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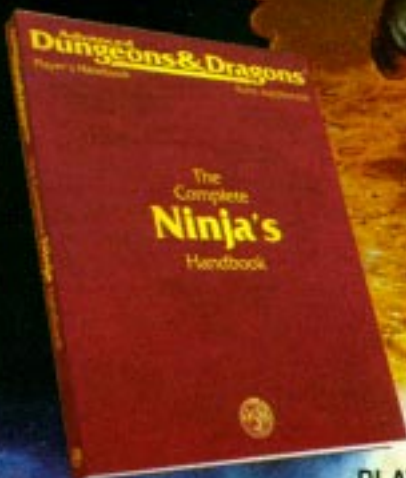
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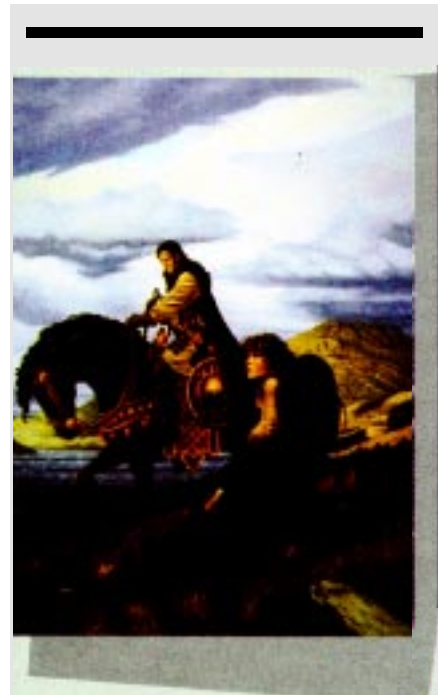
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## COVER

After a wait that was far too long, veteran illustrator Larry Elmore presents the third in a seasonal series that began on the cover of issue #163 and continued with #188. The first represented Autumn, followed by Winter. This one, entitled "Appeasing Karita?", represents Summer.



# L e t t e r s

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. If you want your letter to be published, you must sign it. We will not publish anonymous letters. We will withhold your name if you request it.

## Fiction Fan

Dear Dragon,

As a Rafael Sabatini and Alexandre Dumas fan, I loved your swashbuckling section. I'm glad someone remembers there's more to fantasy RPGs than just hack-and-slash.

However, I shared Sylvia Drake's and Len Mackey's concern about *Libram X* and the fiction being missing. Frankly, I'd like Barbara Young to print two or three stories a month, instead of just one. (Of course, I'm biased. Ms. Young gave me the best rejection slip of my writing career—as well as two or three form-letter rejection slips—and I'm hoping eventually to sell her a story or two.)

Finally, I'd like to applaud Heather Darling and Denyse Zane for their letters. Well said, sisters.

Susan M. Macdonald  
Chula Vista, CA

PS. I was surprised when Chris Williams mentioned *Rupert of Hentzau*. I've never met anyone else who's read it before. A beautifully written book, though I hated the ending.

Unfortunately, we don't have a short story to publish this month; however, we expect that this is just a temporary lull and we'll have more fine fiction for you next month.

## Quite Disappointed

Dear Dragon,

As a subscriber, I am always pleased when I find the latest issue has arrived. With issue #219, I was especially pleased, due to the inclusion of the bonus CD. Then, when I looked at the cover, I discovered that you had raised the newstand price by two dollars simply because of

this. As I live in Canada, this means that the price for this issue would be nearly eight dollars Canadian. Because I subscribe, I didn't pay this, but if I bought my magazine at the newstand, I would be unwilling to pay more for a CD.

I have listened to the CD; of four tracks, two simply talk about the CD project in general. I am quite disappointed in DRAGON Magazine—certainly you can find a better way to introduce us to your CD line than to force us to pay extra for our magazine.

Now, after all my criticism, I must say that the issue itself (excluding the CD) was very good. I especially enjoyed the article "Pirate Crews and Retinues" by James R. Collier. Keep up the good work, hut please, no more CDs. I can see where this would lead ("BONUS: Entire RAVENLOFT® Campaign Set with this issue! \$80 Extra!").

Alan Harum  
Toronto, Canada

*While we have no current plans to include any more CDs with future issues, we will continue to send subscribers all bonus materials at no additional cost.*

## Index at Last!!

Dear Dragon,

I know that an index of articles was published in issue #112. I also remember reading about plans for another index. What is the status of a second index? It would really be helpful, as I have perhaps 13 years of DRAGON Magazines now—give or take a couple of issues.

Steven Murfee  
via email

*Several readers have written asking about the status of the index; the good news is that an index, compiled by a loyal reader, is available for all issues up to the present. The bad news is that the index is so big (at about 60 full pages) that we can't hope to print it and cover anything else in a single issue. However, the index is available for anyone to download from the America Online TSR site (check in the Library area under "Errata" as "TXT: DRAGON Mag Article Index"). The upload date was June 12. The index is also available to any Net user through anonymous ftp to the ftp.mpgn.com site, in the Gaming\ADND\Dragon Articles\directory.*

## Computer Credibility

Dear Dragon,

A brief word about your regular reviewers, Jay and Dee: Comments like, "We couldn't understand it, even after playing it for four hours, so we gave up" are extremely worrying. Paul Murphy's comment—"Remembering that you're on deadline with this stupid review, you go outside, brush off the CD, and restart"—is more like it. I'd think that you weren't paying Dee and Jay enough, but a number of magazines that I read, some of which don't pay their authors, have commented that their reviewers spend at least 20 hours on a product. Okay, so DRAGON Magazine isn't a computer magazine, but if it's going to do computer game reviews, they should be done properly

Andrew Garrard  
Suffolk, England

*This month's "Eye of the Monitor" by Jay and Dee is their last column; however, "Eye" will continue as a regular monthly feature. Zeb Cook, Paul Murphy, Ken Rolston, and a reviewer to be named later will use, abuse, and rate computer games of interest to gamers.*

## Art Updates

Dear Dragon,

I just picked up the new *Player's Handbook* and *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*. They look great. To me, the coolest thing about the books is the old 1st Edition artwork that's been updated. So far my friends and I have found nine different updated pictures:

PHB: Grell (from the old *Fiend Folio* tome), page 14  
Emirikol the Chaotic (a personal favorite), page 138  
Magic mouth, page 211  
Skeleton rising from water, page 297  
DMG: Paladin in Hell, page 91  
Looting of statue, page 125  
Man on horseback on cliff at night, page 165  
Troll rolling up string, page 171  
Temple of the Rat God, page 181  
Are there any that I've missed? Kudos to whomever thought this up!

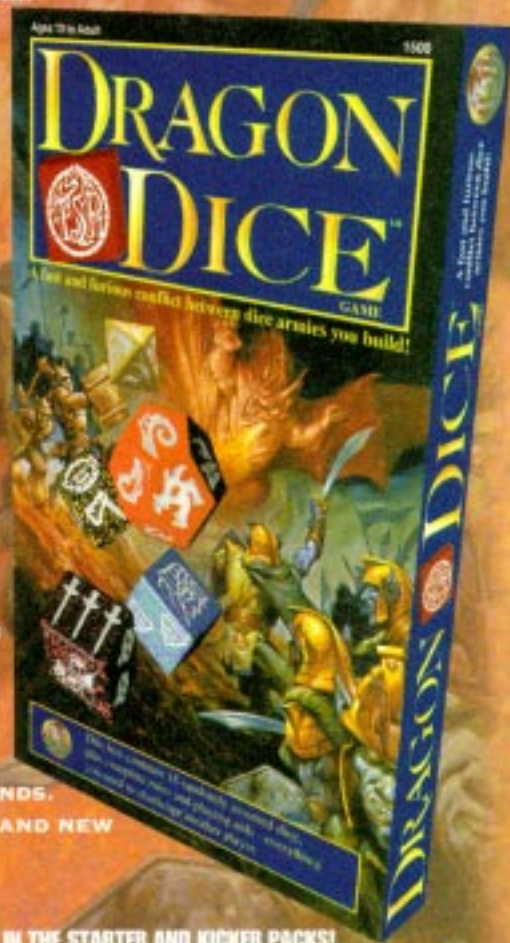
Tim Wadzinski  
Arlington Heights, IL  
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## Making it Up

Role-playing is a weird concept. Certainly, outsiders don't always catch on right away; I had trouble wrapping my brain around it when I was one of the uninitiated, reading the basic rules. I sort of got the idea, but it seemed to be more than the sum of its parts: sitting around the table rolling dice doesn't really describe what's going on. In fact, I sometimes have trouble explaining it to those who don't already know about it. In the past, when someone asked me to explain my hobby (OK, my obsession), I gave them a definition explaining that RPGs include elements of storytelling, wargaming, puzzle-solving, and even wild swashbuckling action. This won me some strange looks but not a lot of new players.

One fine day at Cornell University, I revised my definition of role-playing games. In addition to the usual group of hardened veteran players, our group was preparing to launch a new campaign with some new players. As the DM, I was swamped with questions ("What optional rules are we using?" and "Can I be a bladesinger?" and "I want to be a minotaur" — the usual). One of the novices, Karen, wasn't convinced that the *ADVANCED DUNGEON & DRAGONS*® campaign that we were beginning was really a proper game, and she levelled her accusation in one simple sentence: "You're making it all up!"

At the time, I wasn't exactly sure how to answer her, so I stumbled and said something about how the rules provide a framework for the game, and the adventure was sketched out in notes beforehand, and some other ways of putting off the thrust of her question. It was a smokescreen, and she saw right through it. When I encounter that question today, I have a different answer.

Karen was absolutely right; we were making it all up—the players were creating imaginary characters, I had designed a world, and the game revolved around the exploits of the imaginary characters in the

make-believe-world. Of course, no one sees the imaginations at work, minds furiously creating all around the table. All that a new players sees is people around a table, rolling dice.

Maybe the miniatures and the board had put Karen on the wrong track—after all, role-playing has deep roots in tabletop wargames, but it has left those roots so far behind that many players don't even use a board or miniatures at all. But Karen wasn't wrong to point out what the rest of us took for granted, and in doing so, she provided me with a new answer for people who want to know what role-playing is. Now, when people ask me to explain my hobby, I tell them that it's a somewhat complicated game where the players create the adventure as they go along. I tell them that role-playing is the fine art of lying convincingly and entertainingly. I still get strange looks, but I get more new players.

One of the places where gamers meet yearly to practice making universes, heroes, and epics is at the *ORIGINS*™ Convention. This year it was held in Philadelphia, and there was plenty to see and do. I played cards with a Hurlon minotaur, I watched the national *MAGIC: THE GATHERING*\* card championships, I wandered in the Maze of Games sponsored by *GAMES*\* Magazine, and I strolled the dealer area. Behind the glitz and bustle of the dealers

and the arguments of the players, everyone was inventing worlds, characters, and stories. It was certainly the most potent collection of imagination and sheer inventiveness that Philly's seen in years.

But strolling through the halls of the Pennsylvania Convention Center was bitter-sweet. This is my last issue as *DRAGON*® Magazine's editor.

For several years now, I've been designing sourcebooks, adventures, and games as a sideline to my "day job," fitting in the writing during evenings and weekends. At last I'll have the opportunity to practice the art of creating something from nothing full time. I'll

miss the day-to-day contact with fellow writers and gamers, reviewing the constant stream of original, inventive submissions and proposals, and the chance to work with talented columnists, authors, and artists. I'll miss the wonderful staff at *TSR Periodicals*, but I hope to keep in touch at conventions and on the Net. I hope to meet you at *ORIGINS*, next year; look for the guy playing cards with the minotaur.



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## Special Effects

by Michael A. Stackpole

My introduction to games was peculiar enough that I don't really have a pure, first game experience. I started with chess and hit my peak at age 14, when I beat my father. He'd taught me the game and was king of the hill in our house. Once I'd won, the game's luster dimmed for me.

I moved up to war games that same year (1972) and was a hex-gridded well before this roleplaying stuff ever showed up. I grew up in Vermont, and if there were other gamers in the state, I didn't know how to reach them. My solution for finding competition outside my family was to play by mail, so I started playing STARWEB\* with Flying Buffalo in 1976. Buffalo offered an RPG called TUNNELS & TROLLS\* in its catalog, and it looked perfect to me because 1) it was cheap (\$3 for rules, \$1 for the supplement) and 2) it had a solitaire adventure for \$3. This gave me the whole package for \$7, which beat the D&D® game's \$10 price tag *and* included an adventure I could play by myself.

My copy of T&T arrived right after Christmas, 1976. It was completely unlike any game I had ever seen. In this age of desktop publishing, that edition of T&T wouldn't pass for a bad fanzine, but it was close to state of the art for the time. The illustrations were crude, but the writing was clear and humorous. I generated a character, stuffed him into BUFFALO CASTLE, rolled dice until he died, and started over again. While things were a bit frustrating, I got the hang of it and rejoiced when new solo adventures came out.

I decided very early on that I could write a solo adventure and, on my third try, sold "City of Terrors" to Flying Buffalo in 1977. In 1978 I learned that Ken St. Andre, Liz Danforth, Rick Loomis, and Dan "Ugly John" Carver were going to be at a game convention in Ottawa, Canada. All of 20 years old, I headed out on an international adventure to meet all these folks. Moreover, at the end of the convention, they asked if I wanted to travel back with them. (I recall telling my father on the phone "I've got a ride home, but it's via Arizona.")

The trip to Phoenix with everyone in the Buffalo van was great. Once we got to Phoenix, the others made me run a game that I consider my First Quest. The reason is simple: it was the first time I learned

what it was to provide a true roleplaying experience.

Here I was, a kid from Vermont, running a game for the luminaries of the T&T world. They all trotted out fairly formidable characters, and I hauled forth this massive dungeon I had. Looking at their numbers, I could tell the 5<sup>th</sup> level was the place to start. The dungeon itself had several levels designed on a Tarot card theme, and we stared off in the room corresponding to the card called "The World": a giant arena.

Jim "Bear" Peters played Gil the Mad Hobbit, a character who was notorious as a premiere member of a delving band called the Hobbit Horrors. Dealing with Bear and Gil was like being a rookie pitcher on the mound against Mickey Mantle. My nervousness increased because the mounted lancer I'd randomly rolled to act as Gil's foe was pretty tough. In fact, doing some quick math in my head, I knew Gil had three combat rounds before his head appeared on a lance and was paraded around the arena.

But Bear had a few tricks up his sleeve. As a rookie gamemaster, I had to make some quick decisions. As my lancer came in, Gil dexterously executed a diving roll beneath the horse and slit the cinch strap. Horseman and saddle parted company with horse. When the lancer hit the ground, I described him as hitting hard and having lost his grip on the lance.

Bear said, "Gil goes and stands between the lancer and the lance"—clearly assuming the lancer would draw his sword and fight on more even terms with the dagger-bearing hobbit. I countered with the lancer holding his right hand out, at which point the lance teleported back into his grip. I'd never intended for the lancer to disarm himself, so I thought it was only fair that I find a flashy way to rearm him.

The look on Bear's face at that bit of magic was *wonderful*. His jaw dropped and he suddenly realized the guy he was facing had some magic at his command. The battle took on new depth at that point. What was important for me right then was that good old B.F. Skinner action-and-reinforcement thing. I'd made up something that was cool, and I'd gotten a good reaction from my audience for it. Bear hadn't expected what happened.

None of them expected it, and they were entertained. Moreover, that bit of entertainment didn't involve dice or math or anything: it was just special effects, and the effect it had was very special.

In the next round of combat, Gil dodged past the point of the lance and came forward in a somersault. He stabbed both of his little daggers into the lancer's stomach. The damage they did was insignificant, really, and Bear noted that Gil left them behind as he rolled back out of range. I figured, having seen how little the lancer was hurt, he'd just dodge and toss knives, rocks, and anything else that wasn't fastened down. That was fine with me.

Bear then said, "Look, Gil has this amulet that allows him to grow up to six times his size."

"Okay," I said.

"Usually his weapons and stuff grow up to the same size," Bear noted.

*Uh-oh*, I thought.

"Usually he has to be in contact with them, but that's never been clear." Bear kind of shrugged. "What do you think?"

With that simple question, I was thrust on the horns of a dilemma. As a GM, I was within my rights to say it didn't work. It was a nice try, but if I gave him that little thing, the logical outcome would be the death of an opponent he couldn't normally beat. What kind of a GM would I be if I let that happen?

I also had to ask myself, what kind of a GM would I be if I *forced* that to happen. Bear had taken a chance. He'd tried something that was clever and inventive. What he tried made for a *good story*. With that realization, I graduated from the ranks of GMs who judge dice rolls and hand out math assignments. I realized the heart of being a gamemaster is recognizing that entertaining the group is far more important than the dice. Dice are the safety net, the least common denominator, the court of last resort.

As Bear is fond of noting these days, "If we have to roll dice, we know we've done something wrong."

I looked up from my dungeon and said, "What happens is this: Gil grows, the

*continued on page 18*



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# In Dreams





# The Lost Art of Oneiromancy

by **Dave Gross**

Artwork by John Stanko

*Submitted to His August Eminence,  
Helioph XXVI, Emperor of Divven,  
in the Month of the Golden Sun,  
in the Fourteenth Year,  
of His Glorious Reign*

If it please Your Eminence to observe the collected efforts of your devoted historians, the following summations and excerpts are gleaned by my staff from the recently recovered library of Sajii in Ool.

Among the letters recovered from the excavation of the Tower of Sajii, we find a singularly interesting epistle, nearly 1,800 years old. Comparison of the missive's handwriting with the tutorial matter collected in *Manuscripts of the Oolati Scholars* persuades us that the author is none other than Khandive of Ool. This Khandive, our reader will kindly remember, is the only student whose name appears in the *Hopeful Register of Initiates*, yet in neither the *Mournful Record of Attrition* nor the impeccably accurate *Imperial Count of Wizards*, suggesting that, after earning his apprenticeship, he neither perished nor matriculated—one of which occurrences was inevitable for apprentices of the period, due to the rigorous standards of the Takers of the Count. With the discovery of this letter, the tally of imperial apprentices in the third dynasty can be at last deemed whole and accurate.

Contrary to previous histories, the letter suggests that Khandive, Sajii's lost apprentice, did, in fact, return to beg his mistress's forgiveness after abandoning her during the Council of the Yellow Kingdoms. The correspondence also details the motive for Khandive's remarkable behavior, and the reason he believed he could return to his mistress and hope for pardon. Most astonishing, however, are the spells which accompany the letter.

Each spell appears in the style of the first-dynasty scribes, painted delicately in the six proscribed hues of grammar. Interestingly, all verbs appear in a faint, rosy violet rather than the imperial indigo. As for the problem of whether this discrepancy is the result of fading (unlikely, since the rest of the inks are impeccably correct) or an indication that the interregnum between the fourth and fifth dynasties did indeed include the revision of all the volumes in the imperial library to include the color of the consort's eyes in the grammar, we humbly leave the question in the able hands of the imperial grammarians.

## EXCERPTED FROM THE LETTERS OF KHANDIVE OF OOL

ESTEEMED MISTRESS SAJII,

IF YOU SHOULD, UPON RECOGNIZING THE NAME UPON THIS MESSAGE, LAY THE ENTIRE PARCEL UPON A BRAZIER, WHO COULD FAULT YOU FOR YOUR RIGHTFUL ANGER AT A DISOBEDIENT STUDENT? BUT I BEG YOU NOT TO DISCARD THESE PAGES, FOR THEY CONTAIN NOT ONLY MY ARGUMENT FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS, BUT ALSO A TREASURE MOST RARE—A SAMPLE OF THE REDISCOVERED SPELLS OF THE DREAM WIZARDS OF LOST PEL.

DURING THE GATHERING AT WHICH WE LAST SPOKE, I MET A TRAVELER FROM MELLUAR, THE RURAL PROVINCE THAT LIES HALF-WAY BETWEEN THE IMPERIAL CITY AND THE MIRROR SEA. THE COURSE OF OUR CONVERSATION TURNED TO ANTIQUE LANDS, OF WHICH HE CLAIMED HIS OWN WAS ONE OF THE OLDEST AND LEAST APPRECIATED. EXPOUNDING UPON THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CERTAIN GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF HIS HOME, THE TRAVELER GAVE ME TO BELIEVE THAT HIS COUNTRY OF PIG HERDERS AND FARMERS IS, IN FACT, THE VERY SITE OF THE ONCE-GREAT MAGOCRACY OF PEL.

AS SOON AS I COULD LEAVE HIS COMPANY IN ALL CIVILITY, I RUSHED TO CONSULT MASTER QONTHAN'S CHRONICLE OF THE FAINT AGES, WHEREUPON I RECOGNIZED SUFFICIENT LANDMARKS TO CONCLUDE THAT I HAD DISCOVERED THE PRECISE LOCATION OF THE LEGENDARY LIBRARY OF PELLAS, FIRST ARCHMAGE OF PEL. AND THEN I FACED THE DILEMMA WHICH IMPELLED MY WAITING DISOBEDIENCE: TO REPORT THIS DISCOVERY WOULD ENSURE THAT SOMEONE ELSE WOULD HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF SEARCHING THE RUINS AND DISCOVERING THE TREASURES THERE, YET TO HOLD MY TONGUE AND WAIT WOULD BE TO RISK ANOTHER SCHOLAR'S DISCOVERING THE SAME INFORMATION FROM MY FORTUITOUS TRAVELER, OR ANOTHER OF HIS LAND. I KNEW I MUST STRIKE OUT AT ONCE, WITHOUT CONSULTING THE COUNCIL OR, INDEED, EVEN YOU.

SO, WHEN I LEFT WITHOUT FIRST BEGGING YOUR PERMISSION, IT WAS TO INVESTIGATE MY DISCOVERY AND BRING IT BACK TO YOU, THAT WE MIGHT SHARE IN WHATEVER TREASURES I MIGHT FIND THERE. AND SO I PRESENT THEM TO YOU, HONORED TEACHER, TO SHOW THAT, HOWEVER HASTY AND IMPUDENT MY MEANS, THEY PROVE, I HOPE, WORTHY OF YOUR FORGIVENESS IN THE MEASURE OF THEIR SUCCESS. FOR HERE I SEND YOU A SUMMARY OF WHAT I LEARNED AMONG THE DUSTY STONES OF MELLUAR, ONCE PEL, AND A SAMPLE OF THE LAST SPELLS OF THE DREAM WIZARDS . . .

## Summation of Khandive's Essays on Dream Magic

These ancient practitioners of dream magic did not divide themselves into schools, as do contemporary spellcasters, nor were they a race of wizards, dabbling in all schools equally. Rather, they left the meaner applications of evocation, alteration, and the like to their war wizards. The nobles among them practiced dream magic, an aesthetic art which drew mainly from the schools of enchantment and conjuration, with some relevance to divination as well.

The basic premise of the dream wizards is a simple one: while the waking mind *perceives*, the dreaming mind *imagines*. But this simple division does not even begin to provide a sufficient definition of dreams. Perhaps it is simpler to define dreams by what they are not.

Despite the implications of the name of the well-known spell *dream*, true dream magic is not a branch of the illusionist's art. Indeed, so adamant were the dream wizards of Pel in insisting their art was not illusion that using spells which simulated true dream magic was deemed criminal. For a time, in fact, illusionists were persecuted, and casting any illusion spell was punishable by the harshest means.

Historical and philosophical concerns aside, dream magic sits firmly within the modern school of enchantment/charm, with arms resting on the branches of conjuration/summoning, and divination magic.

The relation of enchantments and divination to dream magic is clear, but the conjuration spells may seem incongruous to what is, essentially, a metaphysical or at least intangible science. However, Khandive notes in his essay that the dream wizards posited a demi-plane of dreams. Indeed, several of the dream spells recovered from the tower of Sajii promise to conjure objects and creatures from that very place. Of all the possibilities raised by Khandive's essays and notes, this is the most fabulous. Certainly it bears further investigation by all who seek to broaden our understanding of magic and the multiverse.

While the surviving information is incomplete, it is clear that from a pool of many hundreds of dream wizards, only a few advanced far in power. Furthermore, only two archmagi are listed among the ranks of the dream wizards. This phenomenon cannot be due to an inherent weakness in the dream wizard's spells, since even the small sample discovered in Melluar shows they wielded powerful magic. While the records of lost Pel may simply be incomplete, the more likely



explanation is that dream magic is dangerous and that those who practiced it did not often live long enough to master their craft. Certain paintings and sculptures unearthed in Melluar suggest that dream wizards eventually succumb to the cumulative effects of the material components required for most dream spells: dreamwillow and the blue lotus.

Dreamwillows, or the dreaming willows, as they are called by the natives of Melluar, are the strange relatives of the more common weeping willow. Like their ordinary willow cousins, dreamwillows are usually found along the banks of rivers, spilling their long, blue-green fronds into the stream. The bark of the dreamwillow is moist and black. When dried, the bark turns light and flaky, and herbalists often grind it into a fine powder used to treat headaches, fits of insomnia, and even melancholy.

The blue lotus is, or was thought to be, a mythical flower existing only in the ballads of Nemeer and Pel. The discovery of dream magic spells, however, confirms its existence, at least in the time of the earliest dynasties. When described in song, the blue lotus is said to resemble the orchid more than the common lotus, with thick, fleshy, dark-veined petals. If the petrified specimen held by the imperial botanists is truly a blue lotus, then the flower is even more curious in its lack of fully developed roots. In his essays, Khandive speculates that the roots of the blue lotus grow only so deeply as to affix the flower to the soil before vanishing into the plane of dreams, from whence they draw their sustenance.

Unfortunately for those who would revive the art of dream magic, the dreamwillow is rarely seen, even along the banks of the Rehjuu in Melluar, where once they lined the river from far Hanish to the southernmost towns of the waterfolk. And except for the single, petrified specimen in the imperial city, and except for any specimens Khandive himself discovered in the ruins of Pel, the blue lotus is lost to us. It is not too great a leap, therefore, to speculate that dream magic declined for want of the necessary material components.

## Dreamwillow and Blue Lotus

DMs wishing to introduce dream magic to their campaigns without allowing PCs easy access to these potentially powerful spells can restrict them simply by limiting the availability of dreamwillow bark and blue lotus flowers. If dream magic is to be very rare in the campaign, then dreamwillow and blue lotus can be extinct or lost species, available only in a few coveted vials of *oil of preserving*. A more interesting means of making the plants rare may be to locate them in

remote regions, requiring adventures to recover.

**Suggestions:** In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign, the blue lotus may blossom only once a year, in the highest mountains of Tabot. The last remaining dreamwillow may live in the magically protected garden of a Thayvian wizard.

In the BIRTHRIGHT™ game world, the blue lotus could grow only at the base of Rhuannoch, the remote castle guarded by Rhuobhe Manslayer and his *gheallie sidhe*, or hunt of elves, while the dreamwillow is found only on banks of the Zhainge river bordering the realm of the Basilisk.

**Optional Rule:** Some DMs may want to make dream magic dangerous as well as rare. To reflect the dangers of this form of magic, spellcasters who use dreamwillow bark or blue lotus flowers run a risk of falling prey to their own spells. The magic inherent in both materials is precarious, and repeated handling of the bark and flowers gradually reduces the caster's own resistance to the magic and his ability to direct it at a target. Each time a caster uses either component in a spell, he runs a 1% chance per spell level of succumbing to the same magic he casts. For instance, if a wizard casts a *sleepless curse*, there is a 6% chance that the spell affects him instead of his intended target. He still gains a saving throw vs. spells (unless the spell does not allow saving throws).

## Spells of the Dream Wizards

The following spells, less the three wisely banned by His Authority, the Imperial Archmage, mark the most significant discovery from the Tower of Sajii. Even if this is all we shall ever recover of the lost dream wizards, it is enough to begin restoring their craft. One cannot but hope that other archaeologists will unearth more of the dream wizards' lore in future.

### Alter Dream

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 6 Components: V, S, M  
Rng.: 10 yds/lvl CT: 1 turn  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl Save: Special  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

This spell acts as an *enter dream* spell, but it allows the caster to affect the course of the dream, much as a director affects the course of a play. The caster has the same control over the events of the dream as an illusionist has over his phantasms; however, the caster must take care not to disrupt the natural flow of the dream, or else the dreamer may sense the presence of an intruder.

If the caster makes only "logical" changes in a dream, the dreamer gains no

saving throw and must simply experience the dream to its conclusion or to the end of the spell's duration. For instance, if the image of the dreamer's mother turns from singing a lullaby to chiding the dreamer for cheating a business partner, the dreamer senses no intrusion. On the other hand, if the dreamer's mother suddenly transforms into a troll and attacks the dreamer, the sudden shock allows a saving throw vs. spells. Success indicates that the dreamer becomes aware of the spellcaster's intrusion and may attempt to eject the spellcaster from the dream. The spellcaster must roll a saving throw vs. spells every round. As long as he succeeds, he may remain in the dream; if he fails, he awakes and cannot return to the dream without casting another *alter dream* spell.

In addition to acting as an *enter dream* spell, *alter dream* allows the caster to implant a *suggestion* (as the spell). *Alter dream* also permits the caster to warp the dream so that it attacks the dreamer, with the same effects as the illusion spell *phantasmal killer*. However, any failed attempt to kill the dreamer automatically alerts the victim to the caster's presence and gives him a chance to turn the *phantasmal killer* back on the spellcaster. The spellcaster must immediately end the spell or else face the *phantasmal killer*.

The material components of this spell are a bit of melted glass and a one-ounce strip of dreamwillow bark, which the caster must steep in hot water and imbibe.

### Enter Dream

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 2 Components: V, S, M  
Rng.: 10 yds/lvl CT: 1 turn  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl Save: Special  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

This spell sends the caster into a deep sleep, but it also allows the caster's own mind to enter the dream of another. The caster may observe the dreams of the spell's target, much as an audience observes a play. The spellcaster remains undetected by the dreamer unless a saving throw vs. spells is successful (Wisdom modifiers apply). The caster may, however, purposefully reveal himself to converse with the dreamer or interact with the other elements of the dream. In this case, the dreamer perceives the spellcaster as a part of the dream, again unless he makes a successful saving throw. The spellcaster has no control over any aspect of the dream except his own actions.

When he detects the intrusion, the dreamer may attempt to eject the spellcaster from the dream. The contest is a matter of will, and the spellcaster must roll a saving throw vs. spells. As long as the spellcaster succeeds, he may remain in the dream; if he fails, he awakes and cannot return to the dream without casting another *enter dream* spell. The dreamer may try to force the spellcaster out of the



dream once each round.

*Enter dream* has two main uses. Like the illusionist spell *dream*, it allows the spellcaster to deliver a message to the dreamer. Unless the dreamer recognizes the caster as an intruder, or unless the caster announces that he is a wizard invading the dream, then the dreamer perceives the message as a genuine dream.

Alternately, the caster may remain passive and simply observes the dream, watching as the dreamer's unconscious mind reveals itself. While not as discreet as an *ESP* spell, *enter dream* may reveal information that the sleeper may not even realize when awake. For instance, a man questioned about his long-lost brother may truthfully answer that the boy ran away from home when very young. The man's dreams, however, may reveal that the man saw his father murder his brother, yet the memory lies buried in the subconscious mind, revealed only in dreams.

The material component of this spell is a one-ounce strip of dreamwillow bark, which the caster must steep in hot water and imbibe.

#### Conjure Dream Object

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Rng.: 10 yards              CT: 4  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: One small object

When this spell is cast, an object up to the size of a sword appears where the caster directs, within the spell's range. The object can be anything that the caster has seen in someone else's dream (by means of the *enter dream* spell). Thus, the spellcaster may conjure the long lost sword of a warrior's grandmother, the trothing cup imagined in the dreams of a young woman, or simply a fabulous ruby dreamed by a greedy merchant.

The conjured object is real in all respects, but it never has magical properties, even if it has such properties in the dreams from which it is drawn. At the end of the spell's duration, the object returns to the realm of dreams, from where it may be conjured again.

The material components of this spell are a strip of dreamwillow bark and a bit of matter of the same type the caster wishes to summon (a piece of steel for a sword, a fragment of glass for a goblet, etc.)

#### Conjure Nightmare

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 5                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 50 yards              CT: 5  
Dur.: 1 hr. + 4d6 t.              Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

The caster of this spell summons a nightmare (MM/ 269) from the plane of dreams, as it carries a dreamer on its terrible ride. Thus, the summoned night-

mare is always frustrated at losing its dreaming victim, and it requires an immediate offering from its summoner (included in the material components).

The nightmare serves its summoner willingly, as long as the tasks it is given are evil. It can understand the summoner's commands even if he is not evil, but it may feel that something is wrong if its caster is good. If ordered to perform tasks without an obvious wicked purpose, the nightmare rebels at the first opportunity. See the monster description for more information on nightmares.

Because the nightmare is summoned from dream rather than from a lower plane, it remains only until the dreamer it haunted awakes. The spell grants no control over the source of the summoned nightmare, so the caster cannot, for instance, cast *eternal slumber* on a victim, cast a *true nightmare*, and then cast a *summon nightmare* with the expectation of a long-term or permanent servitor.

The material components include a pinch of ground sulfur, crushed bark of the dreamwillow, and a handful of flaked platinum worth no less than 200 gp.

#### Endless Slumber

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 8                      Components: V, S, M  
Rng.: Touch or special CT: 8  
Dur.: Permanent              Save: None  
Area of Effect: One object or creature

This powerful enchantment places its victim in a permanent, unbreakable sleep. While sleeping, the victim remains in a state of suspended animation, requiring no air, food, or water. Victims of this spell do not age, but they always dream.

*Endless slumber* must be cast either directly on the victim by touch, or else cast on an object that delivers the spell to its target. If cast on an unwilling, mobile victim, the caster must make a successful attack roll. If the attack roll fails, the spell is lost.

If the spell is cast on an object, the victim must devour the object (such as a fruit), be wounded by it (a dagger or arrow), or wear it (as a medallion or ring). Each method of delivering the spell has its own advantages. If cast on food, the spell dissipates if the object is not eaten within one day of the enchantment. If cast on a weapon, the enchantment fails after the first failed attack. If cast on a decorative object, the enchantment fails when the token is removed from the sleeper.

*Dispel magic* or *limited wish* spells do not affect this enchantment, but a *wish* spell cancels it. Otherwise, the only means of waking the victim of an *endless slumber* spell is a single strict-but-possible condition chosen by the caster upon completing the spell. The most famous conditions include the sleeper's return to the place of his birth, a solar eclipse, the death of an immortal dragon, or even the fall of a great empire.

The material components of this spell are an entire, perfect blue lotus flower and a pure chunk of amber.

#### Sleepless Curse

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 5                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 10 yd/lvl              CT: 5  
Dur.: 1 day/lvl              Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: One creature

When this dire enchantment is cast, the wizard curses a single target to endure restless and sleepless nights. For the duration of the spell, the victim cannot sleep. Furthermore, he is immune to all spells that cause sleep, and not even a *dispel magic* can relieve this condition. However, a *wish* spell, or a *dispel magic* followed by a *remove curse*, lifts the enchantment. The spellcaster can cancel the spell at any time.

For each sleepless night, the victim loses one hit point, as well as one point from each ability score. When any score reaches zero, the victim dies of exhaustion and delirium. Once the spell ends, the victim recovers ability score points and hit points at the rate of 1/hour for each hour of sleep after the first eight.

The material components for this spell are a dried petal of a blue lotus flower and a small, burning brazier, into which the petal is dropped.

#### Sleepwalking

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 10 yds/lvl              CT: 1 turn  
Dur.: 1 turn/level              Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

This spell works only on a sleeping creature. If the sleeper is already dreaming (i.e., affected by a *slumber* spell or similar enchantment, or at the DM's option), then the victim's saving throw suffers a -4 penalty. When *sleepwalking* is cast, the caster plants a powerful suggestion in the victim's unconscious, which compels the dreamer to rise without waking and perform simple commands from the caster. These commands can be no more elaborate than those allowed by a *suggestion* spell. Likewise, commands that the victim physically harm himself immediately negate the spell. Commanding the victim to violate his alignment immediately allows the sleeper a new saving throw at a +1 to +3 bonus, depending on the severity of the alignment violation. For instance, commanding a *sleepwalking* paladin to commit murder would allow a new saving throw at +3. But commanding that same paladin to borrow his friend's book without asking permission would grant a new saving throw at only a +1 bonus.

The material components for this spell are a crushed petal of a blue lotus flower and a drop of honey or a bit of honeycomb.



### Slumber

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 3                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 10 yds/lvl              CT: 3  
Dur.: 1 hour/lvl              Save: Special  
Area of Effect: One creature

This spell is an advanced version of the more common *sleep*. While it affects only one creature, its range and duration are both greater than those of its parent spell, and the caster can affect creatures of more than four hit dice. Not only does this spell place its victim in deep, unbreakable slumber (unlike the common *sleep* spell), but also it stimulates the sleeper's subconscious, causing him to dream. The caster cannot influence what sort of dreams the victim experiences without casting another spell.

Slapping or wounding a creature enchanted with *slumber* does not awaken it, nor does loud noise or any other normal means of waking a sleeper. Casting a successful *dispel* magic is the most economical way to awaken a victim of this spell.

A victim of slumber may save vs. spells to resist the effects of the enchantment, but the saving throw is modified by the difference between the victim's and caster's levels or hit dice. Thus, a 5th-level warrior saving against this spell when cast by a 10th-level wizard makes his save at a -5 penalty.

The material component for this spell is a pinch of sand from the eyes of a hibernating bear, or the crushed petal of a blue lotus flower. The latter component is so potent that the victim's saving throw suffers a -4 penalty.

### True Dream

(Enchantment/Charm, Divination)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 10 yds/lvl              CT: 4  
Dur.: 1 hour/lvl              Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

When this spell is cast, the recipient experiences a vivid dream relevant to whatever thoughts he held just before sleeping. The dream reveals, however obliquely, the answer to one question or problem, as long as the DM agrees that the answer can come from the dreamer's own subconscious, even through a wildly illogical leap. For instance, if the dreamer wishes to divine the identity of the person who sent him a blackmail note, and the DM decides that the dreamer could intuitively guess that the villain is a merchant who eyed his heavy pouch of gold coins early last month.

The spellcaster is *not* privy to the results of the dream unless he also casts a successful *enter dream* spell to observe its effects.

Willing recipients of this spell may attempt to compose their thoughts on a particular subject by making a successful Wisdom check. Success indicates that the dream imagery will address the intended question; failure means that the recipient still experiences a dream, but that it is not relevant to the question.

This spell can reveal a previously forgotten or blocked memory, revealing through dream imagery an important event, conversation, or even a single word important to the dreamer. The exact nature of this recovered knowledge is at the discretion of the DM, who may determine that no such useful knowledge exists for a particular subject. In this case, the DM may devise some colorful but irrelevant vision for the affected character. As an example, a dreamer may experience this spell while thinking of his brother, who died as a child. The *true dream* could reveal the previously repressed memory of his father killing his brother in a sudden fit of anger.

The material components of this spell are an item valued by the dreamer (the monetary value is irrelevant), a pinch of ground dreamwillow bark and a small amount of silver filings (1 gp value).

### True Nightmare

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 10 yds/lvl              CT: 1 turn  
Dur.: 1 hour/lvl              Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

When this spell is cast, the victim suffers nightmares—not illusions, but genuine terrors from his subconscious. The victim remains asleep, but upon waking he remains exhausted, enjoying no natural healing from rest. Until the victim sleeps undisturbed by nightmares, he suffers a -1 penalty to surprise and initiative and a temporary -1 reduction in all ability scores. These penalties are cumulative for each night spent in the throes of a true nightmare, but even one night of undisturbed sleep (at least six hours) cancels the ill effects.

Wizards or bards who suffer from a *true nightmare* cannot refresh their spells until they have had a night's undisturbed sleep.

The material components of this spell are a pinch of ground dreamwillow bark and a small amount of iron filings (1 gp value).

### Healing Dream

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 3                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: Touch                      CT: 3  
Dur.: 8 hrs + 2/lvl              Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: One sleeping creature

Casting this spell induces a deep, unbreakable sleep in which the recipient dreams peacefully of the most comforting images or events his mind imagines. During the dream, the sleeper cannot be woken normally, not even by wounding. However, during each hour after the first eight, the dreamer heals wounds at an astonishing rate, recovering two hp/hour.

If this enchantment is dispelled, or if the sleeper is affected by a *true nightmare* or *sleepwalking* spell, the healing effect is stopped. Likewise, a successful *dispel magic* not only wakes the sleeper, but also stops the healing.

The material components for this spell are a bear's claw, a strip of dreamwillow bark, and the dried, crushed petal of a blue lotus flower.

### Dream Magic Items

Those who lived in the age of dream magic used several spells and magical items to guard against the intrusion of dream wizards. These protections are unknown today, but one might appear in an ancient treasure trove, or a modern wizard researching the rediscovered art might create one. Among the more common items are the *scroll of protection vs. dreams*, which protects all those who sleep within its range of 30 square feet against all dream spells for its duration (4+2d4 hours); the *amulet of protection vs. dreams*, which constantly protects its wearer against dream magic; and a lesser magical *ward, the wall of sleep*, an embroidered ribbon which, when placed in a circle around a sleeper, forces any dream wizard who casts an *enter dream* on the protected sleeper to make a saving throw vs. spells or suffer the effects of a *slumber* spell. The magical ribbons were often sewn around the edges of a mattress to protect whomever slept upon it.

After comparing the established handwriting of Khandive of Ool with this letter and these notes, few of our staff could muster skepticism of their authenticity. The few remaining doubts were quickly banished upon the discovery of one last artifact in the lowest reaches of Sajii's Tower: the perfectly preserved body of a young man which, upon examination, proved yet to breathe! Thus far, the problem of reviving the sleeper has eluded even the Imperial Archmage, despite his mastery of the most powerful of spells. It would seem, if Your Eminence will be so generous as to allow me to speculate, that Khandive's gifts to Sajii, marvelous beyond description, were deemed insufficient to his offense.

It is our fervent hope that this summary and its attachments shall meet with favor, and we dare so much as to hope it may evoke pleasure, curiosity, or even wonder. If so, and it please Your Eminence, we pray that the current endowment to the Imperial Historians grow by sufficient measure to begin construction of the proposed Library of Lost Arts. No other monument could better commemorate to future empires the wisdom and foresight of the emperor of this twenty-third dynasty.

Padon the Elder,  
Master of Research,  
Fellow of the Imperial Historians



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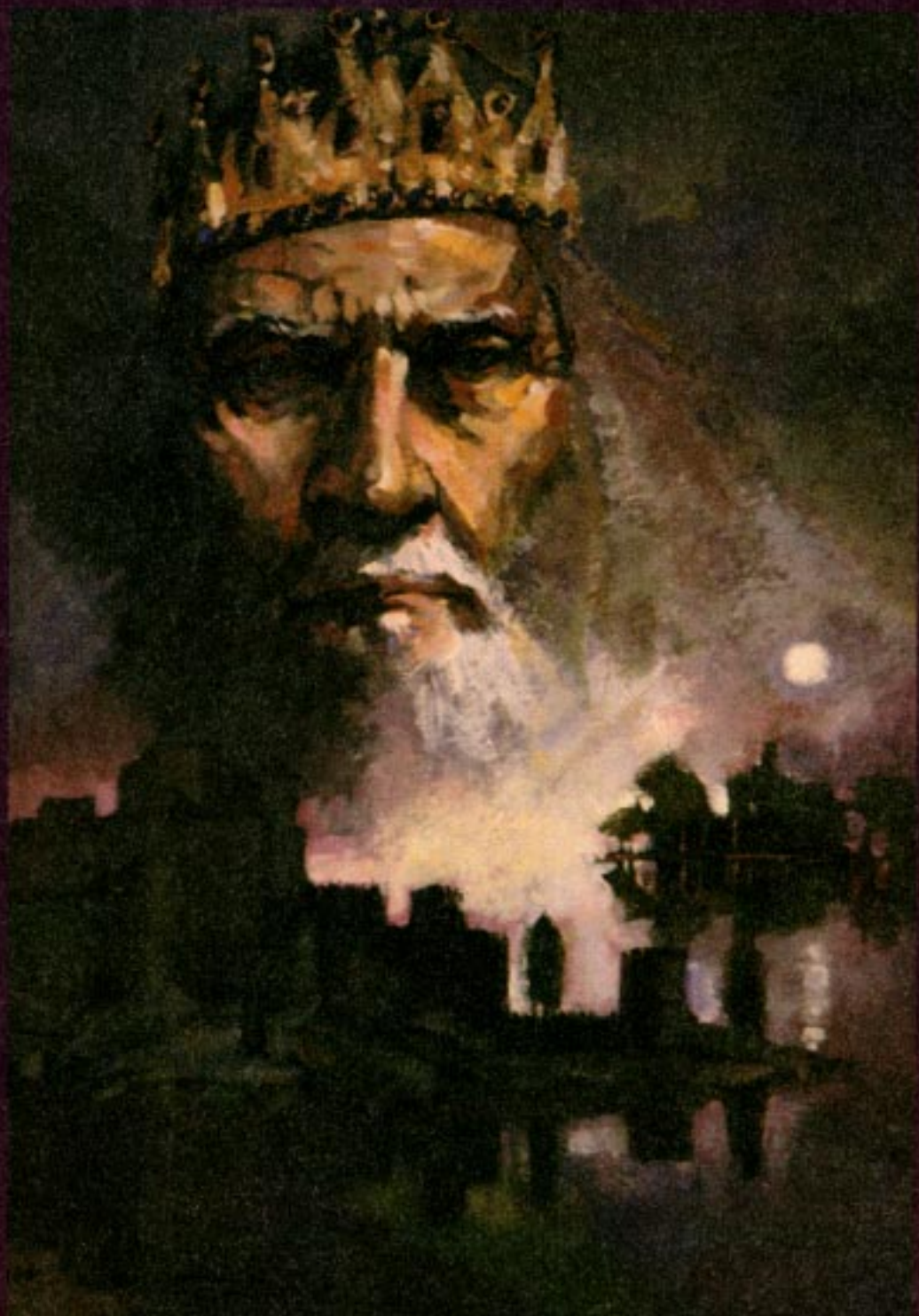
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# Magic of Kings, *Magic of the Land*





# New Realm Spells for BIRTHRIGHT™ Campaigns

by **Kevin Melka**

Artwork by R. Ward Shipman

True wizards and priests in the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign are rare, but their magic is much more powerful than that of a standard AD&D® game spellcaster, able to affect entire armies and even provinces. Only a select few have the ability to control *mebhaighl* (magical essence), the key to powerful magic. Those who dare to attempt realm magic without the energy a regent gains from magical sources would destroy themselves utterly. Player character wizard and priest regents can harness realm magic to craft realm spells, the most powerful magic in the AD&D game.

Realm spells are a form of ritual magic. By accessing the power of the land through magical conduits (ley lines), a spellcaster can accomplish spells of extraordinary power, but preparations for realm magic are lengthy and involved. Preparing and casting a realm spell requires an entire domain action (one month). In the BIRTHRIGHT campaign, three Domain actions make up a Domain turn (a season, or three months).

Materials used to cast realm magic are expensive and sometimes difficult to find. Each spell lists a Gold Bar cost, taken from the domain's treasury or the regent's personal funds. The time, materials, and energy needed to cast realm magic are taxing for a regent, so each spell also has a cost in Regency Points. Spells also list the minimum amount of magic needed from a Source, or magical lands or temples under the regent's control. If a regent doesn't have sufficient Gold Bars, Regency points, or Source points, the spell fails.

## New Wizard Spells

### Forethought

Regency: 5  
Gold: 4 GB  
Duration: 1 Domain turn  
Req'd Source: 5  
Character Level: 3

This spell allows a regent wizard to take an additional domain action the domain turn after the casting of the spell; the spell's magic summons a small swarm of unseen servants and spirits who anticipate the regents needs and prevent minor nuisances, obstacles, and day-to-day drudgery from affecting the wizard. The action takes place after all other actions in a domain turn have occurred. This spell cannot be cast in a domain turn already affected by *forethought* spell.

### Disrupt Ley Line

Regency: 3  
Gold: 3 GB  
Duration: 1 Domain turn  
Req'd Source: 3  
Character Level: 3

This spell disrupts the flow of a single ley line in one specific province. The ley line still exists, but *mebhaighl* (magical essence) cannot travel through the line in either direction while the spell is in effect. This spell affects one ley line known to the caster.

The controller of the ley line can still obtain *mebhaighl* from the line if he is between the source and the province where it is disrupted, but not within the affected province.

### Tangle Ley Lines

Regency: 5  
Gold: 5 GB  
Duration: 2 Domain turns  
Req'd Source: 4  
Character Level: 5

Similar to *disrupt ley line*, this spell interferes with the flow of magical energy from sources through a specific province, but this spell tangles multiple ley lines, snarling them hopelessly. The ley lines still exist, but *mebhaighl* cannot travel through the lines while this spell is in effect. This spell affects all ley lines in a province, including the caster's own.

The controller of an affected ley line can still obtain *mebhaighl* from the line if he is between the source and the province where it is disrupted. He cannot tap the ley line for energy if he is within the affected province.

### Duplicate

Regency: 6  
Gold: 3 GB  
Duration: 1 Domain Turn  
Req'd Source: 3  
Character Level: 5

By casting this spell the wizard-regent creates a magical duplicate of himself to oversee his domain. This spell is most often used when a regent wishes to adventure across Cerilia or is otherwise indisposed. The ruse is most effective when the regent's subjects believe the duplicate is really their ruler. Otherwise it is unlikely they will follow the duplicate's commands. This spell takes effect in the first action round in the domain turn following its casting.

This spell creates an advanced, intelligent duplicate that mimics the regent in every way—the way he walks, talks, eats, drinks, and interacts with NPCs. However,

the duplicate cannot cast spells, reproduce, or leave the boundaries of the domain. A small portion of the caster's life essence is imbued into the duplicate, making it an actual extension of the regent's mind and spirit.

In all aspects the duplicate seems real. He bleeds when cut and limps if kicked. The duplicate is a zero-level fighter for attack rolls and saving throws, but it has the same ability scores and hit points as the caster. If the duplicate suffers a mortal blow, the duplicate is dispelled and its true nature is revealed. If the duplicate is destroyed, the caster's spark of life essence is destroyed with it, and he loses one level of experience. This danger makes the spell undesirable to most regents.

The longer the duplicate rules a domain, the more problems pile up. Rebellions or wars are not beyond the realm of possibilities, and a duplicate's inability to cast spells could put a domain in jeopardy. The true nature of the duplicate is revealed by *true sight* or *detect lie* spells.

If duplicate's existence becomes common knowledge among the general populace, the *loyalty* rating of the domain drops two grades (such as from high loyalty to poor—see BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook, page 36). Wizard regents using this spell often inform a trusted lieutenant of its true origin, having him compensate for various problems which may arise.

The casting regent and the duplicate's mind are linked for the duration of the spell. If something momentous occurs or complex decisions need to be made, the regent knows to return to the domain.

### Enhance Source

Regency: Z/per source level  
Gold: Z/per source level  
Duration: 2 Domain turns  
Req'd Source: 1/per source level  
Character Level: Special

This spell increases the level of a Source in a province above the normal allowable limit. This spell affects only magical Source holdings, not Law, Temple, or Guild holdings.

*Enhance source* doubles the *mebhaighl* gained from a specific type of source. For example: a province (4) in hills can normally support only a casting source (1). Through the use of this spell, the source could be increased to (2).

The spell's cost varies depending on the source's total level. For example, raising the source described above from (1) to (2) would cost 2 Regency Points, 4 Gold Bars, and require a casting source of level (2) to increase the target source's power to (2).

The number of sources that can be increased depends on the level of the caster. A wizard regent can affect two magical sources per four levels of experience (two at 4th level, four at 8th, etc). *Enhance source* affects only one source in a given domain at any one time. A source can be affected by only one *enhance source* spells at a time; additional castings have no effect.

Enhance source does not increase the amount of regency collected by the caster. It increases the value of the source for powering realm magic only.

#### Locate Sources

Regency: 2  
Gold: 1 GB  
Duration: Instantaneous  
Req'd Source: 2  
Character Level: 1

By casting this spell, a wizard regent immediately knows where to find all the magical source holdings in provinces where he has sources. This spell locates sources under the caster's control, as well as those controlled by other regents. If the spell is cast within one mile of the source, the level of the source also known. This spell does not determine the power of the source (for instance, the level of a power of a source may be altered by ley lines or *enhance source* spells).

This spell is often used by a new regent who wishes to locate all sources in his domain, and it reveals whether other regents are drawing magic from his land. This spell locates only sources; it does not trace ley lines to their source.

#### New Priest Spells

Remember that priest regents can only cast spells in provinces where they control Temple holdings.

#### Divine Right

Regency: 5  
Gold: 4 GB  
Sphere: All  
Duration: 1 Domain turn  
Req'd Holding: 5  
Character Level: 3

By invoking the power of his divine patron, a priest regent becomes more active and requires less rest and sleep. As a result, he is better able to execute his plans and may take an additional domain action during the domain turn after the spell is cast. This extra action is taken at the end of all other actions in the domain turn. This spell cannot be cast in a Domain turn already affected by a *divine right* spell.

#### Erik's Preserve

Regency: 3  
Gold: 2 GB  
Sphere: Plant, Animal  
Duration: 1 Domain turn/level  
Req'd Holding: 3  
Character Level: 3

This spell is usable only by priests of Erik, whose duties include guardianship of the wilderness. Through the use of this spell a priest regent consecrates an area of his domain to protect it against harmful affects. The area of forest affected is one mile per level of the caster.

A domain under the influence of this spell is immune to harmful natural events (a roll of 6 on the BIRTHRIGHT random events table, Rulebook pg. 40). from occurring within the area of effect. This spell also prevents the random event Monsters & Brigandage (result of 13-14), and counteracts the realm spell *blight*.

This spell does not prevent catastrophic events and has no effect on troops marching through a domain or unabusive human logging or hunting.

#### Hand of Peace

Regency: 5  
Gold: 3 GB  
Sphere: Charm  
Duration: 1 Domain turn  
Req'd Holding: 4  
Character Level: 7

This spell brings all random acts of violence in a province to an end. Everyone within the affected province is overcome with a sense of tranquility, returning to their home province, domain, or other place of origin. Once the domain turn under this spell's influence is over, all creatures affected by the spell suffer complete amnesia; they have no idea of what happened or how they got home.

This spell ends all random hostile events in a province; such as the events Feud, Monster or Brigandage, and Unrest or Rebellion. Hand of peace cannot end a war, but it does turn troops away from the protected province for the duration of the spell. Invading forces can return to the province the following Domain turn if they choose.

#### Haelyn's Courage

Regency: 2/unit  
Gold: 2 GB  
Sphere: War, Combat  
Duration: 3 War Moves +1 level  
Req'd Holding: 3  
Character Level: 5

This spell is usable only by priests of Haelyn, ruler of the gods and patron of kings. This spell is similar to the realm spell *bless army*, increasing the effectiveness of a regent's army units while defending their domain. In keeping with Haelyn's portfolio, this spell does not

affect unjust or unchivalrous troops. Those who follow the banner of another diety, such as the evil Belinik or vile Kriesha, also gain no bonuses.


This spell increases all combat units' offensive scores by +2 and grants the units immunity to the realm spell *subversion*. The caster can affect no more than one unit per level of experience, and all affected units must be in the same province when the spell is cast.

#### Nesirie's Blessing

Regency: 1/ship  
Gold: 2 GB  
Sphere: Weather, Elemental (Water)  
Duration: Special  
Req'd Holding: 3  
Character Level: 3

Only regent priests of Nesirie cast this spell. When cast on a regent's ships in port, the spell summons favorable winds. Regents traveling with the naval vessels experience beneficial waters and favorable winds the entire journey.

Ships protected by *Nesirie's blessing* gain a two-level shift in wind strength in their favor (such as *calm* to *moderate*) and their maneuverability class improves by 1 (such as C improving to B). The caster can enchant one vessel per level of experience.

In addition, all naval proficiency checks (such as Navigation and Seamanship) used to pilot and guide the ship gain a +2 bonus, and all attack rolls for the ship and crew gain +1. Additional rules for naval warfare can be found in the upcoming BIRTHRIGHT campaign expansion *Cities of the Sun*. 

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## First Quest

*Continued from page 8*

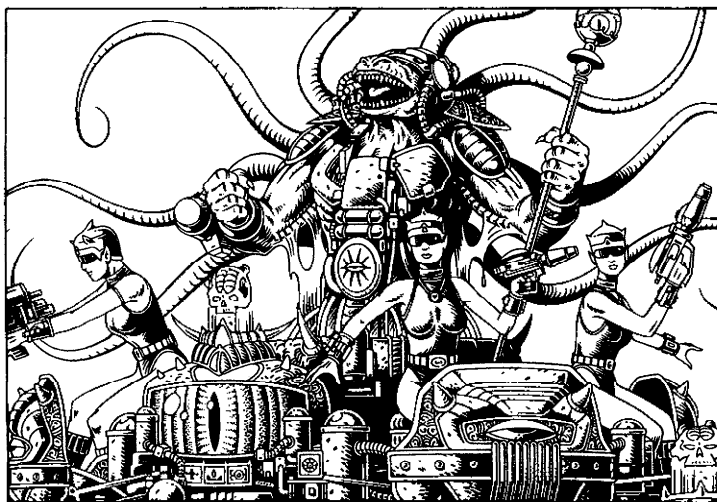
knives grow too and carve the lancer into pieces. The knives drop to the ground, as do the pieces of the lancer."

I paused so Bear could laugh and others could congratulate him, then I added, "You notice the lancer pulls himself together again and stands up. He summons his lance to his hand, then bows in your direction."

Gil graciously returned the bow, and the adventure pushed on from there. Bear knew he'd gotten away with something, but that was his reward for being inventive. My reward for letting him be inventive was that everyone enjoyed the adventure.

From that point forward, our games were less dependant on dice and statistics than on how the characters were played. But that's the object, isn't it? If it weren't, we'd all be in the dice-playing game industry, and none of us would be having nearly as much fun. 





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# Spells for the Sorcerer's Apprentice

by **Jon Winter**

Artwork by James Holloway

## The Little Wish

*"Cast a cantrip? No thanks, I don't need my shoelace tied right now."*

Cantrips are often overlooked by wizards and their players, but only because many players have overlooked the many possibilities that cantrips have to offer. Which spells do almost anything you want? There are *two*—*wish* and *cantrip*.

Apprentices to great wizards have long known the only way to learn the art of magic is to practice, and practice hard. Magical training devours years of youth, and the regime for neophyte wizards is rigorous, exhausting, and often tedious. Before a young mage can master even such simple incantations as the spells *sleep* or *read magic*, he must be able to call upon magical forces to produce any effect he desires.

Such spells are commonly known as *cantrips* or "little wishes," and while they have only a minor influence on the surrounding world, they are nonetheless important. Cantrips teach the basic lessons of magic—simple conjurations, illusions

and alterations. Once he masters the cantrip, the wizard can progress to more complex spells. At this point, many wizards abandon cantrips entirely, regarding their minor effects as beneath themselves to cast.

### Mechanics of Cantrips

A wise mage, however, knows how to use cantrips to their full effect. For mages of first level or greater, cantrips are so trivial to cast that they need not be memorized. Instead, little wishes can be treated as a proficiency:

**Cantrip** (wizard group) **Modifier:** Int -2

**Cost:** 1 slot (mages), 2 slots (bards, specialists), 3 slots (priests, psionicists, thieves).

A character with the cantrip proficiency has learned enough of the rudiments of magic to conjure minor mystical effects. Anyone may learn cantrips, provided they have been tutored by a wizard, although with their natural intelligence and aptitude for magic, wizards and bards excel in this field. While all mages learn cantrips as part of their training, many forget the basics once they become fully-fledged

mages. Others are too proud (and arrogant) to use such "petty magics."

When a character tries to cast a cantrip, the player must describe the form he wishes the spell to take, preferably in the form of a short rhyme. In combat, cantrips have a casting time of 2. A proficiency check is rolled to determine whether the verbal and somatic components have been executed correctly (cantrips do not require material components). A successful check means the cantrip was cast as desired, and a failed check means the cantrip fizzles. A roll of 20 has no additional effect, unless the DM decides otherwise.

Even the simplest spell creates a mental burden, so the number of cantrips a PC can use is limited. All characters may cast four cantrips per day, plus one per wizard or bard level (i.e., nonwizards cannot use more as they advance in level). Each additional cantrip cast beyond this limit inflicts a cumulative -1 penalty on the proficiency check. Failed checks still count against the total.





*Optional Rules:* Specialist mages and elementalists do not need to roll checks when performing cantrips pertaining to their specialist school or field of magic. However, they cannot use cantrips of opposing schools.

A wizard of 5th level or bard of 8th level or higher need not roll checks—their control of cantrips is complete. These characters can cast an unlimited number of cantrips per day.

Characters of some kits learn the cantrip proficiency more easily than others. The skill costs two slots for swash-bucklers and fops whose rich families can easily locate tutors, charlatans (and those kits that masquerade as other characters), scholarly characters, priests of deities of magic, and any character from a magic-intensive background (such as Halruua or elven society).

### School-Specific Cantrips

The *cantrip* spell spans all schools of magic and has a limitless number of uses. However, DMs should determine exactly which school a particular effect belongs to. Specialist mages cast more reliable cantrips in their own school of magic, and bonuses to saving throws may also apply. A list of commonly used cantrips, listed by magical school, follows:

#### Abjuration Cantrips

Abjuration cantrips tend to be practical, often employed by apprentices to clean up rooms, dust shelves, sweep and polish floors, wash or dry clothes, aid the caster's balance, and warm or cool foods and drinks. Minor wards can also be established (10' radius maximum) against insects or rodents, or an area can be enchanted to stay cool or warm. The cleaning cantrips may either animate cleaning utensils or create ghostly phantom utensils.

#### Alteration Cantrips

The cantrips of alteration magic represent a wide range of uses, from changing the colors of faded plants or garments, to altering the taste of food, or freshening spoiled food—in these forms they are permanent. Such cantrips can also gather firewood; hide footprints; cut, tie, or untie knots in rope or string; or brighten and dim lights.

Alteration cantrips can also act as rudimentary *polymorph* spells, able to change insects to rodents or vice versa for up to one turn. Furthermore, they can change vegetable or animal items into others within the same kingdom for one turn or less, depending upon how drastic the change is. The physical shape of small mineral objects can be altered, such as a coin changing to a ring. Such a transformation lasts for one round.

#### Conjuration and Summoning Cantrips

These cantrips can summon tiny creatures: normal insects, rodents, or non-poisonous spiders, or snakes. Normal

items weighing less than one pound can also be conjured permanently; such items may not be worth more than 1 gp and may not be made from any valuable material. Items between one and five pounds in weight can be conjured, but they remain for only one turn before disappearing. Invisible forces can also be conjured to rattle or tap objects or snatch at, tickle or prod unsuspecting creatures. Conjured objects may appear normal, but they are never stronger than balsa wood and break if stressed.

#### Divination Cantrips

Lesser divinations can be performed, such as determining the sex of a creature, discovering whether a door or chest is locked without having to touch it, locating the direction of north (magnetic rocks or nearby magic may cause distortions), divining the presence of magic in a 30' radius (but not type, direction, or strength), or searching for secret doors. In this latter case, the spell has the same chance of success and takes the same time as the caster would, but leaves the mage free to do other things.

#### Enchantment and Charm Cantrips

Enchanting cantrips can move inanimate objects around slowly and jerkily, as if with a crude form of *telekinesis* (weight limit 2 lbs.). This may spill liquids, pull items off shelves, or knock over unstable objects (such as brooms or sticks). No damage is inflicted by items used to attack.

Charm cantrips affect creatures, and can force targets to wink, nod, scratch, belch, yawn, cough, giggle, sneeze, or perform any other minor, involuntary action. A saving throw vs. spell is applicable; success negates the effect or renders it unnoticeable. Cantrips such as these cannot disrupt concentration, but may prove embarrassing for their victims in diplomatic situations.

#### Illusion and Phantasm Cantrips

These cantrips create false sounds, images, or scents. They can make haunting sounds like moans, chains rattling, footsteps, creaks and eerie bumps, or indistinct muffled sounds. When creating images, illusion cantrips form floating, colored globes of light; alter the facial features of a creature; create illusory furniture, carpets, or bushes in a flat and empty area; or conjure a two-dimensional illusion (invisible from the side or rear). All visual illusions can be dispelled by touch or *dispel magic*, and they remain only as long as the caster concentrates on them.

Any smell created lasts only as long as the caster concentrates, affecting a maximum area of 10 cubic feet. Breezes dissipate the smell, and it may be masked by an overpowering smell, such as a troglodyte's stench or the carrion odor of a ghast.

#### Invocation and Evocation Cantrips

These cantrips can create glowing lights of any color, puffs of smoke, miniature colored flames shooting from the caster's fingers, crackles of lightning and sparks, or a glowing mystical radiance. They can painfully sting another creature, scorch and destroy paper or wood without flames or heat, or cause harmless but noisy explosions. None of these cantrips can physically damage any but the smallest of targets, though they may ignite combustible materials, frighten animals, and alarm the superstitious.

#### Necromantic Cantrips

Necromantic cantrips foster death and decay. They can make flowers wilt or food spoil. Tiny animals such as rodents or insects may be killed by a necromantic cantrip, or animated as ½ HD undead creatures (no more than 2 HD total per cantrip). Bones may rattle, corpses twitch, or glowing points of light appear in the eyes of skulls or undead. Another necromantic cantrip calls out to undead creatures in a 60' radius, alerting them to the presence of a necromancer. The undead may respond to this information any way they wish, and the caster does not learn of their presence or absence.

#### Elemental Cantrips

Elementalist wizards may use any form of cantrip, although their favorites concern their chosen element. They cannot cast cantrips concerning their opposing element.

Air cantrips include the creation of mists, puffs of smoke, hazes, scents and gusts of wind strong enough to billow robes, dry washing, or disperse unpleasant smells.

Earth cantrips create or alter stone, sand, mud, clouds of dust, minor earth tremors, and the growth of stalactites.

Fiery cantrips create sparks, warmth, flickering lights (no stronger than torch-light), and can ignite dry undergrowth, paper, campfires or thin sticks.

Water cantrips deal with the conjuration of water, thick mist (rain if mist is already present), currents and ripples in water, and small waves. Salt or fresh water may be created, as desired.

#### Wild Cantrips

Wild mages have no specific cantrip effects of their own, apparently because their science is still a young one. It has been observed that roughly 5% of cantrips attempted by wild mages become wild surges (a roll of 20 on the proficiency check).

#### Bardic Cantrips

Bards may use cantrips of all varieties presented here. Their favorites, however, relate to the playing of ghostly music or haunting melodies, imitating the sound of horns and bugles, accompanying percussion sounds (cantrips keep time very well),



attracting an individual's attention from across a crowded room or street, illusions and glowing shapes to enhance acts, and false applause. Of course, any cantrip user may create these effects.

### Adjudicating Cantrips

DMs faced with a hitherto unseen version of a cantrip or determining results of those cast should refer to the following guidelines:

No cantrip can directly damage a living target of size S or larger, although damage may be caused indirectly. For example, a fire may be started by a cantrip spark, objects may fall off shelves onto a victim, etc.

No cantrip can force a creature to lose its concentration when maintaining or casting a spell.

Cantrip effects always allow saving throws vs. spells when they affect a living target directly, and they must also overcome natural magic resistance.

No magical items can be damaged or affected by cantrips, nor can a cantrip dispel or remove another magical spell of 1st level or greater.

No cantrip functions within the confines of a *protection from cantrips* spell, instead being cancelled with a popping noise. A *dispel magic* spell automatically cancels any cantrip, as will touching any illusory creation. A divination cantrip is automatically fooled by any form of *misdirection*.

The DM may further rule that areas of strong background magic warp cantrips, preventing them from functioning correctly. Cantrips do not function in dead magic zones, and in wild magic zones they are treated as if they were spells of level 0.

If two cantrips from different wizards contest each other (such as two wizards

using *telekinesis* on the same object, or one creating a breeze to blow away an illusory scent), the wizard with the highest successful proficiency check wins—as in a psionic contest. In the case of a tie, neither cantrip dominates, and the contest continues into the following round.

### Why Use This Method?

Dungeon Masters should consider using cantrips this way for several good reasons. First, few wizard PCs memorize the cantrip spell given in the existing rules because they (rightly) see it as a waste of a 1st-level spell slot. As presented here, cantrips are such minor forms of magic that they need not be memorized before being cast, for the user is assumed to know enough magic to create effects as desired.

Second, these altered cantrips allow a low-level wizard to help the party after his one or two spells have been cast. Otherwise, players of such characters feel left out because they are frequently too weak to participate in hand-to-hand combat. Cantrips provide a way to offset this problem.

Furthermore, these optional rules add storytelling flavor to a game. If you read any fantasy novel, you'll find mages using minor spells that help them in small ways. They always seem to have the right spell at the right time. They use quaint rhyming phrases to activate these spells. Using these rules, this too can be incorporated into an AD&D® game.

With cantrips as proficiencies, thieves and psionics have a chance to use magic, albeit in small portions. This ability greatly helps the players of charlatan characters who pretend to be spell-casters. After all, one can only fool people with sleight of hand and glittering dust for

so long. Players can also develop failed-wizard characters, those apprentices who went on to another career. Likewise, priests of magical deities can be granted a little extra magical spice.

Finally, this system of cantrips allows creative players a chance to use their imaginations freely. Instead of spending weeks of game time researching exciting and powerful spells, they can simply create effects on the spot when the whim strikes them. Special effects can be added to the casting of other spells, such as puffs of smoke when *teleporting* or whooshing noises with *magic missiles*.

### Conclusions

With all of its benefits, this system has a few drawbacks. The DM must be alert and ready to deal with new spell ideas quickly and determine likely effects on the spot. Novice DMs may find this difficult. Similarly, novice players may find the system a little complex at first. However, a bit of experience should overcome this.

Some players may attempt to abuse the rules with cantrip effects that are too powerful. Apply the guidelines listed under "Adjudicating Cantrips" to prevent this.

Finally, DMs should note that on Athas, water-conjuring cantrips simply do not function. In RAVENLOFT® campaigns, Power Checks may be necessary if cantrips are put to particularly cruel uses.

More cantrip ideas may be found in the *Complete Wizard's Handbook*, the *Unearthed Arcana* tome, and the old gray FORGOTTEN REALMS® boxed set. As always, players and DMs alike are encouraged to be devious and creative; have fun with cantrips!

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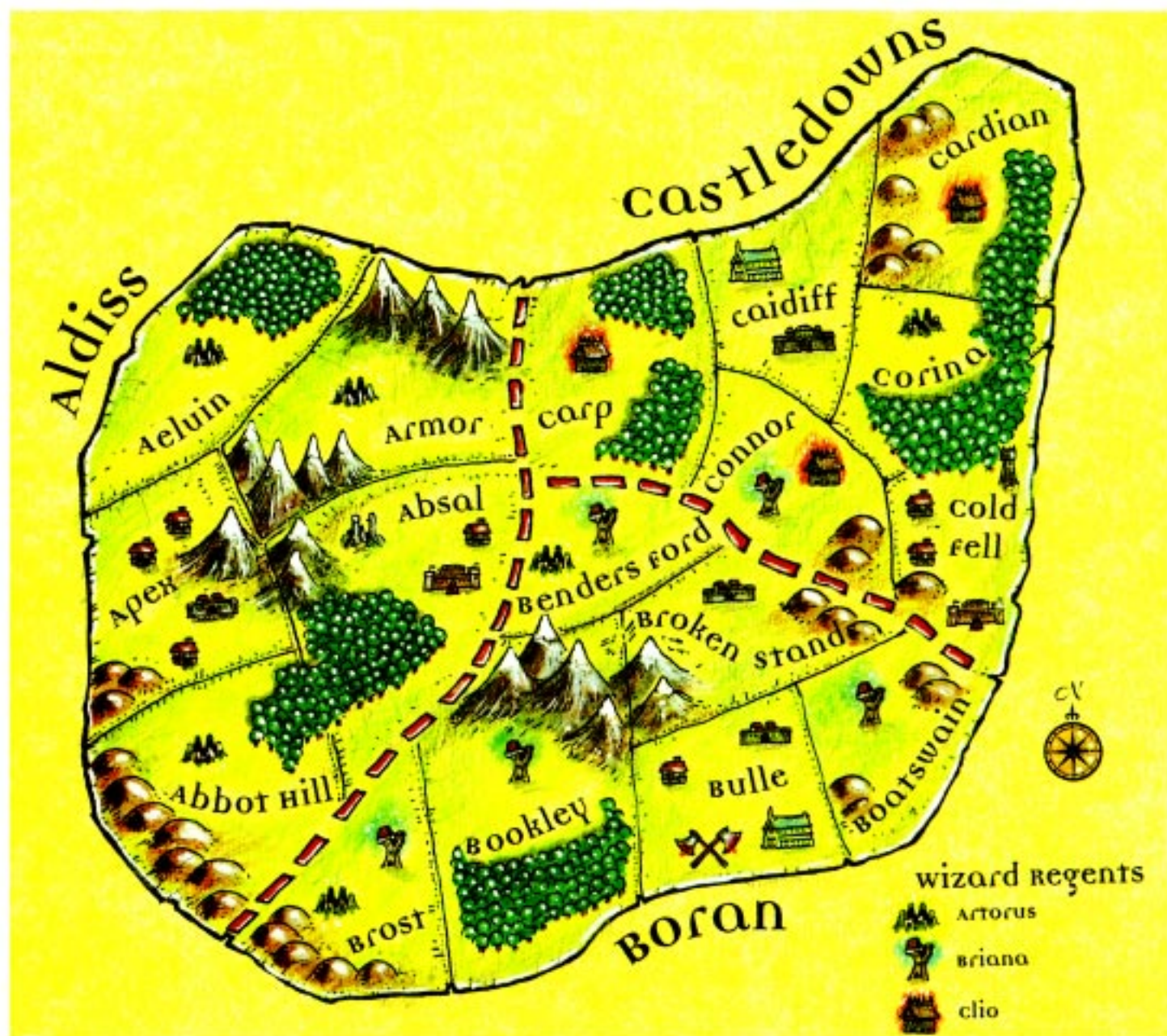


# Magic Across Cerilia

by **Carrie A. Bebris**, **Anne Brown**,  
and **Ed Stark**

Cartography by Rob Lazzaretti

# The Ley of the Land







No sooner does someone commit a few rules to paper, than others commence debate over how those rules should be interpreted.

Look at poor Moses. You'd think setting the Ten Commandments in stone would have been enough. Not so.

Or how about the Bill of Rights? Ten little amendments outlining basic freedoms. We're still arguing about those too.

And now, barely out of its shiny new box, the BIRTHRIGHT™ Rulebook has already inspired debate over how some rules should be interpreted—and that's just among its design team.

Ley lines—conduits of magic energy (*mebhaighl*) that wizards use in casting powerful spells—seem to be a primary subject of debate right now. Who would have thought the deceptively simple words “between two provinces” and “1 GB per ley line” could inspire so much dissent over their meaning?

Yet they have. You know from experience that the best way to handle rules questions is to decide on a house interpretation that seems reasonable to the DM and players in your individual campaign. But if you'd like a little guidance from the BIRTHRIGHT team, the three of us have ironed out a favorite system for forging and maintaining ley lines in Cerilia.

## Laying a Foundation

First, a quick overview of magic, ley lines, and their function in a BIRTHRIGHT game.

In addition to all the spells available in the *Player's Handbook* (and other sources), wizard regents are allowed to cast *realm* spells—powerful magic available only to wizards who can tap and control the magical energies of the land. When a wizard wishes to cast such a spell away from her base of operations, however, she needs to create a ley line to channel magic from her home turf to the place where she needs it.

As a refresher, recall that *mebhaighl* (meh-VALE) may be tapped and concentrated through a holding known as a source. Wizards control sources and may increase or decrease them in the same manner as guilds or temples. Their strength is indicated by their level (which is shown in parentheses).

Quoting from the BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook:

*Wizards may use a “forge ley line” action to create a magical link between two provinces. Many realm spells require a minimum source level in the province to be affected, but a ley line acts as a magical conduit, allowing the wizard to treat the weaker province as if it had the Source level of a higher connected province for purposes of casting realm spells.*

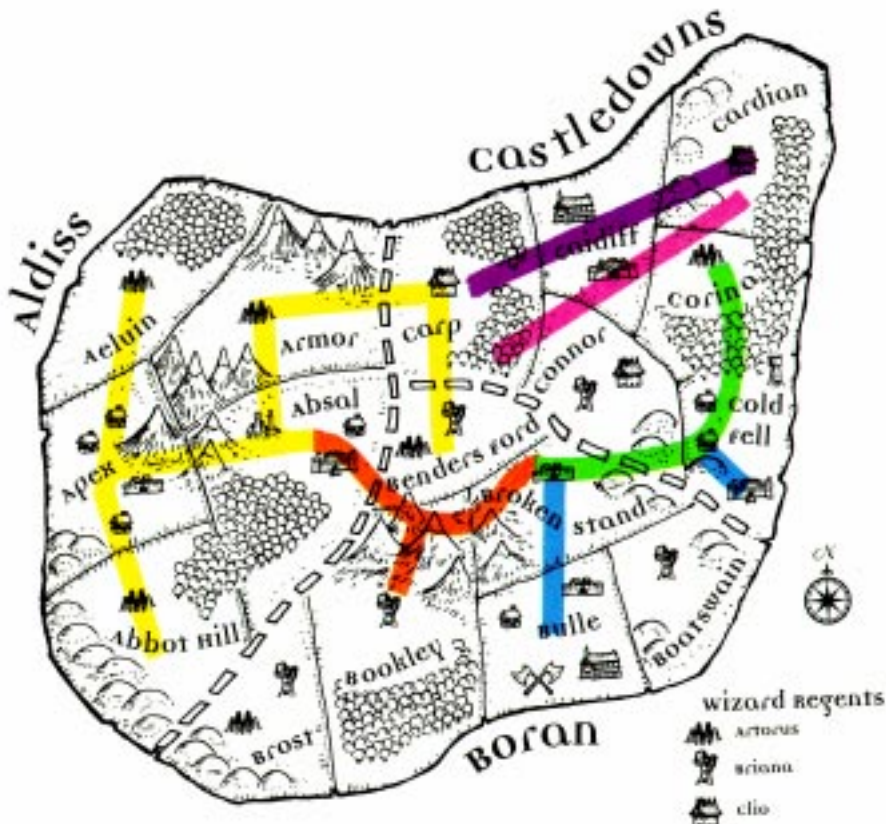
*For example, consider a wizard who controls a source (7) in one province, and a source (1) in another. The source (1) is too weak for most realm spells, but by forging a ley line between the two, he can cast any realm spell in the province with the source (1).*

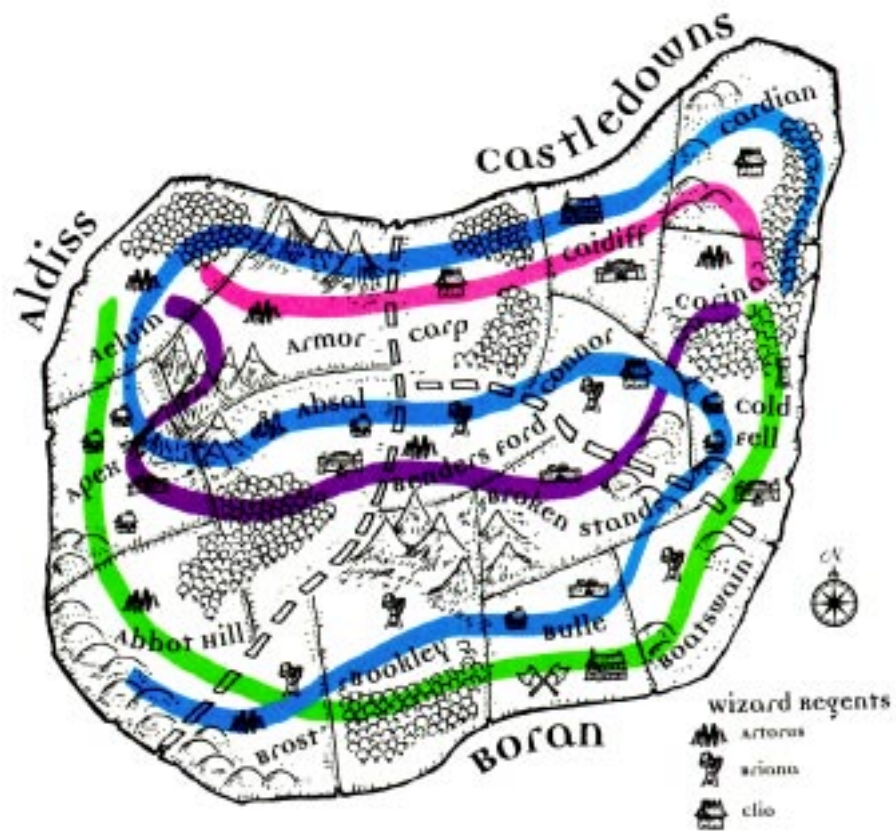
*Ley lines cost 1 RP and 1 GB per province crossed; thus, linking to a province three moves away costs 3 RP and 3 GB. Ley lines can be forged from other ley lines the wizard controls; it is possible to save effort by creating local networks stemming from one major ley line. The construction of a ley line can be opposed or supported by any wizard with a source holding in any province the ley line crosses.*

*A ley line costs 1 RP per domain turn to maintain, regardless of its length. This is paid in the Adjustment Step of the domain turn.*

Just as ley lines can be forged, they can also be sundered. The boxed set didn't have room to cover such issues, but the upcoming *Book of Magecraft* (coming in March) will explain in detail how to destroy, disrupt, or otherwise screw up someone else's ley lines—and this issue's “Magic of Kings” article provides some examples of such realm spells. For now, it's important to know only that ley lines can be tampered with, and interference from rivals is a possibility your wizard PC should consider when forging ley lines.

To illustrate the ley line rules, we've created three kingdoms: Aldiss, Boran, and Castledowns (see diagram #1). Three wizards—Artorus, Briana, and Clio—control the magical sources of these domains. Artorus, the court wizard of Aldiss, controls sources in Aeluin, Armor, Abbot Hill, Brost, Bender's Ford, and Connor. Briana, the Mage-Queen of Boran, controls sources in Aeluin, Armor, Abbot Hill, Brost, Bender's Ford, and Connor. Clio, the Mage-Queen of Castledowns, controls sources in Aeluin, Armor, Abbot Hill, Brost, Bender's Ford, and Connor.







province of Castledowns). Clio, the court wizard of Castledowns, controls sources in Carp, Connor, and Cardian.

Notice that while Artorus has lots of *mebhaighl* at his disposal, it's all spread out and not very useful to him as it stands now. He can cast realm spells requiring a source (1) in Aeluin and Armor, and spells requiring up to a source (4) in Abbot Hill, but he has to travel onto foreign soil to tap his source (5) or even his source (2).

So what can Artorus do? Well, he can forge a couple of ley lines. He can use his spread-out sources to create a network of energy throughout the land, drawing his influence closer to home and tighter around the three domains in the region.

Of course, Briana and Clio will try to stop him—but what would life be without a few challenges?

## The Core System

This rule follows the strictest interpretation of the “Forge Ley Line” domain action. As a result, players of wizard regents might find this method *too* strict (two optional rules are provided for players who want a looser system). However, this system has the advantages of simple bookkeeping and clear guidelines.

“Wizards may use this action [forge ley line] to create a magical link between two provinces.” That's what the rules say, and that's what you can do using this method. A ley line links one higher-level source to one province with a lower-level source or to a province with no source at all. As a result, the wizard can cast realm spells that require the higher-level source in two provinces: the province in which the source is located, and the province where the ley line terminates.

## Drawing the Ley Line

Forging a ley line costs the wizard 1 Regency Point and 1 Gold Bar per province crossed, not including the province in which the source is located. Therefore, a ley line between neighboring provinces, such as Abbot Hill and Absal, costs Artorus 1 RP and 1 GB; a line between Aeluin and Abbot Hill (crossing Apex) costs 2 RP and 2 GB.

This cost, however, leads to a problem: Players may try to optimize their ley lines by manipulating the number of provinces they pass through. For example, if Clio wanted to forge a ley line between Carp and Cardian, the line could pass through as many as five provinces (see diagram 1, pink line) or three (purple line), depending on how she draws it. To minimize this problem, ley lines must be drawn from the approximate center of the source province straight to the approximate center of the destination province. In Clio's case, the purple line is the correct one.

In this example, drawing from center to center saves Clio 2 RP and 2 GB. However, a straight line won't always work to the wizard's advantage. Sometimes it may be

more expensive to draw a straight line from center to center—not to mention more dangerous, if the line passes through enemy territory.

If a wizard regent wants to bend his ley lines—whether for strategic, economic, or aesthetic reasons—he can. But the extra concentration and materials involved cost him an additional 1 RP and 1 GB for the ley line's forging. That's not 1 RP and 1 GB per bend, just per ley line.

In diagram 1, Artorus sees the wisdom in this course of action. He wants to tap his big source (5) in Corina while sightseeing in Broken Stand. If he forges a straight ley line between Corina and Broken Stand, it passes through Connor, where both his enemies hold sources. Chances are, that ley line won't last long. So he forges a bent ley line through Cold Fell instead (diagram 1, green line). He spends just 1 RP and 1 GB more (for a total of 3 RP and 3 GB), and creates a much more secure line in the process.

## Connecting Ley Lines

Under the basic ley line rules, realm spells can be cast only in provinces where a source of the required strength exists or where a ley line from that source terminates. Therefore, wizards cannot cast realm spells in provinces through which a ley line merely passes. In diagram 1, Artorus can cast source (5) spells in Corina and Broken Stand using the green ley line, but not in Cold Fell. Why? Because the ley line is a magical conduit—like a power line. In order for it to be tapped, there must be a terminus or a branch-off.

Of course, ley lines can be drawn from a province to an existing ley line. For example, Artorus can forge a separate ley line from Cold Fell to the ley line passing through Cold Fell (see diagram 1, blue line). The ley line is a minor “tap” and allows the casting of realm spells in the additional province.

Likewise, if Artorus wanted to extend his Corina/Broken Stand ley line to Bulle, he could do so by forging a ley line from the original (green) ley line to Bulle.

## Ley Line Networks

Ley lines cost quite a bit (for a regency- and gold-poor wizard) to set up. They don't cost quite as much to maintain, but the price can add up quickly if the regent has lots of ley lines. Under the core system, ley line networks are strategically efficient, but maybe not very cost efficient.

A ley line network is a series of ley lines set up in successive domain turns that allows a wizard regent to tap sources in many different provinces. Viewed as a whole, diagram 1 illustrates a ley line network set up by Artorus (all but the pink and purple lines—those belong to Clio). The network consists of 11 ley lines, including the short “taps.” It was set up over many domain turns (a minimum of 11, unless Artorus had a wizard lieutenant helping him) and is quite extensive.

The network runs from Corina to Broken Stand, then extends to Absal and on to Apex. Artorus forged another ley line from Abbot Hill to Apex and then extended it to Aeluin. While this looks rather complex, it was for a good reason: Because all the ley lines converge in Apex, they share several sources. Anywhere along this network, Artorus can draw on the magical power of his sources in Corina, Abbot Hill, Aeluin, Armor, or Bender's Ford. The Brost source is not connected to any ley line, so realm spells cast in that province by Artorus must require no higher than a source (1).

## Severing Ley Lines

Even though details about severing ley lines will be discussed in the *Book of Magecraft*, results of that contingency should be addressed here. If a ley line is severed, the break continues in both directions until it reaches a terminus (the point where a line originally began or ended), where the break ends.

For example, let's say Briana severs Artorus's ley line in Bookley. Artorus suffers a setback—Briana has sundered his most critical ley line (the orange one, which connects his highest source to the Aldiss provinces). The whole ley line, from terminus to terminus (Broken Stand to Absal), evaporates. Any ley lines not connected to sources but connected to the severed ley line are also cut. So the entire orange section of the network, including the tap, disappears.

Note that the ley line between Absal and Apex still holds, even though neither province has a source. Since Artorus set up a ley line from Abbot Hill (and one from Aeluin) where there is a source into Apex, the Absal/Apex/Abbot Hill/Aeluin mini-network remains. Likewise, the connection between Armor, Carp, and Bender's Ford still remains, because those lines were not dependent on the Corina source.

On the other side of the map, the Corina network is much smaller. The ley line still runs through Cold Fell and terminates in Broken Stand (where there is an extension to Bulle), but the ley line in Bookley is gone. Artorus must re-forge a connection if he wants to restore the power of his Corina source to the western network.

## Option 1: Power-Up

Extending ley lines and creating lots of terminal points is a very good idea.

Artorus was wise—when he lost the Corina/Absal connection, he still had his source (4) in Abbot Hill connected to all of his western holdings. If he runs a ley line between Bender's Ford and neighboring Broken Stand, or restores the sundered section, he will be all linked up again.

But while it is harder to cripple a networked wizard by cutting just one ley line, lots of short ley lines add to the cost of maintenance. All ley lines, no matter how long or short, cost 1 RP to maintain, so

Artorus was paying 11 RP per domain turn for his network; now he's paying 9 RP.

The optional power-up rule allows DMs to make life easier on the poor, deprived wizard. Since wizards don't usually collect as much RP or GB as other regents (emphasis on the "usually"), the DM might want to make maintaining ley lines *optional*—depending on whether the wizard regent wants to use, or *thinks* he might want to use—a ley line in a particular domain turn.

Wizards pay their ley line maintenance costs when everyone else is paying their GB for their provinces and courts. Since this stage of the domain turn arrives before the wizard regent casts spells, using the power-up option requires some planning. The wizard regent decides during the maintenance phase what ley lines he will *activate* for the entire three-month turn. Then he pays the maintenance costs for those ley lines and no others—but he can use only the ley lines that he has powered up.

With the orange section gone, Artorus' network has been split in half. If Artorus is spending all his time out east trying to reunify his network, he might not want to dole out the full 9 RP it would take to maintain (power-up) all his ley lines. Since Artorus's source (4) in Abbot Hill is connected to Apex, Absal, Armor, Carp, and Bender's Ford, he might decide he doesn't need the connection between Apex and Aeluin this turn. It isn't likely, in his mind, that Briana or Clio will assault him magically in Aeluin, and he's not going to tell them he hasn't powered that connection. He saves 1 RP and temporarily excludes Aeluin from his network. He'd like to exclude Apex as well (it isn't a border province and it doesn't contribute a source to the network), but it is required as a connection to Absal and the east.

On the other side of the map, Artorus has only three remaining ley lines—Corina to Broken Stand, the tap to Cold Fell and the extension to Bulle. Since both of these terminus points lie in enemy territory, Artorus spends the 2 RP to keep both lines active. So, Artorus saved only 1 RP this turn, reducing his maintenance fee from 9 to 8 RP, but that's one RP he might need later.

Less-strict planners with Artorus' networks might save more RP if they desire. For example, if the player knows all the domain turn's action will be in the east, he could shut down the entire western network and pay only 2 RP to keep the Corina/Broken Stand/Bulle network alive. He can still cast realm spells in the west—as long as he is in the sources' provinces—but he can't use the western network. That would save him 6 RP.

However, the power-up rule has two inherent drawbacks that ensure game balance. First, at the end of every domain turn, the wizard regent must roll 1d10 for every inactive ley line. On a roll of 1, the ley line did not receive enough residual

energy to survive the turn. It simply dissipates. This loss affects the network just as severing a line would. So if Artorus did not maintain the entire western network, and the player rolled a 1 when checking for the Apex/Absal line, that connection would disappear, cutting Absal, Armor, Carp, and Bender's Ford off from the Abbot Hill source. They would still have access to the source (2) in Bender's Ford, but Artorus would lose a lot of flexibility—and that's assuming the player doesn't roll a 1 for any other lines on the western network.

The second drawback affects domain actions. An inactive ley line cannot have new lines connected to it. So, if Artorus left his western network inactive, he could not forge a ley line from Absal to Bookley, since Artorus does not have a source in either province. However, Artorus *could* forge a ley line from Broken Stand, through Bookley, and into Absal—and, next turn, he could reactivate his giant network, connecting all his ley lines once again to the source (5) in Corina.

## Option 2: Forging Lines of Power

The core system is a simple and straightforward interpretation of the rules, but it's also expensive: A comprehensive network of ley lines and taps costs a mint to set up and sucks down a horde of RP for maintenance during a time of national emergency. The forging lines option gives wizards more freedom, but it might be subject to abuses by aggressive players.

In some cases, however, a wizard needs a **break**. For example, in our weekly playtest sessions, Carrie is playing a wizardess with lots of source holdings but no land and no patronage by another regent. As a result, the wizardess doesn't collect taxes or a salary, and due to a low bloodline score she doesn't collect much regency, either. Basically, she's broke.

Not only is she broke, but she's also bored—it's tedious to burn up domain turn after domain turn patiently forging ley lines while everyone else around the table raises armies, rouses rabble, and plots assassinations. It seems that Carrie's wizardess may never use the cool spells she's spending so much time preparing for.

To help strapped wizards out, consider using the line forging option, which offers the simplicity of bookkeeping that makes the core system appealing, while allowing poor wizards more bang for their buck.

As already described, ley lines connect two provinces and any number of provinces can lie between the source province and the destination province. However, ley lines are more malleable under the line forging option. Think of a ley line as an open river of magical energy instead of a closed pipeline. Rivers collect water at a "source" and channel it to a destination; ley lines channel *mebhaighl* from the magical source to a destination province. And just as someone can draw

water or go for a swim at any point along a river, wizards can access the magical energy flowing through a ley line *from any province through which the line passes*.

For example, if our wizard Artorus forged a ley line due north from Abbot Hill to Aeluin, he could draw on the magical power of his level 4 source in both of those provinces and in Apex, which lies between them.

"Cool!" Artorus says. "I'm going to forge one ley line from my level 5 source in Corina through *all* the provinces of these three domains, so I can access its magic everywhere." Can he do that?

Sure. Under this option, any line Artorus can draw on the map without lifting his pencil is considered one line, and it doesn't matter whether the line is straight or curved or even circular—after all, rivers wind and bend all over the place. More importantly, he can start with a small line and add on to it later (like digging a canal)—it's still just one line. If Artorus wants to forge the whole line at once, he may spend 16 GB and 16 RP in a single action to forge a ley line that runs through every province (see diagram 2, blue line). He spends just 1 RP per domain turn to maintain it.

Bargain shopping at its best? In the short term, yes, but the one-line-does-it-all plan has serious strategic weaknesses. While this optional rule allows Artorus to forge a powerful line quickly and with little maintenance cost, it creates a very vulnerable ley line. Briana or Clio need to sunder the line in only one place—anywhere along the line—and the whole thing collapses.

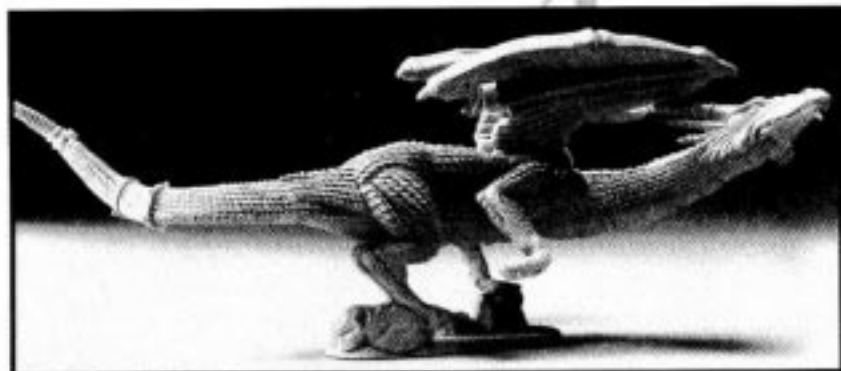
(I know what you might be thinking—if you build a dam in a river, there's still water on one side of it. But *mebhaighl* flows so strongly that the "banks" of a sun-dered ley line can't hold it, and the line collapses in on itself.)

Sadder and wiser, our determined Artorus decides to try again. But this time he approaches his ley lines with caution and deliberation. Artorus forges a network of three ley lines, all beginning in Corina and terminating in his domain of Aldiss (diagram 2, pink, purple, and green lines). This network requires a total of three actions, costing 19 RP and 19 GB to forge, plus 3 RP per turn to maintain. However, the extra expense buys Artorus some security: Briana and Clio must sunder three separate ley lines to keep Artorus from using his source (5) in Aldiss.

The line forging option offers players several advantages: easy bookkeeping, low maintenance costs, and magical access in many provinces with minimal forging time. But for these very reasons, some DMs (and players of nonwizard characters) might think it makes life—and access to power—too easy for wizards. The DM will have to decide whether to use this optional rule based on his campaign.



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### Option 3: Artesian Wells

This option is based on three elements of the basic rules: First, maintenance costs for all ley lines are the same *regardless* of their length; second, although the rule says a ley line connects two provinces, it doesn't necessarily mean that the *two* are exclusive; and third, the rules state that a wizard can tap *the most powerful province on the line*. That said, let me explain the Artesian Well option.

The Artesian Well rule allows a wizard to wind a ley line around the countryside, spending as much gold and regency as he cares to. However, allowing a wizard to cast realm magic in every province crossed by his ley line may throw some campaigns out of balance. Thus, Artorus could run a line beginning in Abbot Hill and wrapping through Apex, Aleuin, Armor, Absal, Carp, Caidiff, Cardian, Corina, Cold Fell, Connor, Bender's Ford, Broken Stand, Boatswain, Bulle, Bookley, and Brost (see diagram 3, green line). This ambitious action would cost 16 GB and 16 RP, and Artorus could tap the sources at the beginning and end of the lines; his source (4) in Abbot Hill could be used to cast magic in Brost, a source (1). If the source in Abbot Hill were reduced to 0, he could tap the source in Brost to cast realm magic in Abbot Hill.

With a ley line this long, Artorus would suffer terribly if his line were cut; the whole thing would disappear. Because of this risk, this option also allows a wizard to *extend* existing ley lines. This results in a new domain action: extend ley line. The cost is 1 RP and 1 GB per province crossed, just like forging. The wizard can add provinces to one end of a ley line, but will pay no additional maintenance costs for them; they become part of a single line, and the wizard can cast realm spells from the line's new endpoint.

Let's say that Artorus began his line in Abbot Hill, but stopped in Broken Stand. By extending his ley line to Brost (following the path described earlier), he could now cast in a total of three provinces, but he'll have to pay maintenance costs for only one ley line. As a bonus, Broken Stand acts as a dam in the event the line is severed. If the line were cut, it would disappear only as far as Broken Stand, regardless of which side of the line were cut.

So, how is all this like an Artesian well? Once the line is forged, Artorus can create magical taps—in effect, he sinks a well to tap into his ley line, allowing him to cast realm spells in more provinces. This results in a new domain action: Establish Ley Spring. This action costs 1 GB plus 1 RP per spring, to a maximum of five springs per action. The springs may lie anywhere on an existing ley line. The wizard-regent incurs a maintenance costs of 1 RP for every five ley springs.

Artorus decides that he needs to cast spells in more provinces on his ley line. He uses a domain action to create ley

springs and places them in Aleuin, Absal, Carp, Corina, and Cold Fell (see diagram 3, red line). The results are threefold: first, he can cast spells in these five provinces; second, the springs act as dams to limit the damage if anyone cuts his ley lines (as described earlier for extended ley lines), *and* he can now cast magic derived from his level 5 source in Corina (power from that source is now added to the line).

Working from the extended ley line example (the red line on the diagram), Artorus can cast realm spells in eight provinces, and he pays 2 RP per domain turn to maintain this system.

Furthermore, the damage from any cut in Artorus's line dead-ends at the closest taps or extensions on each side of the cut. Thus, if the evil wizard Briana cut the line in Bender's Ford, the line between Broken Stand and Cold Fell would disappear, but the taps in those two provinces protect the lines beyond those points. Artorus would then be forced to maintain two ley lines at a cost of 1 RP each, plus an additional RP for the 5 springs he still maintains (a total of 3 RP). Later, he could use the extend ley line option to reconnect the two lines.

### Ley Line Bookkeeping

Any player with a wizard regent character needs to track ley lines and taps carefully. This is most easily accomplished by laminating a map or slipping it into a plastic sheet protector and using dry-erase or water-erase markers. Different colors can be used to designate separate ley lines or extensions; springs and endpoints likewise by different colors or symbols (remember, under the Artesian option, you pay maintenance costs for springs, but not endpoints!). In any case, ley lines change during any campaign, so choose a method that allows for flexibility.

### So What do You Think?

By now, you've got more options and, with any luck, a better understanding of the nature of realm magic and ley lines—give these rules a try and use the options you like best. In fact, we'd love to hear from you to find out what worked best and what failed miserably, because we may make some tweaks to the *Book of Magecraft* based on your comments. (We also have a lunch bet riding on what optional rules get the most positive responses!) Write to any of us—Carrie, Anne, or Ed. If we get enough feedback, we'll let you know the results in a future issue.

Ω



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# ARCAINE

## BOOKS

### Zala's Book of Barriers

by John W. Baichtal

Artwork by David Day

The following spellbook can be introduced to a campaign in a number of ways: it can be found in a treasure trove, it can be purchased by a PC, the individual spells can be introduced separately, or a villain may use the book's power against the characters. The book contains 33 common enchantments plus 10 new Abjuration spells; all 43 spells are related to defenses or barriers.

#### Lakharemtolma Zalarem

**Appearance:** The Book is a massive tome; its two heavy, metal-reinforced wooden covers are bound over 44 pages of thick vellum, for a total weight of about 30 lbs. The book is invulnerable to fire, acid, moisture, and physical damage such as cutting and tearing. Despite this, a great black scorch mark mars the front cover, eating into the wood and destroying a runic message that was once inscribed there. The remaining marks reveal that the runes spelled out the book's title, the Lakharemtolma—the Book of Barriers. Sages speculate that a red dragon's breath scorched the front cover; Zala is known to have fought more than one such wyrm.

**History and contents:** Sages agree that the Book of Barriers is the work of Zala the Sorceress, quite possibly the cleverest wizard of the Palurigan region. Though her career was long and productive, Zala is said to have died in an earthquake more than four decades ago. The book was found among her possessions after the quake and was later stolen by an apprentice. The lad took the book to a sage to

have it appraised, but he was apparently unsatisfied with the price he was offered and vanished (along with the book). The present location of both the apprentice and the Book of Barriers is unknown.

Zala was fascinated with defensive spells, not surprising for an abjurer specialist wizard. History tells us Zala was vain but brilliant, and she was extremely concerned about keeping her fame alive after she was gone. Sages suggest that she somehow found a way to cheat death, as the inscription found inside the book clearly shows she had foreknowledge of her doom.

The first page contains a brief note in Seleggi, an ancient and obscure dialect of common: "This is the Book of Barriers. It contains my lifetime's accumulation of defensive magic. Now it is time for me to step beyond the veil and leave this world forever, but my art will remain for all time. Farewell. (signed) Zala." The 43 subsequent pages contain wizard spells, including 10 heretofore unknown spells created or discovered by Zala. The pages hold *alarm*, *armor*, *hold portal*, *protection from evil*, *shield*, *wall of fog*, *Zala's icejacket\**; *compose mind\**, *protection from cantrips*, *web*, *Zala's lifeforce guardian\**; *blink*, *non-detection*, *protection from evil*, *10' radius*, *protection from normal missiles*, *wind wall*, *Zala's forcebuckler\**; *Zala's amber-helm\**, *fire trap*, *illusionary wall*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, *repulse metal\**, *solid fog*, *wall of fire*, *wall of ice*; *avoidance*, *passwall*, *Thunguul's preservation\**, *wall of force*, *wall of iron*, *wall of stone*, *Zala's deception\**; *anti-magic shell*, *globe of invulnerability*, *repulsion*, *Zala's disruption\**;

*forcecage*, *spell turning*; *antipathy/sympathy*, *mind blank*, *prismatic wall*; *prismatic sphere*, *Tobian's ultimate circle\**.

Spells marked with an asterisk are new spells described below.

#### Zala's Icejacket

(Abjuration/Conjuration)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Dur.: 5 rds + 1/lvl

Area of Effect: One person

Components: V, S

CT: 1

Save: Negates

This spell coats one person in magical ice and snow that provides excellent protection from fire until it melts. The recipient is totally protected against normal fire; he could run into a burning house without fear of being burned, though smoke inhalation is another matter, of course. Even damage from magical fire is reduced—the *icejacket* insulates against minor fire spells (level 1-4 wizard and priest spells), reducing damage by 2 hp per die or 1d10 hp total, whichever is greater. Against major magical fire attacks, such as red dragon breath or flame spells of levels 5 and over, damage is reduced by 1 hp per die. Any magical fire attack nullifies the *icejacket* on contact; the spell protects against only one such attack.

The spell can be used offensively, because the ice and snow is quite heavy (10 lbs.) and can freeze a victim to death in a blizzard or sink a heavily-armored foe in a body of water; unwilling targets gain a saving throw. The *icejacket* can also be used for camouflage in snowy conditions, or to cool a person in the middle of a desert.

## Compose Mind

(Abjuration)

Level: 2                      Components: V, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 2  
Dur.: 3 rds./lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: Caster

*Compose mind* is a deceptively simple spell that allows the caster to imbue his or her mind with a supernatural calm, allowing the logical analysis of battle situations without fear of distraction from spells, injuries, and other sources. When the spell is in effect, the caster is immune to the following distractions:

- The pain from wounds and injuries.
- Natural fears and phobias (fear of heights, etc.).
- Itching, irritation, dizziness, confusion, and disorientation, whether mundane or magically induced.
- Any 1st or 2nd level spell that affects emotions, such as *scare* or *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter*.

Additionally, the caster gains a +3 saving throw bonus versus following situations and spells are saved against at +3:

- All emotion-affecting spells of 3rd level and higher, such as *symbol*, *emotion*, and *fear*.
- All 1st- to 3rd-level illusions, as well as natural camouflage and chameleonlike effects of monsters.
- The *awe* effects of ultra-powerful creatures such as deities.

*Compose mind* lasts as listed or until the wizard fails to save against an emotion-affecting spell. The material component is a stick of incense, which is burned while the spell is in effect.

## Zala's Lifeforce Guardian

(Abjuration/Conjuration)

Level: 2                      Components: V, S  
Range: touch                CT: 2  
Dur.: 5 rounds/lvl          Save: None  
Area of Effect: One person

This spell creates an invisible, intangible double of a person, which interposes itself whenever the recipient's lifeforce is in peril. Mere death does not qualify; the threat must harm or alter the recipient's lifeforce (for example, animate dead spells, any energy-draining spell or power, the transformation into undeath after being slain by an undead creature, *maze* and *trap the soul* spells, plus anything else the DM deems appropriate). When the spell or power is about to take effect, the invisible double interposes itself and nullifies the offending spell, but it is in turn dispelled. The double is effective only against creatures with the same or fewer HD/levels than the caster. The *guardian* does provide partial protection against stronger spells and powers, giving a saving throw bonus (where applicable) of +3 against beings 1-4 levels higher than the caster, +2 against those 5-8 levels higher than the caster, and +1 against those 9 or more levels higher.

The whole attack is not nullified, only the aspect which affects the soul. For example, if a 9th-level wizard was struck by a vampire, he would still suffer 5-10 hp damage but would avoid the vampire's energy drain.

## Zala's Forcebuckler

(Abjuration/Invocation)

Level: 3                      Components: V  
Range: 0                      CT: 3  
Dur.: 1 turn/level          Save: None  
Area of Effect: Caster

The *forcebuckler* is a glowing golden disc of magical energy that appears on the wizard's left forearm. The *forcebuckler* doesn't hinder spellcasting and provides the following benefits:

- A bonus of +2 to the wizard's armor class and saving throws.
- Protection from spells equal to -1 to every die of damage incurred by fire, acid, cold, electricity or raw magical energy (e.g. *magic missiles*).
- May block spells with a percentage chance equal to 5% per level of the wizard. The only spells that can be deflected are those that affect a single target, such as *ray of enfeeblement*, *Melf's acid arrow*, or *flame arrow*. Successfully blocking such a spell neutralizes the *forcebuckler*— the spell's energies are expended in defending the wizard.

The *forcebuckler* cannot be removed or concealed in any way, except by nullifying the spell. It sheds as much light as a normal candle.

## Zala's Amberhelm

(Abjuration)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 2 turns  
Dur.: 1 hour/level          Save: None  
Area of Effect: Caster

Zala invented this spell after a vicious battle with a psionist, to protect herself. When this spell is cast, a 2'-diameter amber-colored translucent sphere appears around the caster's head, serving as a barrier against all mind-affecting spells and psionic powers, but not illusions or phenomena. While the *amberhelm* is in effect, no such spell works, nor does any psionic power requiring Contact. Conversely the wizard cannot affect anyone with his mental powers (if any) while the spell is in effect.

The *amberhelm* can be dispelled normally, but the only way a psionist can destroy it is to expend a number of PSPs equal to half the wizard's hit points plus 1d20 points, then make a power check vs. Intelligence. If the check succeeds, the *amberhelm* is destroyed but feeds back its motive energies, zapping the psionist for 3d10 hp damage, with no saving throw. The material components are an amber bead worth at least 200 gp, a silver piece, and a parrot feather; the components are consumed in the casting.

## Repulse Metal

(Abjuration)

Level: 4                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 4  
Dur.: 7 rounds                Save: None  
Area of Effect: See below

By manipulating magnetic forces, the wizard creates a brief burst of magical force that impels all metal within 100 yards to fly away from the caster (except any metal he is carrying) at a rate of 10 yards per round, for seven rounds. Unlike mundane magnetic fields, this force affects even nonferrous metals like gold and lead. The force ceases 100 yards from the caster, so someone 99 yards away would be pushed just 3'.

The force that propels the metal increases as the quantity of metal present increases. For example, a wizard carrying a pouch of 20 sp could prevent himself and his money from being dragged away, but a warrior in full plate would be helpless to save himself, and would be flung back. Anyone carrying more than one pound of metal must make a Strength check (with a -1 penalty per pound of metal carried) or be inexorably pushed away from the caster. One check may be made per round, and a roll of 5 or more above what is needed indicates that the person may move toward the spellcaster if he so wishes. Alternatively, the metal item or items (a sword, for instance) could be dropped or detached and allowed to fly away.

The material components are three small iron bars and a gold piece that has been cut in half with a magical sword or dagger.

## Thunguul's Preservation

(Abjuration/Necromancy)

Level: 5                      Components: V, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 5  
Dur.: 1d6 hours/level      Save: None  
Area of Effect: Caster

Zala's uncle Thunguul was a powerful mage, though nowhere near his niece in skill. In his long lifetime he created just this one spell, an incantation designed to save the caster's life. *Thunguul's preservation* drains and stores a portion of the caster's life energy, protecting it from nearly any harm. This energy is equal to 3d4 hp, but it can never exceed the caster's hit points at the time the spell is cast.

When the spell is cast, this energy is marked off the character's hit points; these points cannot be recovered except on the completion of the spell. If the character's hit points drop below zero during the duration of the spell, he will seem to die, but when the spell expires, that life energy returns to the caster, bringing him back to life if he has fallen below zero hit points. This infusion of life energy is not a true resurrection because the character's life energy was never completely extin-



energy was safely hidden away. When the energy returns, small (though possibly fatal) wounds vanish, but severed limbs do not grow back and certain conditions, such as poisoning, disease, decapitation, incineration, disintegration, and so on, are not altered. If the PC's body is in a life-threatening location, such as at the bottom of a lake, then true death occurs immediately unless the character can reach *safety*. Only one *Thunguul's preservation* can be in effect at any one time.

The material component is a special candle that costs 1,000 gp to prepare. The candle must be lit when the spell is cast and gradually burns down until the spell is completed. If the candle is blown out or destroyed prematurely, the life energy is lost and must be recovered in the normal way.

### Zala's Deception

(Abjuration/Illusion)

Level: 5                      Components: V, S  
Range: 0                      CT: 5  
Dur.: 3 rds/lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: 50' radius circle

This spell combines the wizard spells *blink* and *mirror image*. When cast, two or more exact duplicates of the caster appear within 50' and their actions duplicate exactly those of the wizard. In addition, the caster's true location jumps around among the images, as if he were affected by a *blink* spell. Unlike the images of a *mirror image* spell, this spell's illusory duplicates do not vanish if struck.

The spell creates 1d4 images plus 1 image for every five levels of the caster, so a 10th-level wizard creates 1d4+2 images and a 15th-level wizard creates 1d4+3, to a maximum of 1d4+5 at 25th level.

The caster has considerable control over the images—they will not appear hovering in thin air unless the wizard wishes it, nor will they be facing walls or appear with their heads sticking into low ceilings. The caster also has some measure of control over placement of the images: if he takes an additional segment per image during casting, the images can be precisely placed within the area of effect, and can be set to face a certain way.

The images can be dispelled normally, and spells such as *true sight* can easily determine which are the images and which is the true wizard.

### Zala's Disruption

(Abjuration)

Level: 6                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 6  
Dur.: Instantaneous      Save: Negates  
Area of Effect: 5' radius/level

When invoked, this powerful incantation erases spells from the minds of wizards and priests within the stated range. Anyone with memorized spells within the radius must make a saving throw vs. spells or lose 1d4 random spells. Anyone failing

the first saving throw must roll again; failure results in another 1d4 spells lost and another saving throw until he has no spells left or a saving throw is successful. The caster and any allies in the area of effect are likewise affected by the *disruption*, though the caster gains a +2 bonus to the saving throw (+3 if an Abjurer). The *disrupted* magic takes the form of spectacular clouds of shimmering light that hover in the area for hours after the spell takes effect.

The material component is a diamond worth no less than 5,000 gp. However, this gem is not expended in the casting of the spell.

### Tobian's Ultimate Circle

(Abjuration)

Level: 9                      Components: V, S, M  
Range: 0                      CT: 9 rounds  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: 2'—diameter circle per level

This spell is the final word in defensive magic: completely invulnerable to those against whom it is cast, yet cannot be used to protect an attacker.

To set the spell, the caster makes a circle using gold dust—at least 500 gp worth per caster's level. While being cast, the wizard decides whether the *circle* protects against the inside or the outside. If inside, nothing within the lines can escape or attack through the barrier until the spell

expires or the circle is broken. If set to protect against the outside, whatever is within the lines is absolutely invulnerable to every conceivable attack.

In all cases, any force or attack brought to bear against the invulnerable side of the *circle* is reflected back against the initiator of the force. However, if a creature on the protected side moves or attacks through the barrier, willingly or not, the spell is broken.

The above rule has one exception: the caster of the *circle* can open the circle for an instant to *teleportation* or planar travel—just long enough to trap someone inside or bring someone across into the protected side. This is the only way a creature can pass through the wall without being reflected back or breaking the spell.

The caster can make the *circle* permanent by casting a *permanency* spell, though it can still be broken by someone walking through the opposite side. Legends tell of an archmage who did just this, and put a second *circle* around the first, with the invulnerable side out, thus trapping an enemy inside forever. Ω

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# Eight Ways to Tame the Dark Overlord

## Why PCs survive to face the powerful bad guys

by Peter C. Zelinski

Artwork by Dan Burr

Experienced Dungeon Masters often structure their campaigns around a “big story,” an epic quest in which each adventure is a chapter in an unfolding saga. In the big story, the player characters are heroes with an important mission in life, and they work toward this goal level by level, across months or years of regular gaming sessions—though they’re not the only recurring characters. Many big stories also have a standing villain, a menace who terrifies the heroes from chapter to chapter, and opposes them in their quest at every opportunity. The villain is part of the big story, and his effectiveness and believability are essential for the story to work. Unfortunately, however, sustaining such a villain is extremely difficult—a result of the nature of the AD&D® campaign.

The problem is the growth potential of the PCs. Heroes in AD&D games evolve significantly in the course of the campaign, much more than do their counterparts in mythology or fantasy novels. This leaves the DM with the problem of creating a villain who will not squash novice heroes, but who will also stay frightening many chapters later when the PCs have grown much more powerful.

Indexing the villain’s level to the PCs’ is an attractive solution, but this rarely works. First, it cheapens the players’ accomplishments to have the villain advance in levels with the heroes, without having to risk his life constantly as they do.

Second, even when the villain does keep pace, power differences dwindle as levels grow. A 5th-level mage may be terrifying to a group of 1st-level novices, but when

the PCs become a crack squad of 7th-level veterans, they’ll know they have their 11th-level opponent’s number.

Instead, what a big story needs is a big villain. For the big story—or any important, long-term villain role—the DM needs an Enemy.

### Enter the Enemy

The Enemy is a villain who is both immensely and consistently powerful—a Dark Overlord. The Enemy is bigger than the PCs at the outset of the story, and he will continue to be bigger throughout the campaign, to the final confrontation a dozen or more adventures later.

The PCs don’t immediately have to face the Enemy. In fact, an Enemy who can remain behind the scenes is more fearsome—e.g. Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Making the Enemy frightening and keeping him that way is no problem, but his power leaves the DM with one important question: *If the heroes are working against the Enemy, and the heroes are so much less powerful, why doesn’t the Enemy destroy them the instant they become annoying?*

In the absence of a believable answer to this question, the logic and credibility of the campaign could crumble. To make an effective Enemy, and therefore an effective big story, the DM must find a way to limit the Enemy’s ability to destroy the PCs. However, it has to be subtle. If the PCs decide they’re in no danger from the Enemy, he’ll lose his power to strike terror in their hearts.

In other words, the DM must “tame” his

Enemy, but he can’t let the players know the villain is on a leash.

Listed below are eight ways to tame an evil overlord—eight devices the DM can employ, all of which have been used before in heroic stories of one form or another. Just one of these devices may be ideal for the particular Enemy a DM has in mind. However, a better strategy is to consider all eight as cards in hand, using two or more of them simultaneously, as warranted, and possibly switching between them as the campaign evolves. Out of eight scenarios, the DM should be able to find some combination even experienced players have never seen before, to create an Enemy who remains terrifying all the way to the final chapter.

### 1. Ignorance

The Enemy simply doesn’t know the heroes are out there. Though the heroes are working to defeat him, the Enemy’s attention is consumed by his scheming, so he is unaware that the PCs have him in their sights.

This is the most straightforward device, but also the most fragile. If the villain is truly worthy of Enemy status, then he will discover the PCs and deduce their intentions well before they confront him—so the DM should have another device ready to use later in the campaign. When the heroes are found out, for example, the Enemy may decide they are beneath his concern (device #5), or he may force them to flee his wrath, to continue their mission as best they can while they are hiding (device #3).

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## Evening the Odds: Part One

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## 2. Infamy

The PCs aren't the only ones fighting the Enemy. In fact, the Enemy is widely despised—by other adventurers who have launched their own crusades against him, and possibly by other villains, who enviously plot his downfall so they can take his place.

This device makes the PCs part of the crowd. For as long as the heroes fail to distinguish themselves, the DM will have a ready excuse for their surviving to the next adventure: The Enemy's forces and attention can be spread only so thin, and at the moment he has bigger fish to fry. The DM can reinforce this by letting the players meet fellow adventurers who had to face the Enemy or his henchmen, while the PCs were once again spared.

Inevitably, however, as the protagonists of the big story, the PCs must distinguish themselves—either by advancing to a higher level than any of the other heroes, or by making progress against the Enemy unmatched by their peers (e.g., obtaining the one weapon that can defeat him). When this happens, device #2 effectively disappears, as the Enemy attempts to correct his oversight by making the destruction of the PCs his top priority. Again, the DM should have another device ready if this one fails.

## 3. Covertiness

This is similar to #1: the Enemy knows the PCs' actions and goals, but he doesn't know where the heroes are and can only guess where they will strike next. The PCs are guerrillas, simultaneously aiming to defeat the Enemy and to avoid his detection.

This device depends largely on the availability of magical items in the campaign. While any scrying spell short of a *wish* is risky—the Enemy may be loath to cast a *vision* spell, for example—a *crystal ball* in the Enemy's hands makes it effectively impossible for the PCs to remain hidden for long. However, if the Enemy has no means of obtaining a *crystal ball* or similar item—or the PCs have a dependable way to frustrate scrying—then the Enemy must rely on spies and hearsay, and this gives the PCs a fighting chance.

A big story where covertness alone protects the heroes can be particularly exciting, because the PCs must always remain hidden. Any journey home becomes too hazardous to risk, because the Enemy surely has the families and friends of his adversaries closely watched. Similarly, the heroes may require disguises when they journey into a town for supplies or healing, because the Enemy has spread their descriptions far and wide, along with the promise of a generous reward for their capture.

Under device #3, the PCs forsake any place in society for of their quest, leading

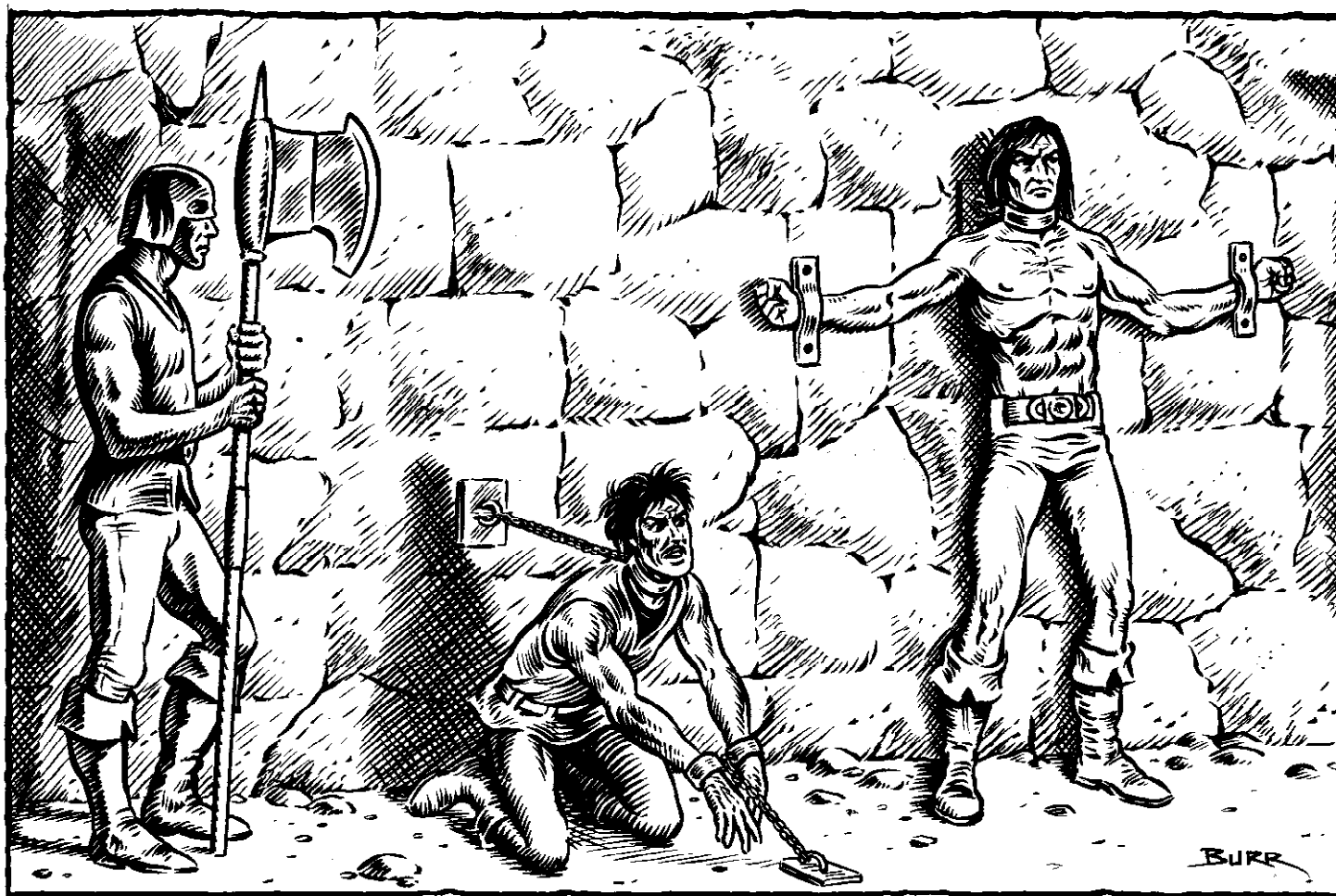
secret lives for years, until at last the Enemy is defeated. The DM, in turn, watches the actions of the PCs with the Enemy's eyes, always alert to any trail that might allow the Enemy to find the heroes.

In an alternate version of this device, the PCs use the town as their cover, blending in with the townspeople to remain inconspicuous. They pretend not to know each other in their day-to-day lives, and they pretend to be less capable than they truly are. To preserve this anonymity, they strike against the Enemy under cover. They hide their identities behind disguises or costumes, and may even use *noms de guerre* that are spoken in awed whispers throughout the land.

## 4. The Master Plan

Using this story device, the Enemy has a quest of his own—as well as a broad and far-reaching plan to finish it, which may bring him godlike power, world domination, immortality, or what have you. Like the PCs' quest to defeat him, the Enemy's quest involves many sequential steps, each of which brings him incrementally closer to his goal.

Like #2, this device gives the DM a convenient excuse for the Enemy's failure to flatten the heroes: The master plan is more important, and the Enemy can't afford to waste valuable resources on his adversaries right now.





However, the PCs must pay for this reprieve by watching the Enemy advance toward his goal, growing more powerful along the way. Whenever the PCs fail in one of their missions, or are slow to move against the Enemy, the DM should let them learn of yet another of the Enemy's victories—thereby making it clear to the heroes that they are in a race to finish their quest before the Enemy finishes his.

To make this device even more believable, the DM should have the Enemy's plan mapped out in advance. If the plan is a logical one, clever PCs may be able to predict the Enemy's next move and come up with a plan to frustrate the Enemy and buy themselves time. Conversely, the Enemy may mask his intentions through diversions, sending his minions on useless errands serving only to confuse the PCs.

### 5. Overconfidence

This is the classic Enemy downfall: an ego so big that it gives him a blind spot that helps the PCs. Because the Enemy can't believe that a group of puny adventurers could ever be a threat to him, he misses important opportunities to destroy them, or he sends minions to dispose of them instead of soiling his own hands.

Though effective, this device can render the Enemy and the big story absurd if it is overused. Eventually, the heroes will advance far enough in their quest to be

dangerously close to victory, and the Enemy will have sent even his high-level minions against them to no avail. At this point, even the most arrogant Enemy must see the truth. If he can, he may then move against the PCs directly, but by then it might be too late.

### 6. Limited Mobility

The Enemy simply can't reach the PCs. In all likelihood, he is also unable to carry out his own schemes. Under this device, the Enemy relies on minions who are free to roam the world to be his "arms," putting his plans in effect and striking against the heroes.

This weakness is the PCs' salvation. Because the minions are neither as powerful nor as cunning as the Enemy, the PCs can defeat them. In addition, because the Enemy is so dependent on them, he will be reluctant to send his trusted, most powerful minions to face the PCs until many others have failed before them. This delay gives the PCs a chance to advance in levels before facing their toughest foes.

There are many reasons why an Enemy's mobility might be constrained:

- *No legs.* The most obvious possibility. Here, the Enemy is not an ambulatory creature, but instead a stationary, sentient—and evil—being. Maybe the Enemy is an ancient statue, tree, mountain, or building, that has acquired some cruel,

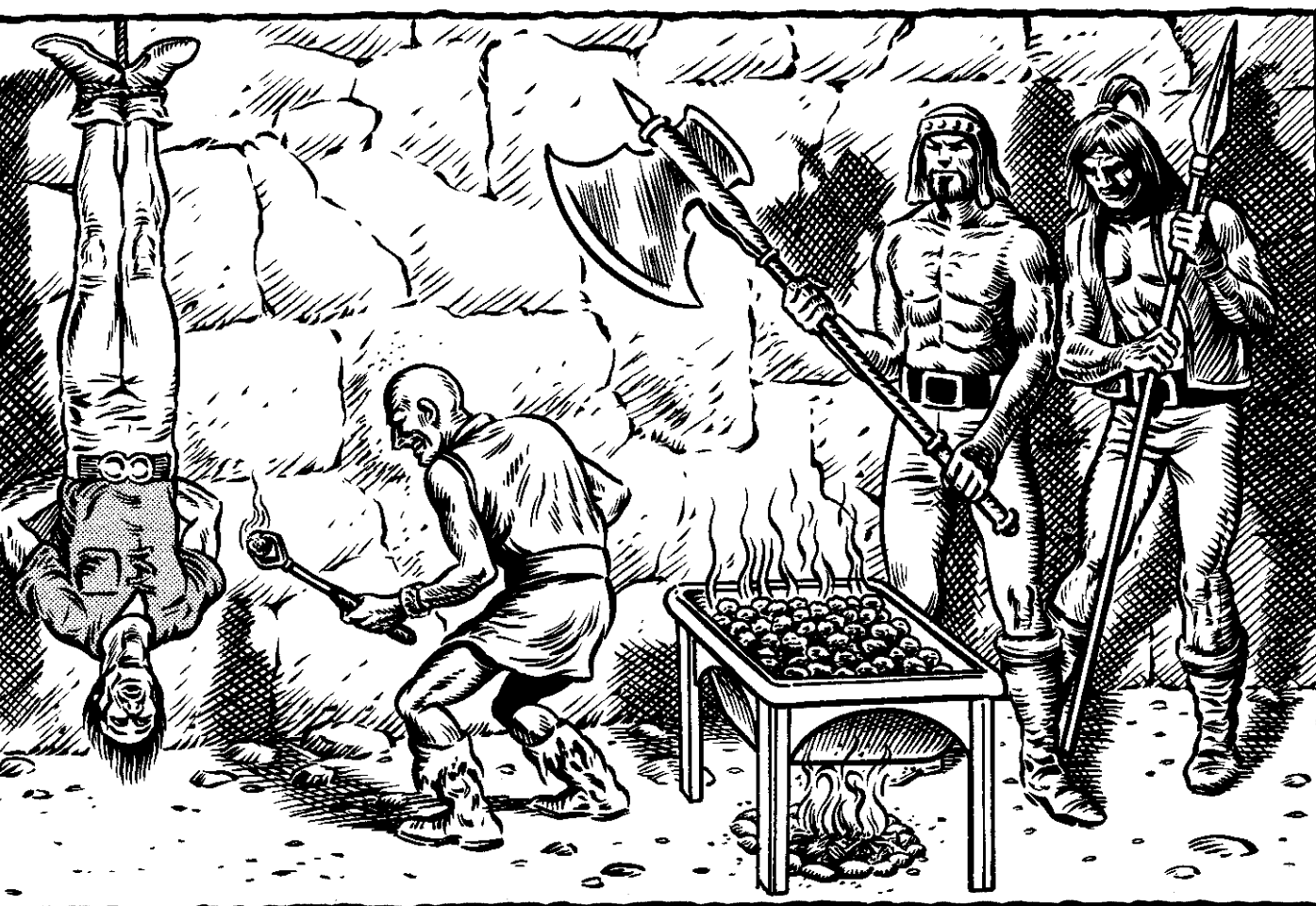
inhuman intelligence over time. Similarly, the Enemy could be an old and supremely powerful living wall, who has his minions bring him powerful creatures to absorb, thereby growing more powerful all the time (See *MM*, page 224).

- *Curse.* An ancient and powerful adversary—now departed from this world—trapped the Enemy long ago, using a powerful curse that forbids him from leaving the Dungeon of Hopelessness, the Orcblood Mountains, etc. If the DM is also using device #4, the Enemy may have discovered a way to free himself, which he is putting into effect via his master plan.

The Enemy may also be trapped on another plane. This gives him access to outer planar minions but it also constrains his ability to act on the Prime Material plane.

- *Vulnerability.* The Enemy refuses to travel because he is vulnerable outside his lair. This explanation can be applied to nearly all undead—particularly those averse to sunlight—as well as enormous or extremely rare creatures that are incapable of traveling inconspicuously, like any dragon older than two centuries.

This explanation also applies to creatures who are not adapted to the central environment of the campaign. The Enemy could be a creature of the far north or deep seas, or a native of the very deepest reaches of the Underdark.



## 7. Magical Protection

Some powerful magic force—a blessing on the heroes and a curse on the Enemy—prevents the Enemy from directly harming the PCs. Perhaps one of the PCs read an ancient and unique scroll granting permanent protection from the Enemy to everyone present. Alternately, the party may own a magical item which provides the same defense.

Though it is a tempting device, magical protection has many logical pitfalls which make it difficult to apply. For example, if the protection is the result of a blessing or scroll, what happens to PCs who come to the group later, arriving with new players or replacing heroes who are slain? Because the newcomers won't share the protection, they'll be sitting ducks for the Enemy.

On the other hand, if the protection comes from a portable item—say, a *staff of protection from the Dark Overlord*, 15' radius—how do the PCs justify their ownership of this item in a world with more powerful heroes? If the heroes truly wish the Enemy defeated, they should give the item to a band of 12th-level paladins who have a better chance of accomplishing this.

More importantly, however, the existence of such a spell or item strains the credibility of the Enemy who allows it to exist. Even the most overconfident Enemy would see a threat in something that neutralizes his power. If he knew it existed, he

would have it destroyed before the PCs found it. If he found out about it only when he was forced to flee from invulnerable PCs, he would send his most powerful minions to squash the PCs before they could find him again.

The DM should employ such a device by using it in a more understated way. Perhaps the item is good for only one use, with a very short duration. Such an item would be useless to the PCs throughout most of their quest, but it will serve them well if they can hold on to it until the final battle.

## 8. Capture

This device offers a last chance to PCs who are defeated prematurely by the Enemy or his forces. Instead of killing the PCs, the Enemy takes them prisoner. Perhaps he hopes to extract information from them using divination, psionics, or torture, or maybe he simply admires their physical prowess and believes they will make useful slaves in his mines, or in the construction of the latest addition to his obsidian fortress.

If this device is used in conjunction with #5, the Enemy may take the PCs back with him to his lair, believing they cannot rise against him when placed under guard and deprived of weapons, armor, and spell books.

Patient PCs will likely see a chance to

overpower their guards. How well they fare after that is largely a matter of their own resourcefulness. They may try to escape, or they may seek out the Enemy then and there—in spite of their missing equipment—out of fear that they may never again come so close to him. Whatever the case, one thing should be clear: Their actions will prove conclusively that they are too dangerous to be kept as prisoners. This time, the heroes must succeed, because the Enemy will never allow them another chance. Ω

## Letters

Continued from page 4

*Glad you like 'em; they're some of our favorites, too, of course. The only ones you missed in the PHB was the "Hero mobbed by kobolds" on page 100. In the DMG, the adventurers and the chest (page 12), the smoking gnome (page 17), and the lurking spider (page 77) are also updated versions of illustrations from the old rulebooks.*

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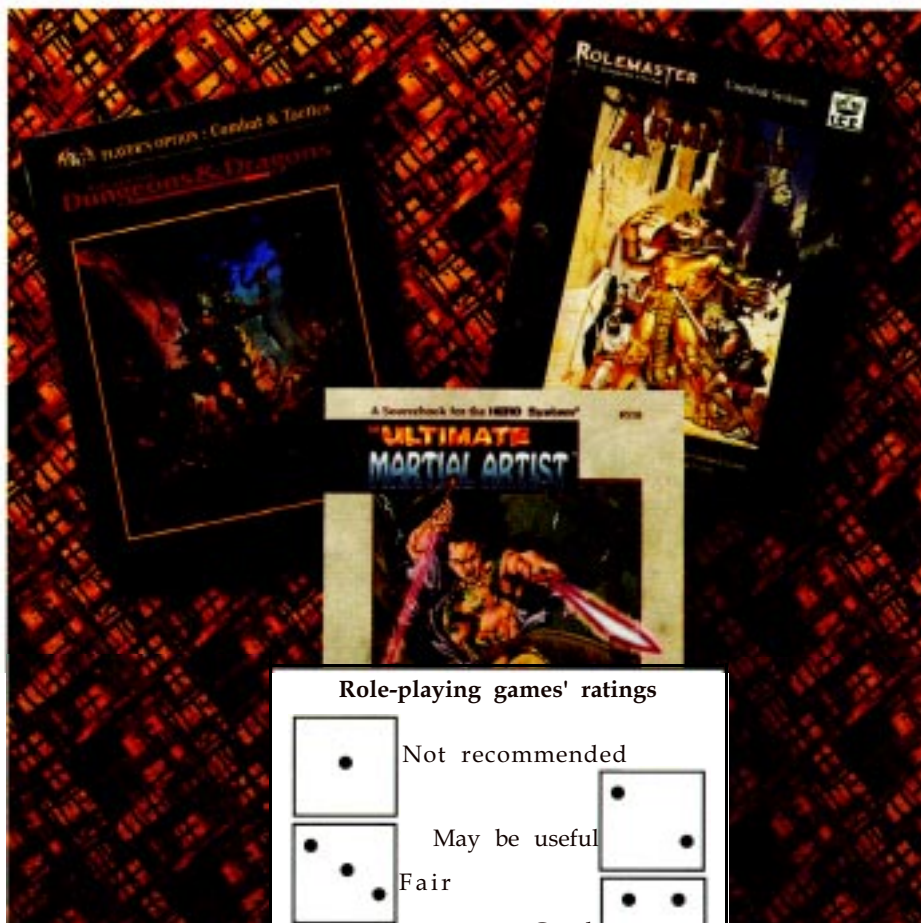




# ROLE-PLAYING reviews

## Bash 'em, punch 'em, and crunch 'em

©1995 by Rick Swan



Photography by  
Charles Kohl

Role-playing games' ratings	
	Not recommended
	May be useful
	Fair
	Good
	Excellent
	The BEST!

I like—make that adore—combat, for two reasons. The first is what I tell my colleagues and fellow professionals, in order to justify my obsession with imaginary characters turning each other into dog meat. The second is the real reason, which I'm normally too embarrassed to admit, but I'll share if you promise to keep it to yourself.

The first reason:

I came to role-playing by way of tactical military simulations, like the SQUAD LEADER\* game. A good military game not only requires the mastery of an elaborate set of rules—hundreds and hundreds of pages worth, in the case of the SQUAD LEADER series—but also the ability to execute complex operations while responding to an ever-changing set of variables. At its best, war gaming is as stimulating as chess, and as satisfying as solving the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. Combat in a role-playing game, when supported by elegant rules, provides the same kind of intellectual challenge.

The real reason:

I like to bash stuff—that is, I like the idea of bashing stuff.

I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, a tough guy—I'm more like Mr. Spaghetti, inclined to snap into several pieces if someone were roughing me up. But sometimes I like to pretend that I'm a tough guy, replete with rippling muscles, a bad attitude, and best of all, a license to smack anybody or anything that deserves to be smacked. I like to fantasize about ridding the neighborhood of brain-dead bullies, pounding sense into arrogant politicians, beating the crap out of creeps.

What I don't like are convoluted, chart-heavy game systems that get between me and my alter ego. If I wanted a lot of formulas, I'd still be playing SQUAD LEADER. Though the following supplements contain a fair amount of number-crunching, all of them stress drama over die-tosses. Better yet, each features a host of neat ways to make bad guys go splat. Take it from Mr. Spaghetti.

### PLAYER'S OPTION™ Rulebook: Combat & Tactics

AD&D® supplement 192-page hardcover book

TSR, Inc.

Design: Skip Williams and

L. Richard Baker III

Editing: Thomas M. Reid

Illustrations: Kevin and Charles Frank,

Roger Loveless, Les Dorscheid, Alan

Pollack, Doug Chaffee, and Erik Olson

Cover: Jeff Easley



I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that AD&D games needs more rules like Michael Jackson needs more plastic surgery. The core system, as presented in the *Player's Handbook* and DUNGEON MASTER® Guide, tops 500 pages. Add the



extras from the *Complete Handbook* series, the world books, the expansion sets . . . well, any way you look at it, you're talking a lot of material.

So maybe the AD&D game doesn't need more rules. But it could stand a little cleaning up. From its humble beginnings as a *Chainmail* game supplement—*Chainmail* being a rather modest medieval military simulation by Gary Gygax and Jeff Perren—the AD&D game became sort of a Frankenstein's monster, a behemoth cobbled together from two decades of design experiments. Pretty scary.

Enter the *PLAYER'S OPTION™ Combat & Tactics* book, a compendium of upgrades and refinements for what is arguably AD&D's most intimidating feature—combat. *Combat & Tactics* scrapes the mold off the core system, dresses it up in a new suit, and teaches it to behave. If the core system is Frankenstein's monster, *Combat & Tactics* is Miss Manners.

**Presentation:** A caveat: this review is based on a pre-publication copy, devoid of illustrations, graphics, and index; the book may also undergo a few editorial nips and tucks before it hits the stores. That said, *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* stands as a model of organization, with clear explanations, logical arguments, and a generous number of examples (a blow-by-blow account of a bugbear skirmish fills almost four pages). Where the designers deem it necessary to rehash old information, they go out of their way to improve the language. For instance, the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* explains the parrying bonus like this: " . . . all characters but warriors gain an AC bonus equal to half their level . . . A 6th-level wizard would have a +3 bonus to his AC (lowering his AC by 3)." *Combat & Tactics* untangles the syntax and presents it so: "Parrying reduces a nonwarrior character's Armor Class by one-half his level. A 6th-level wizard with an AC of 5 who parries reduces his AC to 2." The book also attempts to eradicate ambiguities specified or implied in the core system, providing lucid definitions of called shots, grappling, and "range only" weapons.

Occasionally, the designers cram too much information into the same sentence. I'm not exactly sure, for instance, what this means: "Warriors and monsters can make three attacks of opportunity plus one per five levels or Hit Dice." But overall, it's a first-class performance.

**The Basics:** Faced with so many choices, you may feel like a chef with a box of new recipes—which ones do you try first? Three concepts in particular stand out. Because they address and—for the most part—correct problematic areas in the core system, they seem strong candidates for inclusion in the average campaign.

**Movement Grid.** Dungeon Masters, at least the ones I know, have had a hard time agreeing on the best way to regulate movement. Some use hex maps, some use

rulers, and some, like me, just take a wild guess and hope the players don't mutiny. *Combat & Tactics* uses battle maps divided into 1" square grids (you can manufacture them yourself or borrow them from other games; I fudged and used a checker board). Generally speaking, one figure occupies one square; a huge creature (like a hill giant) may occupy two to four. Ten or more tiny creatures (like rats) can squeeze into the same square. While far from perfect—squares work well in rectangular dungeons, not so well in circular towers—the grids make the DM's life easier by providing simple, intuitive answers to common questions. When are opponents eligible to grapple? When they occupy the same square. How far can a range 2 weapon reach? Two squares. Where is a character's flank? Easy—the spaces on either side.

**Movement Scales.** The *Combat & Tactics* rules alternate between two movement scales, depending on the scope of a particular engagement. In melee scale, the default scale for close range encounters, one square represents an area 5' per side. In missile scale, suitable for outdoor and long-distance settings, one square equals an area 5 yards per side. The DM shifts between scales as the circumstances of an encounter change. For example, if two opponents spot each other at a distance of 150 yards, the DM tells them they're in missile scale, 30 squares apart. As they close, say, to a distance of 90', the DM shifts to melee scale; they're now 18 squares apart. Switching back and forth isn't confusing in the least; it's like using the zoom lens on a camera. Statistics are easy to convert (characters move 1/3 of their normal rate in missile scale); computing distances becomes second nature (in melee scale, a target at a 5-square range is 25 feet away; in missile scale, he's 25 yards away). With two scales, just about any encounter can be staged on a table top. For indoor encounters, my checker board worked fine.

**Weapon Proficiency.** The AD&D game's rigid weapon restrictions have long been a sore point with nitpicky players. Why, for example, can't a wizard wield a long sword? By fine-tuning the proficiency rules, *Combat & Tactics* allows PCs to arm themselves just about any way they please. Rogues can learn weapons normally reserved for warriors by paying an extra slot; wizards can use long swords by paying two extra slots. Further, a character proficient with a particular weapon is automatically familiar with all weapons of the same group. A warrior proficient with a light crossbow is familiar with all crossbows, suffering half the standard nonproficiency penalty when using a heavy or hand crossbow. Spending additional slots on a particular proficiency enables single-classed fighters to achieve various levels of mastery; a 5th-level fighter expending four slots becomes a high master (he scores

critical hits on rolls of 16 or higher), expending five slots takes him to grand mastery (he can make one extra attack).

Additionally, the book presents a new take on the combat round, breaking it down into several multi-step phases, each with a formidable menu of modifiers and special cases. Initiative involves weapon speeds, movement rate adjustments, and rolls on the Critical Event Table (which can result in a lost shield or a fallen mount). Actions are resolved in five phases: very fast, fast, average, slow, and very slow. Actions also come in four flavors, linked to the character's movement; guarding and withdrawal are half-move actions, charging and sprinting are full-move actions.

Suffice to say, *Combat & Tactics* combat is so detailed, it's a game in itself. But fortunately, it's a pretty good one. Slicing combat into tiny pieces requires players to make more decisions; consequently, they're more vulnerable to missteps but less dependent on the outcome of any given die-roll. The system rewards competence and punishes stupidity—just like a real battlefield.

**More Neat Stuff:** Where to begin?

Advanced students can pummel their opponents with shield punches, trample them with horses, and demolish their castles with bombardment engines and siege towers. The comprehensive equipment list describes weapons from the Stone Age through the Renaissance; it even includes firearms, like matchlocks and axe-pistols (which use regular gunpowder or magical smoke powder). And at long last, the AD&D game has a real live critical hit system to counter the wimpy dismissal in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* ("[Critical hit tables] do not fit well," says the DMG " . . . within the spirit of the game." Oh yeah?) *Combat & Tactics* provides 54 (!) hit location tables that allow bloodthirsty players to crush skulls, pierce torsos, and sever tails to their heart's delight. Whee-e-e!

**Not-So-Neat-Stuff:** When you start piling modifiers on top of modifiers, some rules become more trouble than they're worth. Take the fatigue rules, for instance, which use a point system to simulate the effects of exhaustion. In every phase a character moves or attacks, he expends a fatigue point. When he reaches zero, he moves and fights as if he were encumbered one category more than normal, an anticlimactic payoff for all that bookkeeping. Another rule gives prone characters a -2 bonus against ranged attacks. That's fine. But how necessary—and how useful—is it to go one step further and tack on modifiers for prone crossbows (half the normal rate of fire, melee attacks at a -4 penalty)?

Though the square grid facilitates movement, it's also easy to exploit. If you move, say, 16 squares diagonally, you're actually moving the equivalent of 22.6 squares (so says the Pythagorean

Theorem). The rules attempt to correct this by charging 3 movement points for every 2 units of diagonal movement. But that cheats you the other way; it effectively costs 24 points to move 22.6 squares. The designers admit that the rules don't always hold up to close scrutiny: "... applying physics properties to every situation (such as the fact that the wizard with *feather fall* is now plummeting to the ground at a hasty 6.8 MPH rather than the standard 1.4 MPH) may reveal lots of facts, but it won't make for a better game." I agree. But sticklers for accuracy might not.

**Evaluation:** I can't imagine using all the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* rules in every adventure. Except for fanatics, there's too much to retain—I'm as likely to remember the melee retreat exemption as I am my grandfather's Social Security number. And if you're more interested in a PC's personality than his tactical skills, you probably won't appreciate the distinctions between half-move and full-move actions.

But if you consider combat a key element of the AD&D game—or, perhaps, its primary purpose—then *Combat & Tactics* succeeds in two critical areas. First, it lets you tailor the combat system to the style of your campaign. If you prefer quick-and-dirty clashes between armies, use the mass combat rules; if you want to linger over every scratch and scrape, use the critical hit tables. Second, and more importantly, *Combat & Tactics* captures the visceral feel of combat: the blood and the sweat, the sting of a sword, the heady jolt of victory. Despite all the numbers, I always felt like a warrior, never an accountant.

*Combat & Tactics* makes combat more flexible (with tactical maneuvers for every occasion), sensible (the improved proficiency rules) and chaotic (unlike standard AD&D, there's a real danger from friendly fire). And it's all compatible with the core system. Pick out what you like, drop it into your current campaign, and ditch it if it doesn't work. Go ahead—you won't screw up anything. That doesn't sound so scary, does it?

## The Ultimate Martial Artist

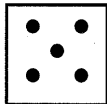
HERO SYSTEM\* game supplement  
256-page softcover book  
Hero Games

Design: Steven S. Long

Editing and development: Bruce Harlick

Illustrations: Storn Cook, Greg Smith, Pat Zircher, Dan Smith, Bryce Nakagawa, and Steve Peterson

Cover: Storn Cook



When you label something "the ultimate," you're asking for trouble. The term heightens expectations, invites cynicism, and begs for ridicule. (I shudder to think

of the mail I'd get if I called this "The Ultimate Review Column.") Worse, *The Ultimate Martial Artist* is a sequel of sorts to Aaron Allston's *Ninja Hero*, a masterpiece of rules writing and as close as Hero Games has ever come to an "ultimate" supplement. So does Steve Long, who confesses his trepidation in the introduction, rise to the challenge?

Boy, does he ever.

**Presentation:** Anyone who tosses around terms like *naginatajutsu* and *vovinam-viet-vo-dao* either knows his stuff or has access to one heck of a library. Long writes with the confidence of a seasoned designer (he's a major contributor to the DARK CHAMPIONS\* game). He defines key concepts with clarity and precision, and peppers the text with numerous examples of play. An index would've been nice; it's hard to find, say, the rules for smashing through walls without paging through the entire book. And the so-so illustrations border on the generic (though the eye gouging on page 27 got my attention).

**The Basics:** The book opens with a discussion of game mechanics, including maneuver descriptions and damage assessment. It's fairly technical, requiring a thorough understanding of the HERO system, evidenced by OCV and DCV ratings. Don't know an OCV from a VCR? Not to worry. Flip to the appendix, which shows you how to incorporate joint breaks, nerve strikes, and flying tackles into the GURPS\*, SHADOWRUN\*, and VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE\* games with minimal effort. The appendix also has conversion notes for "level-based systems" (read: AD&D games) that work surprisingly well.

The bulk of the book is a catalogue of martial art styles, staggering in scope. Each of the 100+ entries features a fact-filled overview (*capoeira* is the national martial art of Brazil, developed in 1530), a list of associated maneuvers (the *hsing-i* style encompasses tiger pushes and monkey slaps), and optional rules (*pakua* masters can strike 10 times per second). The historical styles draw from an impressive range of cultures: Korean *hapkido*, Burmese *bando*, Hawaiian *lua*. Fantasy gamers should check out the *butokumojutsu* style, where practitioners scuttle along the ground like spiders, or *poluraathkaa*, made-to-order for vulture-men and other airborne humanoids. You want kung fu? Long describes 18 different types. You want ninjas? Long's ninjas have access to a bonanza of magical powers, such as *bridge of the tide dragon* and *Soul leeching*. You waded through all the entries and still can't find a style you like? In one of the book's best sections, Long provides step-by-step instructions for creating new styles from scratch.

Long also makes the referee's job easier by including a surplus of staging tips. Rather than let players pick and choose the styles they like, Long suggests that the

referee insist on logical rationales; a PC who wants to learn Korean *hwarang-do* might have to account for a decade of training with a Buddhist monk. A PC who designs his own martial art might be urged to set up a dojo (school); after all, anyone who develops a brand new fighting style is probably in demand as a teacher. With the referee's blessings, PCs may organize themselves into secret societies, seven of which are detailed here (I like The Ones Who Pass Through The Dragon's Flame Unharmed, whose members wield flaming hammers). The "Martial Arts and Other Genres" chapter describes how martial arts can be incorporated into cyberpunk, fantasy, and SF settings, the latter utilizing ingenious rules for zero-gravity combat.

**More Neat Stuff:** The completeness of the weapon section rivals that of the *Combat & Tactics* book, with nearly 30 pages devoted to descriptions and statistics. The "Building Characters" chapter looks at dozens of skills, ranging from acrobatics to Chinese healing, spelling out the implications for martial artists. In high-level campaigns, players may experiment with super-powers, such as invisibility and telekinesis.

**Not-So-Neat-Stuff:** Though Long furnishes plenty of staging tips for referees, he isn't as attentive to players. A section on character archetypes offers 23 examples (Philosopher, Super Solider, Vigilante), but they're too skimpy to be much use—few of them are longer than a couple of paragraphs. Worse, the archetypes contain little information about behavior, training, or style preferences. Likewise, the style descriptions could have used a few role-playing notes, discussing the disposition and interests of the students. The text occasionally refers the reader to other HERO products; but instead of sending us to DARK CHAMPIONS for a description of Mind Control, why not just reprint it here? More diagrams, illustrating specific stances and maneuvers, would also have been nice.

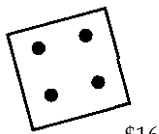
**Evaluation:** With its smorgasbord of character archetypes and skill variants, *The Ultimate Martial Artist* reads like a volume in TSR's *Complete Handbook* series—actually, considering the mountain of material, more like two or three volumes. It's strong on ideas, a little weak on application; Long prefers to dump everything in your lap and let you sort it out. But even players with only a cursory interest in karate chops should be impressed by Long's meticulous research and keen eye for detail. "Ultimate" couldn't be more appropriate—this is the last word in martial arts.



## Arms Law

ROLEMASTER\* game supplement

144-page softcover book  
Iron Crown Enterprises



\$16

Design: S. Coleman Charlton, Kurt H. Fischer, Peter C. Fenlon Jr., John W. Curtis III, Jason O. Hawkins, Terry K. Amthor, Bruce R. Neidlinger, Bruce C. Shelley, and Leonard Cook

Editing: John Curtis

Illustrations: Chris Bailey, Jason O.

Hawkins, Kamran Sedaghatkish, and Jeff Yette

Cover: Angus McBride

With its tidal wave of numbers, formulas, and tables, the ROLEMASTER\* game always struck me as the kind of fantasy RPG that calculus professors play on their day off. As one of the mathematically challenged—the Pythagorean Theorem reference in the PLAYER'S OPTION review above is an aberration, believe me—ROLEMASTER has never been my idea of a good time. But since the release of *War Law*, the complicated but clever miniatures supplement (reviewed in issue #178), my appreciation for the system has grown. ROLEMASTER has been buffed and polished now for a good decade and a half, and it shows. Most of the bugs seem to be gone, and the internal logic remains remarkably consistent. It's still more than I can manage, so I don't play it a lot. But I admire those who do.

**Presentation:** *Arms Law* is the combat system for ROLEMASTER, though with some work, it can be adapted to other fantasy RPGs as well. It's mainly a book of tables—more than 100 pages worth—that referees and players can use to adjudicate the results of armed and unarmed brawls in exacting detail. While the revisions from previous editions may seem minor—reformatted Critical Strike Tables, new weapon breakage rules, replacing the Armored Fist Attack Table with the Brawling Attack Table—they're essential for keeping a ROLEMASTER campaign up to date. Veterans will have to whip out their wallets one more time.

**The Basics:** If a weapon commonly appears in a fantasy game—whether it's a battle axe, broad sword, morning star, or whip—*Arms Law* gives it a two-page table. The first page details combat results; the battle axe table has close to 1,500 entries. The second page handles critical hits, which include damage statistics along with a line or two of narrative description. Among the possibilities for the battle axe: "Foe tries to disarm you and pays with a nasty cut to his forearm" and "Crush foe's chest cavity. He grips your arm, looks into your eyes, then drops and dies in 3 rounds." With 180 different critical hits, you can whack a bad guy with a battle axe from now until the millennium and never score the same way twice. The results I spot-checked seemed reasonable, perhaps

a bit on the bloody side, but overall, on par with those of similar games.

The appendix provides a set of streamlined combat rules, intended for players without access to the entire ROLEMASTER extravaganza. Players roll percentile dice, matching offensive advantages (weapon choice, expertise, experience) against defensive capabilities (armor, shield, quickness), played out over an 11-step battle round. A round equals about 10 seconds of real time, which can be stretched by *haste* spells (to double the number of activities affected characters may execute). Complex but well-written rules cover a host of interesting options, such as opportunity actions (plotted a round in advance) and orientation rolls (for measuring awareness and self-control). Even with all the formulas, the system requires the referee to make quite a few judgment calls, especially regarding the time it takes to compete an action; each action requires a percentage of a round to complete, with a physical attack considered "at least a 50% activity. . . and movement as a 0-100% activity." Experienced referees shouldn't have any problems, but the book doesn't give much help to novices (though they really shouldn't be fooling around with ROLEMASTER in the first place).

**More Neat Stuff:** Along with the routine tables are plenty of goofy ones, my favorites being the Brawling Critical Strike Table ("Blow to solar plexus causes foe to vomit") and, for assaults from bunnies and mice, the Tiny Table ("Poor follow-through. You lose a claw."). The Weapon Fumble Table describes exactly what happens when you bungle an attack ("Your ferocious scream is followed by silence as you hit yourself"). Important charts—Initiative Determination, Maneuver Modifications, Weapon Statistic—are collected in the back of the book for easy reference.

**Not-So-Neat-Stuff:** Even stripped to the essentials, the ROLEMASTER system is a brain-strainer. To compute the Offensive Bonus, for instance, add the Skill Bonus to the Stat Bonus to the Level Bonus to the Weapon Bonus to the Special Item Bonus to the Position Bonus, plus or minus the Status Bonus, minus the Parrying Bonus minus 20 (if the weapon is used in the nondominant hand) plus or minus the Range Modification minus the Reloading Penalty minus the Armor Missile Attack Penalty. With three or four characters, combat is snail-slow, but manageable. With a handful of characters, the snail has arthritis and drags a ball and chain. With an army of characters, the snail's nailed to the table.

**Evaluation:** ROLEMASTER is the antithesis of, say, VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE, the latter stressing storytelling over die-tossing, the former a glorified war game—think the AD&D game crossed with SQUAD LEADER. No doubt about it: if you read computer manuals for fun, if you get misty-eyed thinking about your high school algebra class, if you wonder why your

friends complain about something as trivial as filling out tax forms, then ROLEMASTER ought to be right up your alley. *Arms Law* is as good a place as any to begin your investigation.

## Short and sweet

*Houses of Hermes*, by Jonathan Tweet. Wizards of the Coast, \$17.

A sourcebook for the ARS MAGICA\* game, this look at the powerful Order of Hermes downplays dreary historical summaries in favor of engaging profiles of master magicians. Martin, a brilliant theoretician of the House Bonisagus, can cast spells that last a day and a night. Cygna, a follower of the shapeshifting House Bjornaer, can change into a swan. The characters make great adversaries and advisors, the intriguing sidebars—check page 24 for ten puzzles to stump the smarty-pants Bonisagus—supply referees with adventure hooks galore.

*Elminster's Ecologies Appendix 1*, by Scott Davis and Donald J. Bingle. TSR, Inc., \$10.

This charming sequel to the *Elminster's Ecologies* box focuses on the flora and fauna of the Battle of Bones and Hill of Lost Souls. The zombie ferret, lava ankheg, and dead grass snake all turn up, as do recipes for ruby blushrose potpourri and firebush spice paste. Whimsical asides and grumpy narration ("Oh, I suppose you care about the weather. I don't really see why.") makes this as fun as a fairy tale. They could have cut the S-page encounter booklet, though, which is long on pretty pictures but short on useful information.

*Strange Eons*, by Lucia Szachnowski, Gary O'Connell, Michael LaBossiere, and Justin Tynes. Chaosium, \$15.

Chaosium twists the CALL OF CTHULHU\* game in yet another direction with this collection of adventures set in unexpected eras. The atmospheric "King of Shreds and Patches" takes place in 17th-century London. "Blood Moon" sends the investigators to a U.N. moon base in the year 2015. "Garden of Earthly Delights," the best of the trio, plops alien lifeforms into the Spanish Inquisition. This isn't essential—for purists like me, the further CTHULHU drifts from the 1920s, the more flavor it loses—but it's a nice change of pace.

*When Black Roses Bloom*, by Lisa Smedman. TSR, Inc., \$10.

Lord Soth, the tormented and terrifying death knight of Solamnia, crawls out of the DRAGONLANCE® setting to guest star in this engaging RAVENLOFT® adventure. Trapped in the Demiplane of Dread, the homesick Soth longs to return to Krynn, and has fashioned *six memory mirrors* to help him get there (sort of—I don't want to give too much away). The principal encounters, which take place inside the

mirrors, not only challenge the party's tactical skills, but also reveal tantalizing bits of the DRAGONLANCE myths.

*The Seven Sisters*, by Ed Greenwood. TSR, Inc., \$15.

FORGOTTEN REALMS® godfather Ed Greenwood hosts this study of the Witch-Queen of Aglarond and her silver-haired siblings, high-level mages who dabble in immortality and troublemaking. The first section, rich in anecdotes, reads like excerpts from a good fantasy novel. The second half focuses on magic; *ghostharp* and *manujaws* are among the memorable new spells. At 128 pages, the book may strike some as overkill. But if you make it to the end, you'll probably know more about the Sisters than you know about your own relatives.

*Interactive Fantasy*, edited by Andrew Rillstone. Hogshead Publishing Ltd., \$32 for a five-issue subscription.

*Silver Griffin*, edited by Devlin Janax. Silver Griffin Publishing, \$14 for a six-issue subscription.

These magazines, both hopelessly infatuated with RPGs, target radically different audiences. With articles such as "Foreign Language Education and Role-Playing Games," the high-gloss *Interactive Fantasy* aims for the eggheads. The lengthy reviews, despite their verbosity (from the TALES OF GARGENTIHR\* game review:

"Umberto Eco would have us believe that this nostalgic view of the unreal is bound up with a cultural awareness of the importance of the Medieval era in the formation of our modern world-view") are usually more interesting than the games themselves. The less scholarly among us might prefer *Silver Griffin*, with its fannish discussions of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® magic system and human/dwarf relationships. *Interactive Fantasy* is a vitamin pill, *Silver Griffin* a candy bar. Wouldn't hurt to try them both. (*Interactive Fantasy* information: Hogshead Publishing, 29a Abbeville Road, London SW4 9LA, Great Britain. Silver Griffin Publishing, PO Box 1751, St. Paul, MN 55101.)

SIM CITY: THE CARD GAME\*, by Darwin Bromley, Louis Rexing, and Tom Wham. Mayfair Games Inc., \$8.50 (60-card starter deck), \$2.50 (15-card booster pack).

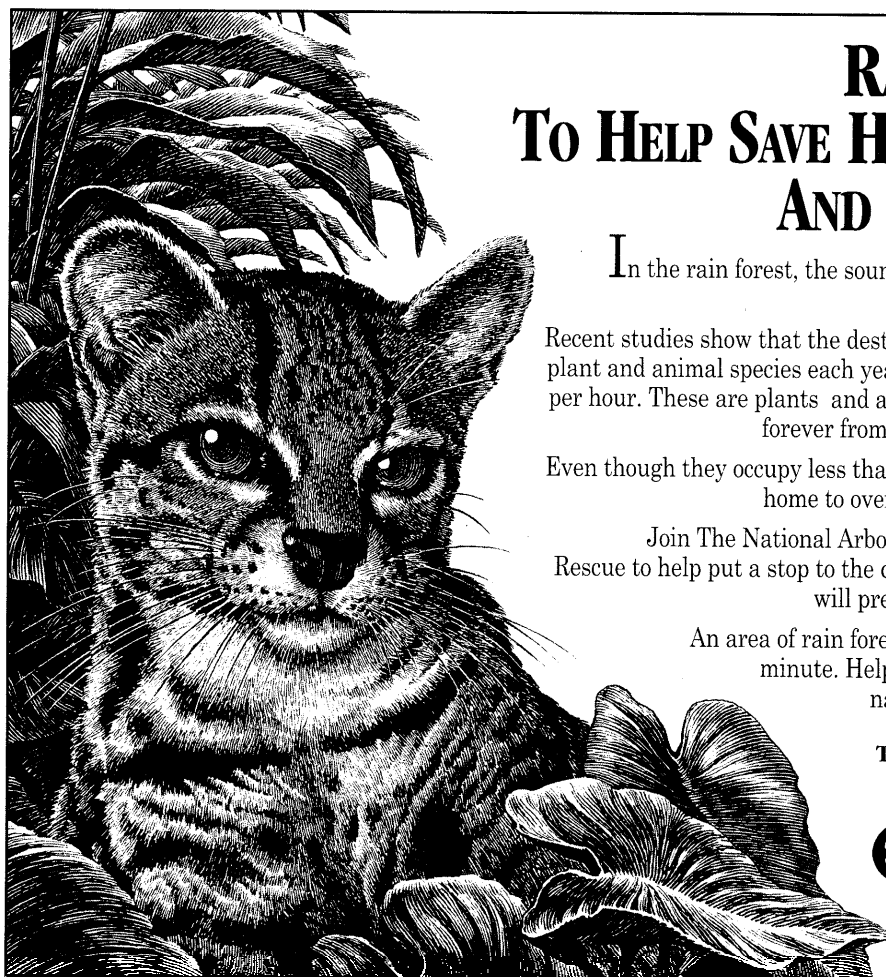
If I could get back all the time I've invested in the SIM CITY computer game, I could hand-deliver every subscription copy of this month's DRAGON® Magazine. While the card game doesn't scale the heights of the computer game, it comes close. And that's a remarkable achievement considering the intricacies of the original and the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of simulating a developing city with nothing but cardboard slabs. Players begin with hands of seven cards (gorgeous, featuring lush photography

and cute little citizen icons), representing city blocks, businesses, and landmarks. Together, the players build a city by arranging blocks on the table in compliance with zoning regulations, indicated by the color of the cards (orange for residential, brown for industrial, blue for commercial). The blocks must also be linked with roads and power lines, which run along the cards' borders.

As the city gets bigger, so do the problems: there's no room for new power lines, the citizens need an expensive mass transit system, pollution threatens an entire suburb. Players earn money points for deploying block cards and exploiting opportunities, requiring them to balance the welfare of the city with their own ambitions. In the game's most entertaining feature, players vote as members of the city council to change zoning regulations or adjust the value of properties. I'm basing my enthusiasm on a preproduction set, so I can't tell you about the booster packs or the mysterious "long cards." But if first impressions count, SIM CITY looks like a winner.

*Rick Swan is the author of The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games (St. Martin's Press). You can write him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply. ♪*

\* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.



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# The of Books

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## ANGEL SOULS AND DEVIL HEARTS

Christopher Golden

Berkley 0-425-14831-9 \$5.99

Vampires are everywhere these days, it seems. There are romantic vampires, diabolical vampires, accidental vampires, elegant vampires, punk vampires, *et cetera ad infinitum*.

And then there are Christopher Golden's vampires. *Angel Souls and Devil Hearts* is the second book in a series (the first is last year's *Of Saints and Shadows*) that blows the lid off of everything you ever thought you knew about people with fangs and liquid diets.

It's hard to discuss the current volume's premise and plot without giving too much away; this is one case where tracking down the first book is a good idea however, the cast list should give a few hints. The non-vampires include Allison Vigeant, CNN reporter and bestselling author, and George Marcopoulos, who begins the second book with an office at the United Nations. Among the vampires are Bill Cody, world traveler and sometime star of a legendary Wild West Show, and Meaghan Gallagher, who is one of the most powerful vampires "alive," despite being one of the newest. There's also Liam Mulkerrin, a former Catholic priest who is now an impossibly dangerous sorcerer with a direct pipeline to Hell—and unless Meaghan and the mysterious Lazarus can quite literally break vampire detective Peter Octavian out of Hell, Mulkerrin may well end up taking over the world.

As the foregoing suggests, Golden has tossed much of the conventional wisdom about vampires and vampire lore off the top of the Empire State Building. But there's justification for everything he does in the ingenious back story that explains the lore's origins, and the resulting milieu is utterly fascinating. White Wolf's World of Darkness this isn't, but Golden's setting nonetheless has the same or greater capacity for breakneck intrigue and roller-coaster pyrotechnics.

Indeed, while *Angel Souls and Devil Hearts* is inarguably a vampire novel, it's structured and paced much more like an



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action thriller than a traditional horror yarn. If you spliced together an Indiana Jones film, a James Bond adventure, and some Ray Harryhausen creature footage, you'd have something resembling a faithful movie adaptation. There are military commandos, high-tech security systems, major magical confrontations, and gorgeous European scenery (much of the book takes place in and around Salzburg, Austria). Oh, yes, and there are vampires, too.

In just one respect, this second book isn't quite the equal of its predecessor: its final revelation is a touch less explosive. Alert readers will likely figure out a key character's identity and its repercussions long before the characters do. But that's forgivable; Golden has given his players a heavy workload, and it's perhaps not surprising that they don't pick up on the clues more quickly.

The bottom line: Lestat is old news, and the clans of the Kindred are passe. For cutting-edge, edge-of-the-seat vampire adventure, Christopher Golden's Defiant Ones are in the driver's seat.

## THE FEARFUL SUMMONS

Denny Martin Flinn

**Pocket 0-671-89007-7 \$5.50**

Although Denny Martin Flinn has a pair of mystery novels to his credit, *Star Trek* fans will know him best as co-scripter of the sixth big-screen adventure of the U.S.S. *Enterprise*. It's therefore odd that *The Fearful Summons* seems largely influenced not by that movie, but by *Star Trek V*—seen by many fans as the weakest film in the series.

Like the fifth and sixth movies, this is an "Over-the-Hill Gang" adventure, wherein James Kirk must round up his old bridge crew for a desperate one-shot mission of great strategic significance. The trouble is that the rounding-up takes just about half the book, so we get a number of one-on-one character scenes and set pieces before the plot starts to move. And far too often, Flinn's dialogue or character development is either off-key or too broadly comic for the printed page.

Examples are easy to find. One hardly expects to find off-duty Starfleet brass (and cadets!) lounging casually in a topless bar, for instance. It's just barely in character for Spock to play Polonius in a Vulcan-based *Hamlet*, but wildly unlikely to find the hyperactive Montgomery Scott with a severe beer belly, or Leonard McCoy in a gentrified private practice rather than a research facility. (The Scott sequence is also odd when set against Scotty's appearance in a *ST: Next Generation* episode.) And Kirk's punchline in a scene with a chess-playing Chekov gets its cheap laugh at the expense of the *Trek* universe's usual healthy respect for ethical standards.

The same off-key quality marks Kirk's obligatory romantic interest. The May-December relationship might be more

convincing if allowed sufficient space to develop, but Flinn is juggling too many plot elements to give it that space—and a couple of those plot points tend to undercut the sincerity of the liaison.

Once Kirk and company reach the Beta Prometheus system, where *Excelsior's* Captain Sulu and members of his crew are being held captive, the story tightens noticeably and the dialogue improves. But the streamlining comes too late, the last-minute surprise is too familiar, and the rescue is over too quickly for readers to truly enjoy the adventure.

*The Fearful Summons* ultimately comes across as a rather strange *Star Trek* novel that feels as if it began life as a screenplay. Such an origin would make the peculiar structure far more understandable; there's about enough plot here for a movie, and a decidedly cinematic quality to many individual scenes. But if this is so, Flinn needs to learn a lesson from *Star Trek's* skilled movie novelizers, Vonda McIntyre and J. M. Dillard. Creating a solid full-length novel from a typical script requires adding and retuning material; you can't simply stretch the screenplay like a literary rubber band. But even compressed into movie form, Flinn's tale is marginal *Star Trek*; the props are all there, but the execution is caricature rather than characterization. This is one *Star Trek* novel fans can safely pass over despite its author's ties to the franchise.

## TAPESTRIES

Kathy Ice, ed.

**HarperPrism 0-06-105308-2 \$12.00**

There are still a great many details to fill in, but by and large, this is the book *MAGIC: THE GATHERING\** fans have been waiting for—the one in which the realms of Dominia finally begin to make storytellers feel at home. Although the 17 stories in this anthology cover a wide range of tones and styles, there's still a sense of dimension in the collection as a whole that earlier novels of Dominia simply didn't convey.

In particular, this volume's storytellers finally have a chance to inject humor and wit into the milieu. Ben Ohlander's "Smoke and Mirrors" is a clever be-careful-what-you-wish-for yarn, and Michael A. Stackpole provides a wry roller coaster of a treasure hunt well-stocked with his usual brand of devious logic. "Airborne All The Way" is less sophisticated, as David Drake gives his goblin balloon brigade the approximate brainpower of the Three Stooges, but nonetheless prompts a chuckle.

More balanced treatment of Dominia's goblin population comes from David Honigsberg, whose "Dochyel's Ride" involves a different military device—the rock sled—and successfully captures both goblinish ruggedness and a sense of impending history. Other effective evocations of well-known entities from *MAGIC's* cards include S. M. Stirling's tale of a doomed Hurlon minotaur, S. D. Perry's

chilling "Inheritance," and a story of Shanodin magic from Bruce Holland Rogers. By contrast, Mark Shepherd's "Gathering the Taradomnu" features an elven culture far too reminiscent of his own and Mercedes Lackey's contemporary *SERRated Edge* novels. Shepherd's story is smoothly plotted and told, but the naming conventions are all wrong for the Dominian setting.

Of the remaining stories, two in particular are especially distinctive. Hanovi Braddock skillfully transplants the mode and manner of a Grimm-like fairy tale to the *MAGIC* multiverse, and Cynthia Ward's "Wellspring" is a perceptively crafted bit of folklore that neatly explores both the uses and the consequences of sorcery.

Although some of the contributions—notably the Drake and Shepherd entries—strike less than sonorous notes, there are no true misfires in the anthology. If there's a serious weakness in *Tapestries*, it's the total absence of artwork. Quality visual imagery is one of *MAGIC's* strengths, and it's disappointing that even the usual cover illustration is pre-empted by plain typography. Fortunately, it's a flaw that's already been recognized, as word is already out that popular *MAGIC* artist Liz Danforth has been commissioned to provide illustrations for a forthcoming second anthology.

In the meantime, *Tapestries* has enough good storytelling within its pages to survive even without the pictures. And that's good news for fans of all things Dominian.

## THE KEY OF THE KEPLIAN

Andre Norton & Lyn McConchie

**Warner Aspect 0-446-60220-5 \$5.50**

From the back-cover copy, this new tale of the Witch World gives every indication of borrowing its plot straight from Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar novels: "Running for their lives, psychic Eleeri and telepathic Tharna bond. And in a hidden canyon, they discover the awesome truth: The Keplians were created to serve Light, and to ride with humans." Rarely, however, has cover text been as misleading. Though the night-black Keplians are physical counterparts to Lackey's snow-white Companions, *The Key of the Keplian* is very much its own book.

From internal evidence, one can deduce that the writing here is primarily McConchie's—notably, the omniscient viewpoint sometimes wobbles and there's a distant, oddly un-polished quality to the prose one wouldn't expect from a veteran of Norton's skill. But the atmosphere and storyline follow the classic Norton mold, and if the narrative lacks glitter, it's nonetheless readable and even compelling.

We begin with Eleeri, a young woman raised in Native American surroundings who is about to be forced into an unwanted foster family. Eluding helicopters and bureaucrats alike, she escapes through a portal into the Witch World, where luck and fate combine to cross her path with

that of a Keplian mare and her foal. In rescuing Tharna and Hylan from deadly foes, she acquires companions and propels herself into a new conflict. The resulting blend of mysticism from the Keplians' past and danger from more immediate enemies unfolds with quiet urgency.

In a way, *The Key of the Keplian* is a period piece, a throwback to the fantasy novels of a prior generation. Like many of Norton's earlier works, this is a coming-of-age tale rather than a wide-angle epic, focused on a protagonist drawn as large as life but no larger. And there's an aura of mist and legend around the Witch World, a sense of things unseen, that contrasts sharply with more modern sagas packed full of exacting detail.

That makes Norton's and McConchie's novel a refreshing, low-key pleasure and a welcome surprise. Marketing considerations notwithstanding, whoever disguised this book as a Mercedes Lackey clone did it a singular disservice.

#### THE BAKER'S BOY

J. V. Jones

**Warner Aspect 0-446-67097-9 \$12.99**

It's hard to know how to react when authors ply reviewers with food, like the shrink-wrapped slice of bread that arrived in the mail with *The Baker's Boy*. When a fellow recipient reported having eaten her slice, another critic promptly remarked, "Thus J. V. Jones's murderous campaign against reviewers claims another victim." At last report, however, all three of us were alive and well, and in any event such a campaign ought not to be necessary. Jones's first novel in a planned trilogy is easily as quirky and intriguing as her promotional material.

For one thing, although Jones has several plots running at once, only about half of them actually converge by volume's end. Among these threads are: title character Jacks ongoing attempt to escape the designs of Baralis, master poisoner and would-be ruler of the Four Kingdoms; young noblewoman Melliandra's flight from an unwanted marriage to Kylock, heir to a throne and secretly Baralis son; wandering knight Tawl's search for the key to an obscure, ill-remembered prophecy; and the wily archbishop of Rorn's quiet bid to expand his own influence at the expense of knights, heirs, and nobility alike.

Jones's narrative leaps from subplot to subplot with brisk efficiency, sometimes to the point of seeming choppy. But it gradually becomes clear that there's a pattern developing, although it's far from clear just what the pattern may be. Part of it is political—Baralis' grand plans for the Four Kingdoms are at odds with what the archbishop of distant Rorn hopes to accomplish, and his ruthless tactics are beginning to rebound against him. Another part is mystical—Jack and Kylock, born at the same instant, have intertwined fates, but only the prophecy's long-dead

author and the strange seers of Larn seem to know just what that connection may hold. But the overall design is elusive, and we're left to suspect that a whole layer of revelations has yet to be unveiled.

What helps make Jones's narrative distinctive is that, despite its epic sweep and grand design, the style is direct and approachable. Where others write about confrontations between shadowy, abstract powers of light and dark, Jones is chronicling encounters between very human adversaries. And she retains a sense of slightly earthy humor that also helps keep the tale from getting too high-flown.

The novel's other great innovation is both understated and striking. As noted earlier, there's an ancient prophecy whose meaning cuts to the heart of Jones's tale—but unlike most verses in fantasy, which are miraculously remembered verbatim for hundreds or thousands of years, this one has suffered the ravages of real-world history. Very few people, according to the old sage Bevlin, remember the prophecy's original text, and indeed, the version the archbishop knows is clearly several translations removed from authenticity. This is a clever, perceptive touch that shows Jones to be far subtler and more devious than the novel's unaffected style might otherwise suggest.

*The Baker's Boy* has most of the qualities of a highly successful popular fantasy epic—it's a fat volume with a substantial cast and a vivid, colorful landscape. But between its sense of sly wit and its focus on character rather than concept, it's a remarkably readable epic that doesn't need twenty-page appendixes and glossaries to enable readers to keep up with the story.

### Recurring Roles

There are not one but two new Tom Deitz novels on the shelf this month, both well worth seeking out. *Ghostcountry's Wrath* (AvoNova, \$5.50) is the paperback, which continues the story of Calvin McIntosh, Cherokee shaman-in-training, begun in *Stoneskin's Revenge*. As usual, the Indian lore is insightful and the magical pyrotechnics plentiful, and it now appears that there are connections between these novels and the recent *Above the Lower Sky* after all. The hardcover, meanwhile, is *Dreamseeker's Road* (AvoNova/Morrow, \$20.00), which finds David Sullivan and his friends coping with college life in Atlanta and yet another encounter with agents of the Sidhe. The walls between David's world and Faerie are unraveling, it seems, but a tragedy in David's past may blind him to the key to restoring their strength.

Across the literary fence in the realm of space opera, Debra Doyle and James Macdonald present *The Gathering Flame* (Tor, \$5.99), a prequel to their breakneck Mageworlds trilogy. This is the story of Jos Metadi and Perada Rosselin, parents to the stars of the prior books, and like those

novels, this one is livelier than a houseful of ferrets in full cry. It's also full of subtle details that shift some of the context in the other volumes, and readers who return to the original trilogy after polishing off this new volume should find much to think about.

There's also a new entry in David Weber's series about space warrior Honor Harrington. *Flag in Exile* (Baen, \$5.99) finds Honor taking up life on the world of Grayson, scene of a bitter conflict earlier in the series. Exiled by political necessity from her own navy, she is soon co-opted into Grayson's, and the new adventure blends Weber's crisply and carefully developed brand of interstellar warfare with a chilling assassination scheme fueled by the embers of religious hatred. These novels remain some of the best military SF currently available.

Heris Serrano is a spiritual cousin to Honor Harrington, if not an out-and-out colleague—one occasionally wonders about prospects for a collaboration in which the two heroines meet. Meanwhile, however, Elizabeth Moon's *Winning Colors* (Baen \$5.99) brings Heris, the crew of the luxury yacht *Sweet Delight*, and an assortment of adventurous space nobility back for a third outing. This volume finds Serrano forced willy-nilly into an impossible tactical situation, while her colleagues chase down the roots of a complicated smuggling plot.

Turning back toward fantasy, *Elvenblood* (Tor, \$22.95) marks the much-anticipated return of Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey to the realms of *The Elvenbane*, where dragons, elves, and humans co-exist uneasily amid endless intrigues and counter-intrigues. While this volume is as briskly paced and magically charged as the first, it's very oddly structured for a fantasy adventure. Very nearly a true ensemble piece, it's long on plot but short on deeply realized conflict—yet somehow still reads well despite resolutions that seem too easy on close examination.

The final volume in this month's roundup is *House of secrets* (White Wolf, \$5.99), into which James A. Moore and Kevin Andrew Murphy weave a truly astounding number of references to cards from the former JYHAD\* card game, now renamed VAMPIRE: THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE\*. But despite all the card-trickery (some of it literal, as minor characters include magicians Harry Houdini and Dr. John Dee), the book doesn't read like a game translated to prose. Rather, it's a story so Byzantine and convoluted that not even most of the characters really know what's going on till very late in the action, and thus a completely accurate representation of Kindred politics. Moore and Murphy have clearly had fun putting this volume together (look for the scene in which Dr. Dee turns out to be a science-fiction fan), and devotees of the World of Darkness will definitely want to check it out. Ω



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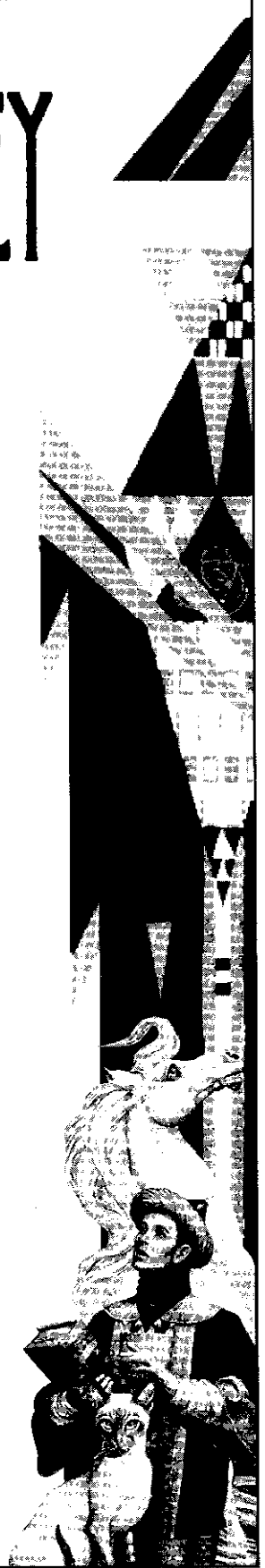
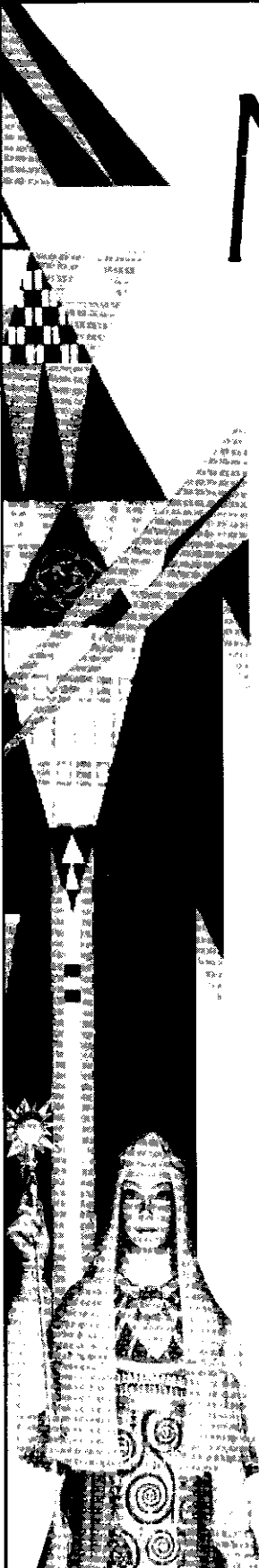
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# Truth, rumor & spin in the game industry

# RUMBLINGS

You can send us news, press releases, announcements, and gossip using the Internet at [TSR.mags@genie.geis.com](mailto:TSR.mags@genie.geis.com). We welcome your comments at Rumbblings, *DRAGON Magazine*, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI, 53147, U.S.A.

After a failed attempt to poison the magazine staff with turpentine-laced muffins, **DRAGON**® editor, **Wolfgang Baur**, has decided to leave the ranks of TSR in hopes of becoming the sixth member of Oasis. In only four short years, Wolf went from assistant lackey of **DUNGEON**® **Adventures** to editor of **DRAGON Magazine**, inciting confidence in aspiring lackeys around the globe. When he wasn't marking misplaced modifiers and dangling participles, Wolf completed extensive work on the **PLANESCAPE**™ and **AMAZING ENGINE**® games. We will miss him greatly, but we must caution future employers to be wary of Wolf's baked goods.

One of TSR's creative directors, **Tim Brown**, has left the company to become Vice President of Product Development at **Comico Gaming Inc.** Tim started out as an editor and designer, creating much of the **DARK SUN**® world. At Tim's farewell party he sang the National Anthem at a Beloit Snappers baseball game and drove a lawn mower around the bases (unfortunately, his time didn't qualify him to win the mower). At Comico, his first projects are the **Chrysalis: Borne of the Supernature**® card, computer, and role-playing games. Veteran editor and designer **David Wise** replaces Tim as creative director of the games department. Good Luck Tim!

TSR's new **DRAGON DICE**™ game premiered at the ORIGINS convention in July and met with outstanding praise. This month, the computer game company Interplay will release an online version of the **DRAGON DICE** game. The multi-player game is designed by Matt Norton, Rob Huebner, and Yuki Furumi.

Also coming from the folks at Interplay is a CD-ROM game called **Descent into Undermountain**, based on the popular **FORGOTTEN REALMS**® **Undermountain Boxed Set**. The CRPG uses the **Descent Engine** from Interplay's game **Descent**. The game is designed by Michael

McConnohie, Robert Hanz, and Larry Lesser. TSR's **Jim Ward** says "*Descent into Undermountain* carries players into a new graphic experience of sight and sound." Look for it this winter.

At Origins in July, d8 inc. launched their new magazine, simply called **d8**, with a wild night of drinking and dancing at the Asylum nightclub in Philadelphia. Tagging itself as the magazine of role-playing and culture, the premiere issue contains poetry, a fashion spread, and interviews with Elric author **Michael Moorcock** and artist **Dave McKean** (known for his work on **Arkham Asylum**, **The Sandman**, **Cages**, and many other comics). The magazine is produced quarterly.

**FPG** released a new collectible card game called **GUARDIANS**®, where players assume the roles of powerful mystics who control armies that conquer lands and fight battles. The game was playtested for more than 16 months and introduces an original gaming system of fast-paced action combined with the strategy of chess. The 270-card set boasts new art from **Brom**, **Don Maitz**, and **James Warhola**, among others.

In addition to releasing **GUARDIANS**, **FPG** unveils their new **EVERWAY**® **Companion Collector Cards** for **WoTC's EVERWAY** RPG this month. The cards enhance the game's existing Vision Cards, and include art by **Don Maitz**, **Rowena**, **David Cherry**, and **Bernie Wrightson**. In addition, **Wizards of the Coast** will publish **Spherewalker Source Cards** for the **EVERWAY** game. With these cards, players can discover the secrets behind the unusual people and monsters that spherewalkers encounter in their travels. The SO-card set includes artwork by **Rob Alexander**, **John Bolton**, and **Ian Miller**.

Get out your straightjackets, because **Chaosium** is developing a collectible card game based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft. The **MYTHOS**® game will consist of 60-card starter deck, each drawn from the 300 or so cards that are planned as part of the set. Players begin the game as sane human beings—until the minions of the Mythos drain their sanity and threaten to destroy humankind. The first few booster

packs will introduce Lovecraftian elements that allow players to do things like tell an Innsmouth tale, or prevent Cthulhu from walking the earth again! The game will be out in March.

For history and war buffs comes **THE LAST CRUSADE**® game, from **Pinnacle**. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of WWII, **THE LAST CRUSADE** is a collectible card wargame based on the European campaign that ended the war. The cards feature infantry, armor, and air units from German and American forces. All cards feature authentic, rare, and some never-before-seen photographs that Pinnacle obtained from extensive work in the National Archives. Look for it in October.

Also on the way this month is a collectible card game from **Marvel Comics** and Fler Entertainment Group called **OVER POWER**®. The game features favorite comic book heroes and villains.

Guess what? There's another new card game out called **HERESY: KINGDOM COME**®, from **Last Unicorn Games**. The game was created by **Christian Moore**, **Owen Seyler**, and **Matt Sturn**, the team behind the roleplaying game **ARIA**® (reviewed in issue #214). **HERESY** centers around prophets and dreamwalkers, and players compete for spiritual and global domination in a dark future. **Rick Berry**, who has done covers for William Gibson novels, will oversee the design and production of the 370 Gameday-sized cards.

Does Mars need women? Anders International, an independent film company based in Virginia, sure thinks so, as the company is developing a fantasy-adventure based on the **GDW RPG SPACE 1889**®. This future-retro space flick combines the technology of Mars with a Victorian Earth where capitalistic Earthlings colonize the red planet, adding to the political turmoil that already exists there. But on an archeological dig a team of humans and martians uncover an amazing artifact that will change Mars forever. Pre-production has begun on the film, but no release date is set.

*Continued on page 78*



# CHANGELING

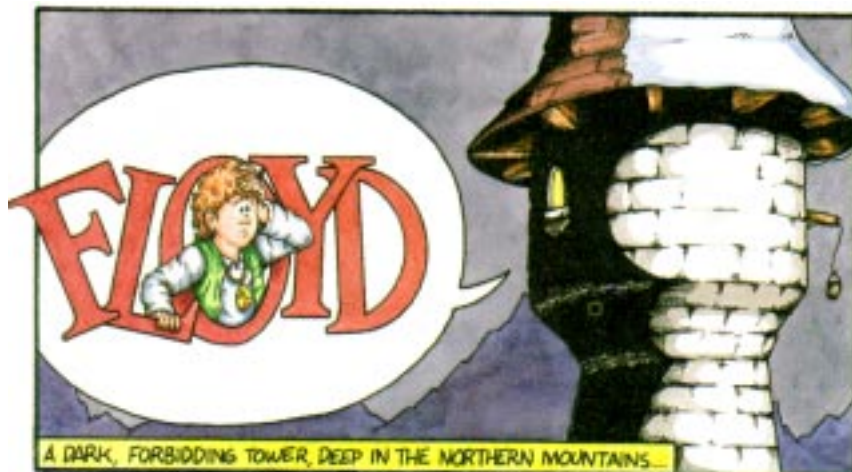
The Dreaming



No shadow without light







A DARK, FORBIDDING TOWER, DEEP IN THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINS...



YES, MASTER MELZAK?

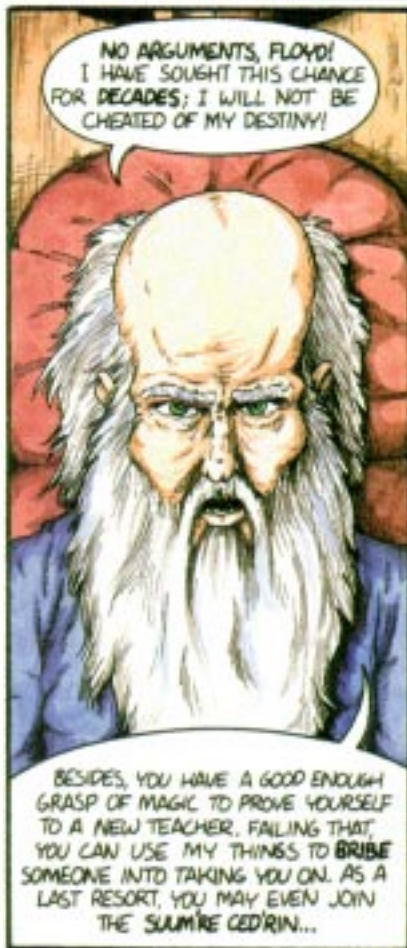
FLOYD, MY STUDENT, TONIGHT, I SHALL BE LEAVING YOU...



...FOR AN OPPORTUNITY SUCH AS FEW MEN DREAM OF PRESENTS ITSELF TO ME THIS EVE, AND I AM COMPELLED TO PARTAKE OF IT. I SHALL EITHER GO TO MY FINAL REST OR ENTER INTO POWER THAT GODS WOULD TREMBLE BEFORE... IN EITHER CASE, I SHALL NOT BE RETURNING...

THE TOWER AND ITS CONTENTS ARE YOURS, OF COURSE

BUT, MASTER! HOW CAN I JUST--



NO ARGUMENTS, FLOYD! I HAVE SOUGHT THIS CHANCE FOR DECADES; I WILL NOT BE CHEATED OF MY DESTINY!

BESIDES, YOU HAVE A GOOD ENOUGH GRASP OF MAGIC TO PROVE YOURSELF TO A NEW TEACHER. FAILING THAT, YOU CAN USE MY THINGS TO BRIBE SOMEONE INTO TAKING YOU ON. AS A LAST RESORT, YOU MAY EVEN JOIN THE SUMMRE CED'RIN...



WHAT?! YOU MEAN I HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN OFF OF THIS MOUNTAIN, FIND ANOTHER WIZARD.



AND, IN PARTING, I HAVE A GIFT I WAS SAVING FOR WHEN YOUR STUDIES WERE COMPLETE.

GREAT! MY WIZARD BECAME A GOD, AND ALL I GOT WAS THIS LOUSY AMULET!

















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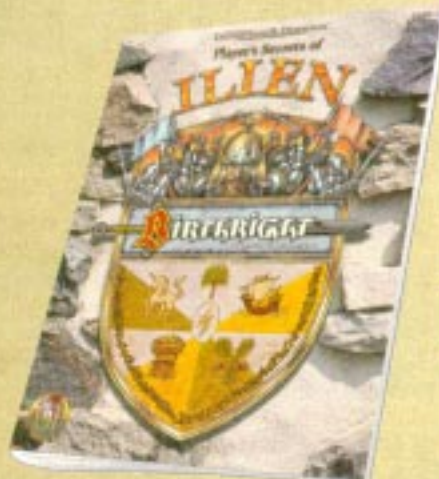




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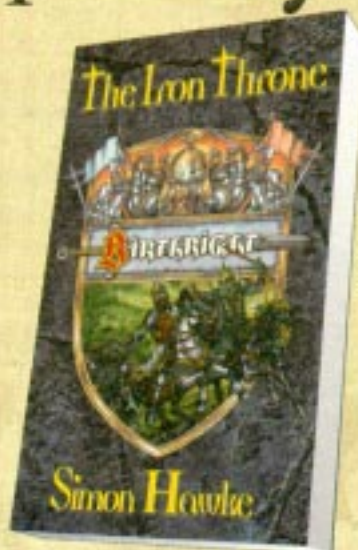
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Wizards of the Coast  
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I am writing in response to Steve Shawler’s letter in issue #216. First, I at least partially agree with Steve’s viewpoint. TSR has been producing a large number of “storytelling” adventures, which are quite different from earlier “classic” adventures (such as *White Plume Mountain* and *Against the Giants*). But I believe Mr. Shawler is missing the whole point here. In the years since the classic adventures were made, role-playing has grown and changed to such a degree that simple plot-based or unfocussed adventures just won’t do for players anymore. I agree that an adventure should not dictate what actions the players should take. However, adventures don’t have to be designed that way. One of the most valuable DM tricks is getting players to do what he wants (as far as the story is concerned) while letting them believe that it is their chosen path. Thus the story is important to the whole. And if you should find yourself unable to lead players into such adventures, then change the adventure to reflect your style of play. If this is too difficult, then I suggest you take up a simpler hobby, such as checkers, and leave role-playing to the pros.

Michael A. Fiorentino  
Summerfield, FL

Regarding Leyshon Campbell’s letter in issue #219, I would like to say this: *haste*’s aging, as I interpret it, is due to bodily stress, not the literal passage of a year’s time.

While metabolism may increase, the only effect on the body would be a case of mild shock, perhaps exhaustion—in addition to a doubling of the time spent under the effects of the spell. There are many drugs and diets that alter metabolism, and they generally have few drastic side effects. Fatigue is almost indivisible from such tampering, however. Thus, in four rounds of *hasted* combat, the recipient would actually age only eight rounds, not an

entire year. The addition of a year of age reflects the energies and system wear of the magic involved (mostly centered on the nervous system), and would be applied when using “Table 12: Aging Effects” from the *Player’s Handbook*. This is my interpretation based on the assumption that *haste* doesn’t speed up time, but rather augments a creature’s physical abilities and, perhaps, its perception of time.

Second, in the same issue, I would both agree with Christopher David’s letter and respond to that of David Arenson.

Rangers, as a class, are perfectly fine. First of all, I don’t think that they were

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intended to be used in large parties (one whose collective abilities might make such a character obsolete). The ranger is a largely solitary character, whose abilities are geared toward wilderness survival. Their exclusive two-handed fighting style necessarily takes more practice and experience to perfect, hence a higher experience point progression. They also gain Tracking proficiency automatically—which increases automatically with level. Also, if your party has spent any time at all in the wilds and has not encountered an animal—threatening or not—something is wrong. Even if the beast was hostile, a ranger would not seek to do it harm, but would attempt to soothe it if at all possible.

Overall, the ranger class has no real flaws. No, it is not the most powerful class—nor is it designed to be. It is, however, arguably the most diverse, and can be rewarding if played well.

Finally, as a male, I would like to say that I do not feel threatened by female players, or GMs, for that matter. In fact, I wish I had the opportunity to play with more female gamers. I encourage both those established players and those struggling with troublesome situations. One word of advice for Denyse Zane: Logic. If you have reasons for your rulings, explain them! Explaining how you came to a decision can go a long way when faced with arguments. Sometimes players need a firm hand, but don't get defensive about your decisions; stick with them when you feel you are right. Players who argue and get their way will be that much more prone to dissention the next time they get a bit of bad luck. At any rate, good luck.

Jason Johnson  
New Hope, MN

How much does your character really weigh? The weight of a healthy human is the sum of bones, organs, muscle, and fat. For a 72" human in good health, the bones and organs weigh close to 100 lbs. with only minor variation. Since the body is three-dimensional, the bones-and-organs weight of a miniature human should vary with the cube of the height. However, since muscle mass is even easier to approximate, since it varies directly with the force the muscles can exert. This can be approximated by maximum press (given on the Strength Table in the *Players Handbook*) divided by two.

We may now suppose that additional body weight is palpable fat. The lean body weight of a character is given by the following formula:  $\text{weight (in lbs.)} = 1.35 \times \text{height (in inches)} + \text{maximum press}/2$ .

You'll find that this works quite well for real-life teens and adults, whether this is a 240 lbs. steroid monster with Strength 18/50 or a gangly 125 lbs. teenaged champion runner. Contrary to myth, a man needs no palpable body fat, while most doctors seem to think that about 10 lbs. is best for a woman.

Ed Friedlander, M.D.  
Kansas City, KS

I have been a GM of various campaigns for about three or four years, and now I'm a player. A slight problem that I've run into (and that even I cause for the current GM) is cheapness. Any weapons, armor, or equipment store our adventuring party goes into, our characters end up robbing.

Bounty hunters and such have had no progress, nor has anything I (or the other GM) could think of.

No one plays "good" characters (they're boring), and no one has any problem with a few extra XP for killing a shopkeep and his help or the act of cutting down a few town guardsmen. Even "No Weapons in City" laws are countered by a simple *invisibility* spell.

I'm asking any GMs with any thoughts or ideas on helping me: Please help!

Hussain Adulhaqq

No address given

Very few things have caused me to write letters in my life, but the latest "Forum" with its header "Why do most men feel threatened by women players?" (issue #219, July 1995) was too much.

I have always gamed with women (or girls) in our groups and always found them accepted and welcomed. Maybe it's due to how I was raised. Or maybe the groups I gamed with over the years were more interested in friendships and sexism simply was not tolerated. I can't really say. I know this, though: since 1977 when I was invited to

play my first game of TUNNELS AND TROLLS\*, I have found that gamers judge people on how they play, not on their sex or the sex of their character. Granted, there haven't been many women involved in FRPGs, but those that did participate played just as hard as any man (or boy). Also, all the DMs that have run dungeons I have played in over those 18 years have always welcomed friends, girlfriends, wives, and children—the more the merrier!

I have only a single piece of advice for those (men and women) who find this sexism offensive: if you find that the group you are currently in is a Boyz Club, join another group or start your own. There are usually several in progress that are looking for players in your area (and not one posting will state "Girls need not apply"). If "Forum" is any indication, lots of DMs out there are looking for a few good players, not just men.

Steven A. Greenfield

5224 Bevans Drive

San Jose, CA 95129-1803

I am writing because I have noticed a disturbing lack of quality in TSR products in the past few years. It seems that the main goal now is to make money rather than quality gaming products. In particular: there have been three printings of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting with basically the same information, packages are getting more complex (and expen-

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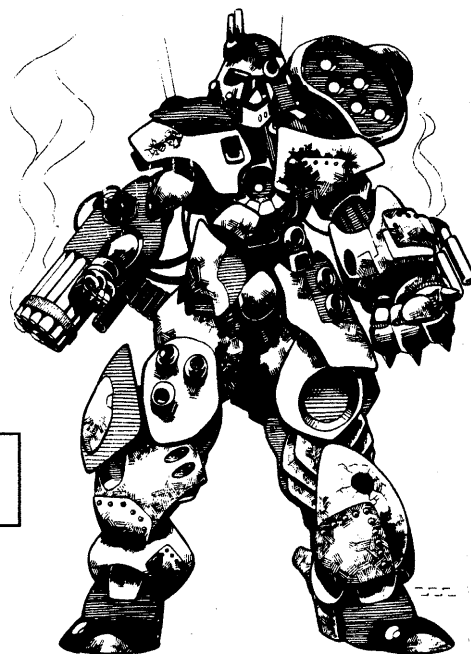
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sive) like *Forest Maker*— and are lacking material illustrations are overtaking material (as in the PLANESCAPE™ MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix), traditional campaign settings are being discontinued, adventure modules are being printed with a comically low level of quality (like *Crystal Spheres* for the SPELLJAMMER® setting), and prices are generally going up (\$30 for the PLANESCAPE™ box!).

Why did the *Manual of the Planes* hard-back "... slip into the abyss. . ." (issue#207, page 51)? Although the illustrations were fantastic, the PLANESCAPE setting contained very little information that would allow quick and easy play without reading the whole boxed set. It is hard to improvise without deviating from the highly detailed style presented. The PLANESCAPE campaign should have been a player's guide, and cheaper. A "general rules" edition could be released with Jeff Grubb or Carl Sargeant as author. That way it could be played without having to buy each accessory, but I am sure that ties into making money as well.

I believe the lack of sales in the discontinued settings could have been prevented. The WORLD OF GREYHAWK® campaign could have used Elminster-like support from DRAGON Magazine, and SPELLJAMMER could have used better adventure authors. In general, switching authors on projects would be healthy. It would give each setting a different

perspective; so that the FORGOTTEN REALMS would not be so Disneyfied, and so one could escape the Companions of the Lance's presence in DRAGONLANCE® Adventures—and you would not need to read so many novels to understand the setting. Different authors might also make the GREYHAWK campaign seem less desperate and unfriendly.

The RAVENLOFT® setting is too mindlessly horrific. I am sure most liberal-minded players would never want to go to the RAVENLOFT demiplane in the first place, and I know from experience most players regard entering the mists a curse by the DM—they quickly lose interest in playing. A creative DM, however, could run a campaign where the players never suspected they were in the vampire-filled realm of madness, where the chance to lose their hard-earned levels quadruples. Unfortunately, in realms such as RAVENLOFT, where the DM is encouraged to run his campaign in a certain style, creativity is not stressed—instead the DM must fill in the common sense that is lacking in the setting. What do the inhabitants think of where they were as compared to where they are now? What about their opinions of neighbors?

I know the playing styles and settings were initially meant to be used as tools, but now they seem to be limitations. This stifling "packaged imagination" is present in every new product. I believe it is intended

to set the tone rather than create conformity. But authors are forgetting this is an interactive game—they appear to be going on their own fantasy trips, never to return.

Children are not the only players. Adults do not need their imaginations programmed, and pretty pictures do not provide an active and creative experience. I do not like to see the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game become a fad, because I know if TSR forgets the point of role-playing games, dependable consumers will go to other gaming companies. What will happen to TSR when it's no longer cool?

If this was merely all my opinion, I would probably keep it to myself. I run a role-playing club at Atlanta College of Art here in Georgia, and the members here as well as the members in my hometown in Florida express the same opinions. Since they are consumers, and inspiration for potential buyers in their hometown, I believe they deserve to be heard. I have been playing and DMing AD&D games since I was 5 (!) years old, and I dread the day (if ever) my players suggest an alternate gaming system from another company to play on a full-time basis. Will the next club president abandon the AD&D game?

Koby Bryan  
Atlanta, GA

This letter is in response to issue #206. Although I am only a mildly experienced AD&D player, having spent more time on Palladium than Toril, I too have suffered as a referee from power gaming, as is the case of a player whose gnome charged kamikaze style at an orc, to have his late illusionist replaced by an ogre thief (which just had to be the same level as the rest of the PCs), I found the advice highly instructive.

I decided that the local order of holy knights might just be genealogically challenged homicidal maniacs, when it came to their dealings with humanoid law-breakers, and promptly set about strewing examples in the PCs' path.

The second method of curbing power play was to use the hints on a hoard being the start of an adventure, as described some issues back ("*Something Completely Different*" by Bruce Humphrey, issue #179). A much-lamented dragon failed to escape a lucky quarrel at extreme range, and his treasure included a large number of beautifully sculpted platinum figurines. These figurines were the heraldic "sweetheart brooches" of fallen knights, given away by the late heroes' fiancées, as per national custom. All it took was one grieving contessa who saw a brooch in a pawn shop—by explaining how it got there after being refused by four reputable jewelers and the fence is telling the city guard what he thinks they would like to hear. Alternatively, try selling the heirlooms back to grieving families. To get two or three role-playing sessions out of an occasional gory hack-and-slash session, which everyone enjoys from time to time, either as a weapons and

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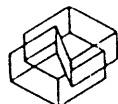
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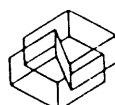
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tactics buff and a strategist or as a gore fanatic or by innovative spell use, which ever happens to be your preference.

The next point I'd like to raise is about dragons. Spell-using dragons make great hedge wizards or alchemists when *poly-morphed*, allowing them to collect and dispense fortunes in magic and gold. Using the idea of a powerful city magical guild, which has a great deal of political clout, as a leading tax contributor, major defense contractor and employer in service industries such as glassmaking, weaponsmithing, and jewelry manufacture. If the guild council has a dragon or two on the board, when a PC discovers this and "blows the whistle," the character could well find himself disbelieved: "Obviously the strain of magic was too much for the poor fellow's mind." The character might have to escape from the local asylum for the criminally insane, might be imprisoned for slander, and being broken out with only one way to clear the characters' names or dodging dragon-financed assassination attempts to silence the character, all depending on the dragons' alignment and inclination.

J. B. Pollard  
 No address given

All players (young and old) of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game in all its various forms have heard all the hoopla and excitement over intelligent, or at least sentient, weapons. As a matter of fact, most of us probably have them in one another of our characters. What about sentient armor? I have a few ideas myself and I'm sure others out there do too! Come on people, let's get cracking and get those ideas rolling in. Why have a sword that tells you where treasure is when you can have a set of chain mail that produces a dragon's roar three times per day? It would work great for those non-magic wielding warriors facing 100 hungry ogres. (Just don't let the command word slip in a tavern full of hungry sailors!) What about field plate with the ability to warn of a creature with hostile intentions in a 10' radius? The possibilities are endless, and the armor doesn't actually have to be sentient, just magical. It also eliminates the problems players experience when (no offense) nasty DMs don't want to give players the advantage of sentient weapons in a room full of 100 ogres.

Steve Bitz  
 San Jose, CA

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# The Dragon's Bestiary

## Lords of Chaos

Four Great Slaad-gods  
descend on the Multiverse

by Edward Bonny

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

The closest things that the slaadi have to deities are the self-styled Slaad Lords. These lords are neither deity nor demi-god but are, however, powerful beings in their own right, much like the Abyssal Lords and the Lords of the Nine.

As the mirror image to the rigid order of Mechanus, Limbo is a plane of unrestrained chaos. Here anarchy crushes law, randomness replaces predictability, freedom usurps enslavement to rules, and individuality triumphs over conformity. As natives of Limbo, the slaadi exemplify chaotic neutral behavior in all its forms. Inherently free, slaadi revel in unrestrained chaos. Real freedom does not exist, however, for the weaker red and blue slaadi, because they are constantly bullied and dominated by the stronger slaadi. True freedom exists solely for the ultimately powerful. This is more obvious with the

mightier green, gray, and death slaadi, who are better able to impose their will on the lesser slaadi precisely because of their enhanced abilities. When any slaad can more freely accomplish what it wishes and not what others wish of it, that slaad defines itself as an individual to a greater degree. But no slaad could hope to become a true individual if it is part of a rank.

To escape this structure, some death slaadi drive themselves to explore an aspect of chaos that they hope will grant them a unique identity and endow them with incredible abilities. During this time of investigation (a little understood and extremely perilous process), a death slaad may leave the ranks of slaad conformity to become a Slaad Lord—a unique being infused with power and chaotic purpose. To date, only four death slaadi have achieved this status. By ascending to their

new level, Slaad Lords become the embodiment of their own particular brand of chaos, and no two Slaad Lords share a similar expression of chaos.

The lifespan of the slaadi varies. Inexplicably and quite mysteriously, when a slaad has reached a certain age, it instinctively travels deep into Limbo. A lucky few advance in status to a higher form of slaad, but the majority never return and presumably dissolve into their base essences to merge with the primal forces of the plane. Not so for the Slaad Lords, whose unique status also grants them immortality. They need never worry about being reduced to their base essence unless slain in combat. For this reason, Slaad Lords never fight to the death. In fact, it is believed that no Slaad Lord has been slain in mortal combat—yet. Whether or not a slain Slaad Lord's essence can reform into its original death slaad self, or even return to any form at all, is debatable. Lesser and greater slaadi slain in combat are forever destroyed, but this may not be the case for the Slaad Lords. Perhaps nothing is impossible for the Lords of Chaos on the plane of ultimate possibility.

### SSENDAM, LORD OF INSANITY

Ssendam, Slaad Lord of Insanity, is the oldest and most powerful Slaad Lord. She floats freely in the roiling chaos-stuff of Limbo, a huge golden amoeba devouring anything that comes too close. Her glistening gelatinous shape supports four fully-developed pseudopods. Ssendam has never been known to leave Limbo, and it is said that she is forever contacting the minds of mortals on other planes to render them mad. She seems to have little concern for the slaadi race, or for anything else, for that matter. Ssendam has two other forms, but she rarely appears in them. She assumes the form of a huge golden slaad when near the Spawning Stone. Her other form is of a golden-skinned female elf warrior. In game terms, Ssendam has Strength of 23, Dexterity of 16, Constitution 18, Intelligence and Wisdom of 0 (unratable), and a Charisma of 18.

**Combat:** An incredibly vicious combatant, Ssendam is nearly unbeatable. Those who don't flee have assuredly doomed themselves. In her amoeba shape, Ssendam fights with her four pseudopods and may target up to four opponents each round. Any opponent hit by three pseudopods in a single round is held fast and drawn inside Ssendam. A victim "eaten" this way suffers 3d12 hp corrosive damage per round from Ssendam's digestive acids. Eaten characters cannot take any physical action while inside Ssendam. Any ingested character who is reduced to 0 hp is completely dissolved, making resurrection impossible. When fighting in her slaad form, Ssendam's powerful claws and bite bring down her opponents. In either form, a victim hit by more than one pseudopod or both claws (depending on Ssendam's current form)



must make a successful saving throw vs. spells or suffer the effects of a *mindshatter* spell (from the *Tome of Magic*).

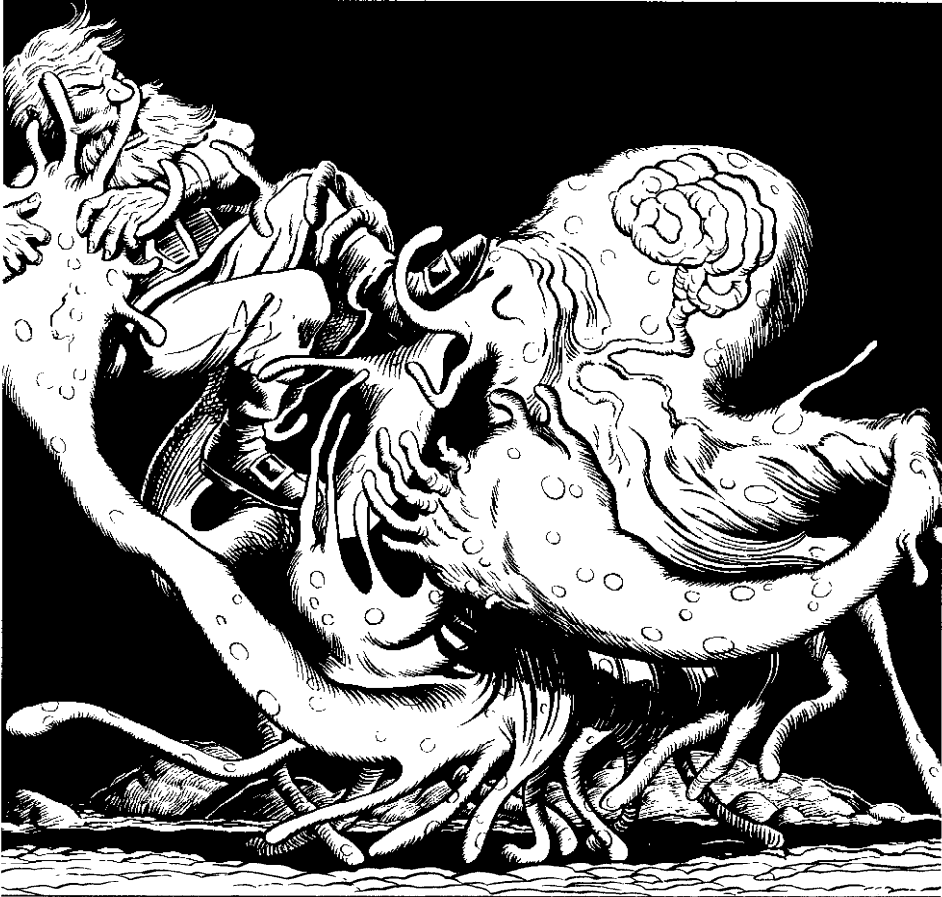
Ssendam has the following abilities, usable at will: *cloudkill*, *continual light*, *darkness 15' radius*, *detect magic* and *invisibility*, *energy drain* (3/day), *ESP*, *flamestrike* (double strength), *know alignment*, *locate object and person*, *any power word* (3/day), *shapechange* to amoeba or elf form, *symbol of insanity* (3/day), *teleport without error*, *unholy word*, and *wind-walk*. The Lord of Insanity can *gate* in 1 death slaad per turn with a 100% chance of success. Ssendam is immune to psionics and enchantment/charm spells that affect the mind.

**Followers & Resources:** Ssendam has no followers, at least none that she cares for. All slaadi and other inhabitants of Limbo who know of her existence avoid Ssendam, lest they become her next meal. Visitors to Limbo are cautioned to avoid any large amorphous yellow goo. It is rumored that Ssendam grows strong by feeding on the psychic trauma of insane beings, especially those in whom she caused madness.

**Plots & Goals:** When Ssendam was a green slaad, she saw insanity as the perfect expression of chaos. Obsessed with madness, she imbued herself with its essence to become a Slaad Lord. In her own way, she contributes to chaos by introducing insanity to stable environments. After all, crazies rarely do anything lawful. By introducing madness into an army, a family, or a village, she guarantees that chaos inevitably follows. Ssendam does not advance any goal except to render the multiverse insane, one being at a time. For the most part, she remains an enigma, and her methods for reaching out across the planes to touch the minds of others from Limbo is unknown.

**"A BIG YELLOW SLAAD . . . MY, WHAT WON'T THEY THINK OF NEXT!"**

**—ONE VROCK'S FAMOUS LAST WORDS, NOW AN IN-JOKE AMONG SLAADI**



	Ssendam	Ygorl	Chourst	Rennbui
<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Limbo	Limbo	Limbo	Limbo
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Unique	Unique	Unique	Unique
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Solitary	Planar Ruler	Solitary	Solitary
<b>ACTIVITY CYCLE:</b>	Any	Any	Any	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	Omnivorous	Omnivorous	Omnivorous	Omnivorous
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Non (0)	Supergenius (22)	Genius (19)	Supergenius (20)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	Nil	V(x4)	Nil	Y,Z
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Chaotic Neutral	Chaotic Neutral	Chaotic Neutral	Chaotic Neutral
<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	-10	-9	-9	-7
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	18	12	12	12
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	41,251 hp	35,220 hp	28, 188 hp	26,174 hp
<b>THACO:</b>	1	1	3	3
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS:</b>	3 or 4	3 or by weapon	3	3
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	3d10+11/3d10+11/2d20	3d8+9/3d8+9/2d12 or 2d12+11(x4)	3d8+8/3d8+8/2d12 or 8d6 + 9 with scythe	3d6 + 7/3d6 + 7/2d10
<b>SPECIAL ATTACK:</b>	Spells	Spells	Spells, Instability	Spells, Transmutation
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSE:</b>	Immunities, +4 or better weapon to hit	Immunities, +3 or better weapon to hit	Immunities, +3 or better weapon to hit	Immunities, +2 or better weapon to hit
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	90%	95%	80%	85%
<b>SIZE:</b>	H (20' tall)	H (15' tall)	H (22' tall)	L (12' tall)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Fearless (20)	Fearless (20)	Fearless (19)	Fearless (19)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	47,000	37,000	28,000	25,000

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A final odd characteristic of Ssendam is her apparent tie to the Spawning Stone. At times she is seen floating around the Stone in her slaad form. Based only on an old legend, sages suspect that Ssendam is the self-appointed guardian of the Spawning Stone. The legend tells of a large pack of vrook who gathered at the Spawning Stone to eradicate the death slaad once and for all. The numerous vrook had overpowered and killed four of the death slaadi when a massive, golden slaad suddenly appeared and dove into the crowd of vrook. Ssendam bit the head off one vrook, ripped another in half, squashed a third under her foot—all in the first flurry of combat. When the golden slaad was finished, she allowed the sole surviving vrook to limp back to the Abyss. Much time passed before the tanar'ri returned to Limbo.

#### YGORL, LORD OF ENTROPY

Technically considered the planar ruler of Limbo, the reclusive Ygorl resides in an ever-changing keep that drifts haphazardly in Limbo's chaotic currents. The other Slaad Lords have never challenged his authority, probably because they are too chaotic to concern themselves with ruling anything, or possibly because Ygorl makes few demands on his domain.

Ygorl resembles a huge, skeletal, winged slaad of blackened, charred bones. He can shapechange into the form of a dark-skinned human male warrior adorned in adamantine armor, but he takes this shape only when outside Limbo. Ygorl's mount is the great wyrm Shkiv, an ancient chaotic neutral brass dragon of maximum abilities. Unlike most brass dragons, Shkiv is coldly neutral and uncaring except in matters concerning his lord. Ygorl was the second Slaad Lord to emerge after Ssendam, and he appears to be the second most powerful. Ygorl has a Strength of 21, Dexterity 18, Constitution 17, Intelligence 22, Wisdom 19, and Charisma 12.

**Combat:** Ygorl has the following abilities usable at will: *advanced illusion*, *blink*, *darkness* 15' radius, *death fog* (3/day), *detect magic*, *detect invisibility*, *energy drain* (3/day), *ESP*, *fear*, *flamestrike* (double strength), *know alignment*, *continual light*, *phantasmal killer*, *power word kill* (3/day), *shapechange* into human form, *sleep*, *symbol of hopelessness* (3/day) and *unholy word*. Ygorl can *gate* in either one death slaad or two gray slaadi (35%/65% of either) once per turn. He wields an *adamantine scythe* +5 viciously in battle. The scythe has glowing runes on its handle that spell out "DEATH" in the ancient slaad tongue. Any being struck by the scythe must make a saving throw vs. death magic or be instantly slain or disintegrated (50% chance of either effect). Even with a successful saving throw, the scythe still delivers 8d6 hp slicing damage to the victim. If Ygorl wills it, the scythe disintegrates inanimate objects with a touch. Ygorl is immune to death magic and all

other harmful necromantic magic. Shkiv is always at his master's side and fights to the death for Ygorl, using his abilities as a great wyrm to full effect.

**Followers & Resources:** To Ygorl, all slaadi are living tools under his dominion, meant to bring chaos and entropy to the multiverse. Ygorl has no true followers, but most slaadi would rather obey Ygorl's orders than be swallowed whole for ignoring them. Ygorl rules in this manner as best as one can in a plane of absolute chaotic neutrality.

Ages ago when Ygorl became a Slaad Lord, he reasoned that even chaos needed a focus, a source from which to flow, and

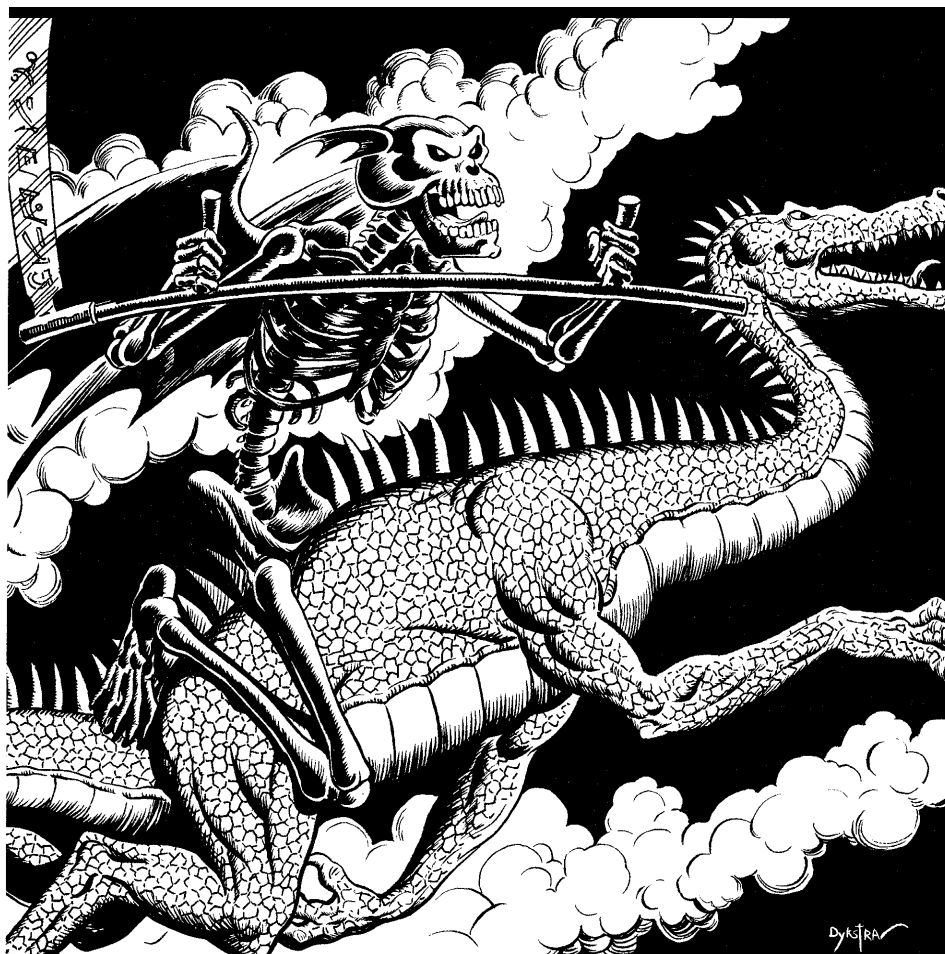
so he created the Spawning Stone. Derived from the purest essence of Limbo and given shape and stability with powerful enchantments, Ygorl designed the Spawning Stone to contain the essence of the slaad race, binding all slaadi to it. The existence of the Spawning Stone has provided a point of convergence for the slaadi, a gathering place for them to rally around and greatly increase their numbers.

Ygorl's fortress is one of the most unusual structures in the bizarre landscape of Limbo. The building's appearance changes constantly to suit the whim of its lord; one moment it appears as a rough hewn cavern, the next as a dese-

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'WHO'? I SAID YGORL . . . THAT'S WHO, YOU STUPID THAD! NOW WHERE DO I FIND HIM?"

—PARADIR, A ONCE GREAT BUT CLUELESS FIGHTER ON HIS FINAL ADVENTURE

CHOMP, CRUNCH, SLURP, CRUNCH



crated temple of broken marble. Ygorl's mental control over the fortress is absolute. The building literally shapes itself to his will. Any person attempting to flee the fortress soon discovers that all corridors eventually lead wherever Ygorl wants them to lead.

**Plots & Goals:** Death, decay, and disorganization are the elements of entropy that Ygorl most desires to force down the throat of the multiverse. He believes that this brand of chaos is best delivered to other realms by the truest agents of chaotic neutrality—the slaadi.

As the Lord of Entropy, Ygorl directs the death slaadi to organize the mass spawnings of the blues and reds in Limbo. These hordes of slaadi are then unleashed on the battlefields of the Blood Wars and the prime worlds to incubate the wounded with slaadi egg-pellets. Through this

uniquely entrepreneurial style, Ygorl oversees the ever-growing slaadi race and ensures the spread of chaos.

Of all the Slaad Lords, the secretive Ygorl desires most to discourage the widely held notion that the Lords are actually deities. All slaadi have been commanded by the Lord of Entropy to devour any cutter who inquires about “slaadi deities.” Ygorl believes that if knowledge of Slaad Lords becomes too widespread, planars and primes alike will think that they are just another caste of slaadi to toy with. Ygorl cannot be bothered with fending off the inevitable host of adventurers that would seek to best a unique slaad. Consequently, Ygorl seeks to keep the number of Slaad Lords very low; the multiverse is full of hotheads who have nothing better to do than try to prove something. As a result, Ygorl seeks out and con-

sumes death slaadi who seem close to evolving into a Slaad Lord. Through forced anonymity and low numbers, Ygorl strives to perpetuate the mystery of the Slaad Lords.

Ygorl ignores Ssendam (rather easily, actually), enjoys Chourst's company at times, and despises Rennbuu because he has not yet figured out how the young upstart gave him the laugh to become a Slaad Lord. Ygorl would have devoured Rennbuu as a death slaad rather than allow him to develop. However, Ygorl gives the colorful Rennbuu a wide berth because he fears his ability to alter slaadi. Ygorl has been grooming one death slaad, Sorel, as his lieutenant, despite his personal standing order to consume aspiring death slaadi. In the near future, Ygorl hopes to unleash Sorel, the newest Slaad Lord, as the Lord of Anarchy and Limbo's latest instrument of chaos. Sorel, a true anarchist, enjoys employing secret agents to spread anarchy via terrorism and acts of sabotage designed to break down lawful societies. She is quite popular with the leaders of the Revolutionary League, many of whom are often involved in her deadly schemes.

## “WHA+ IS +HA+ WHIS+LING N⊕I-B⊕⊕MPH”

-A NEWLY ARRIVED VISIT⊕R ⊕⊕ THE  
LIMB⊕ HALFLING ⊕OWN ⊕F BARNSTABLE  
S+ANDING A+ “GR⊕UND ZER⊕” DURING  
⊕NE ⊕F CH⊕URST+’S VISIT+.



### CH⊕URST, LORD ⊕F RAND⊕MNESS

Chourst is the incarnation of chaotic unpredictability, the erratic Lord of Randomness. At one moment Chourst is tearing some githzerai to pieces, the next moment he is stopping to smell a flower. Chourst remains in Limbo most of the time because he finds the primal soup very soothing. He enjoys occasional forays into other planes for a change of scenery and a new place to wreak havoc. Chourst is the third of the Slaad Lords and cares little of the affairs of other slaadi. He is too chaotic and independent to worry about anything other than his own whimsical passions. Chourst appears as a gangly, 20'-tall, chalk-white slaad. Chourst's other forms are unknown. The Lord of Randomness has a Strength of 20, Dexterity 18, Constitution 18, Intelligence 19, Wisdom 18, and Charisma 15.

**Combat:** Chourst is an odd combatant, because most fights don't hold his attention long enough for him to finish them. Instead, he forsakes the battle halfway through for something else that catches his eye. However, Chourst never allows himself to come to harm by ignoring a dangerous threat, and he disables or kills anything he perceives as harmful. Chourst has the following spell-like abilities, usable once per round at will: *advanced illusion*, *astral spell*, *chaos*, *cloudkill*, *confusion*, *darkness 15'*, *detect magic*, *ESP*, *fear*, *flamestrike*, *light*, *solid fog*, *any symbol* (3/day), and *windwalk*. Chourst's very presence dissolves chaos-shaped land in Limbo (affecting all land within a 30' radius of the Slaad Lord). Dissolved land reverts to its primal form. Consequently,



spells cast within 300 of Chourst always trigger a wild surge, even outside Limbo, to which Chourst is immune. A successful hit or bite by Chourst confers corporeal instability to the victim, who must make a saving throw vs. spells or suffer effects identical to the touch of a chaos beast. (See the *Planes of Chaos* monster booklet for details.) This affects all living creatures except modrons, who must save vs. spells or become Chaotic Neutral (creating a rogue modron). In Limbo, Chourst can *gate* in either one gray slaad (40% of the time) or two green slaadi (60% chance) once every turn with a 90% probability of success.

**Followers & Resources:** Chourst has neither followers nor resources. Knowledgeable members of the Xaositect faction admire the Slaad Lord for his truer understanding and apparent appreciation of chaotic randomness. Even the Xaositects, however, prefer to admire Chourst's perfection from afar.

**Plots & Goals:** Chourst has only one desire: to indulge himself indiscriminately. This behavior is more often destructive than anything else, because Chourst lacks the focus to create or build anything of significance. Ygorl approves of Chourst's senseless behavior because it contributes to chaos and entropy. Outside Limbo, a wildly zigzagging trail of haphazard destruction might just be the recent passing of the Lord of Randomness.

Chourst revels in his power to disrupt chaos-shaped terrain and frequently performs cannonball jumps through githzerai cities and other towns in Limbo just for entertainment. Affected land can be reassembled but not usually quick enough to avoid significant harm. When the githzerai speak of an unexpected and unpleasant event they often say "It was like a visit from Chourst."

Chourst's one and only visit to Mechanus caused incredible mayhem and disorder on that plane. Rogue modrons of all sorts popped up throughout the plane; weeding them out was painstakingly work for the pentadrone police. Chourst barely escaped the plane alive after Mechanus' most important ruler, Primus the One, personally appeared to deal with the interloping Slaad Lord. Chourst is still a dangerous and wanted outlaw in Mechanus.

#### RENNBUU, LORD OF COLORS

Rennbuu is the flamboyant and stylish Lord of Colors. He appears as a 12'-tall, gaunt slaad whose skin color glows and swirls in scintillating, radiant hues. Unlike normal slaadi, Rennbuu sports a long, frazzled mane of stark white hair. The newest of the Slaad Lords, Rennbuu is perhaps the most cruelly sadistic and maliciously capricious of them all. Rennbuu roams Limbo and the planes changing the colors of things and beings. Most experienced travelers in the multiverse report crossing paths

with at least one victim of Rennbuu's artful hand during their many travels, for the Lord of Colors is a very busy Slaad Lord. Rennbuu has a Strength of 19, Dexterity 19, Constitution 18, Intelligence 18, Wisdom 19, and Charisma 20.

**Combat:** Rennbuu prefers to fight tough battles with spells and magic items, but he will not hesitate to use both claws and a bite when closing in melee. Rennbuu has the following spell-like abilities, usable

once per round at will: *advanced illusion*, *color spray*, *darkness* 15' radius, *ESP*, *flamestrike* (3/day), *know alignment*, *light*, *planeshift*, *prismatic spray* (2/day), *prismatic wall* (2/day), *rainbow pattern*, *any symbol*, (3/day) and *windwalk*. The Lord of Colors can *gate* in 6-8 red slaadi (50% of the time) or 5-6 blue slaadi (50% chance once per turn with a 95% chance of success).

Rennbuu can magically transmute any creature's or object's natural color into

"AIN'T MUCH DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN THESE BLUE FRØGS  
FRØM GREEN ØR GRAY ØNES,  
EH?"

—A NAIVE FARASTU

"FRØGS IS FRØGS, I RECKØN.  
LET'S HAVE A+ THAT COLORFUL  
HØPPER THERE!"

—THE MUCH SMARTER SHATØR



another color of his choosing simply by touching it. Color changes can be either permanent or temporary, and they are dispelled only by a *wish*. Temporary effects wear off at a random time: sometimes seconds, sometimes in months or in years. The new color can be any hue and pattern that Rennbuu chooses, including solids, spots, stripes, etc. The pretentious and splashy Rennbuu also enjoys taunting his foes in battle by ridiculing combatants while flailing away with sayings like: "There, you look much better in (blood) red," "Your armor is cheap but it suits you," and "I really hate that color on you—try this." Additionally, Rennbuu is immune to all illusion/phantasm spells. On the plane of Limbo, Rennbuu wields an awesome power that makes all greater slaadi fearful: He can transform a slaad of one type (color) into another type.

**Followers & Resources:** Rennbuu maintains a sizable staff of red and blue slaadi in his pristine and impregnable gallery deep inside Limbo. This staff obeys their master's will mostly out of fear, but partially because they hope to be promoted to a green slaad or better by pleasing their lord. Rennbuu's gallery is filled with his past and present artwork. Entire rooms, even whole wings are devoted to his creations. These pieces are carefully guarded as Rennbuu is proud and possessive of his many accomplishments and likes to see his work preserved. Any art that Rennbuu finds especially pleasing is brought back to his gallery for display.

Most red and blue slaadi revere Rennbuu as the only being who can change their lot for the better because of his ability to transform slaadi. Green, gray, and death slaadi avoid the Lord of Colors lest they be turned into lesser slaadi. Rennbuu could simply not care less.

**Plots & Goals:** Rennbuu enjoys the mayhem that results when colors change. He takes a perverse pleasure in affecting a being's life, whether for better or worse. Out of pure mischief, Rennbuu often selects colors that he knows will cause the most harm (white drow, purple gnomes, plaid dwarves and so on). Rennbuu would color the whole multiverse his own way if given the chance. In one typical tale, a horrified gold dragon returned to her lair to find that her five hatchlings had taken on the colors of the chromatic dragons—black, blue, green, red, and white. The hatchlings were still gold dragons in every way except for their scales' color. Needless to say, the hatchlings all led very difficult lives.

Like many artists, Rennbuu is occasionally gripped by frantic creative moods. During these moods, the Lord of Colors devotes all his time and energy to one particular activity. For instance, in his "Nature Period," Rennbuu used a mountain and an entire forest of gigantic size to create a bizarre monument to Mother Nature. Rennbuu also appreciates style and fashion, and he sometimes spares a village or passerby who displays good taste from his

artistic touch. He is knowledgeable about many planar and prime art forms and can converse for hours with anyone who possesses expertise in any art.

## Adventure Hooks

Dungeon Masters should not introduce the Slaad Lords into a campaign as simply another monster to bash. Each Slaad Lord has its own unique form of chaos, an aspect that defines it as a powerful chaotic being. This chaotic element should always be obvious to characters dealing with a Slaad Lord. Only high-level adventurers should meet the Slaad Lords; others are likely to be destroyed. A few suggested adventure possibilities involving the slaadi:

1. A party member loses his sanity (from the winds of Pandemonium, a spell effect, or a madness check, for example).

Attempts to cure the poor soul all fail because Ssendam has touched the character's mind (though no one else knows this). Based on the ramblings of their mad comrade ("golden, pretty blob" and "where frogs dwell free," and so on), the party ventures to Limbo in an attempt to restore their friend's sanity. First they must learn where the Lord of Insanity is, then they must learn to bargain with her without being destroyed, or how to regain their friend's sanity by force (quite a trick). Will meeting with the golden amoebae free their friend or doom the entire party?

2. The party decides to investigate some recently acquired information about an enigmatic "Chaos Lord" who is behind a slaadi raid on the Prime. The trail leads to Limbo and a mysterious keep owned by that lord. What did the slaadi want on the Prime? Did they get it? Can they keep it?

3. A pink elf approaches the party and wants to hire them for an assassination. He was apparently the victim of a colorful slaad's tricks and wants revenge. The colorful slaad is supposedly somewhere near Ribcage, coloring the landscape and the folk. The party is promised a large sum of money for a successful job, but the pink elf is actually a death slaad colored pink and has no intention of paying the party. The slaad simply wants Rennbuu dead. If the party accepts but later gives up or fails, the pink death slaad becomes an enemy.

4. A githzerai diviner predicts that Chourst will soon visit a githzerai city. Since Chourst's visits are always extremely disruptive, the githzerai are hiring bands of outsiders, placing them strategically around the outside of the city in hopes of deterring or deflecting the Lord of Randomness. This may be possible or impossible or the Slaad Lord may not even show up (so much for divining in Limbo). If Chourst does show, the party may be permanently scarred; undoing some of the effects of the Lord of Randomness (corporeal instability, magical items made sentient, human legs transformed into slaad legs) and could require a separate mission.

5. A member of a lawful faction in Sigil wants to gain Primus's favor. She figures that if she can bring in Chourst's head on a pike, she might receive some political clout and favors from Mechanus. Chourst is still wanted in Mechanus for past crimes. The party is hired and dispatched on a hunt for Chourst. Chourst, of course, does not want to be found, and may try to turn the party against their patron; chaotic PCs may be won over by his arguments.

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## Rumblings

*Continued from page 54*

**MORTAL KOMBAT\*** goes live this fall with a 200-city tour of the first ever interactive high-tech show based on one of the most popular video games around. The show features gymnastics, stunts, special effects, and illusions, but it focuses on the sport and discipline of martial arts. And if you still haven't had enough, **MORTAL KOMBAT 3\*** for your Super NES, SEGA, Game Boy, and Game Gear Platforms debuts on Friday, October 13.

Fractal Dimensions, creators of the play-by-mail game, **A DUEL OF A DIFFERENT COLOR\***, have signed a licensing agreement with Scott J. Compton to publish his internet freeware RPG called **SORD, The System of Role Development\***, this winter. To follow are supplements for science fiction, fantasy, and herbalists. Scott will still support the Internet version and keep updating the information. Fractal Dimensions will also publish the Australian game **DARK FANTASY\*** sometime this fall.

Acclaim Comics will issue a special single-issue comic book called **Convocations—A MAGIC: The Gathering Gallery\*** this month. The book is a collection of paintings that spotlight the game's characters, creatures, artifacts, and spells while capturing the essence of Dominaria. **MAGIC** card artists **Anson Maddocks**, **Jeff Menges**, and **Byron Wackwitz** are featured in the comic along with fantasy painters **Charles Vess** and **Michael Kaluta**.

**Gold Rush Games** has announced that they will release a 3rd edition of the **BUSHIDO\*** RPG sometime in 1996. The new edition incorporates elements of the previous editions, but focuses on the samurai film genre. The core rule book will be an extensive overview of Japan during the 15th-16th centuries. Gold Rush Games promises to release sourcebooks, along with campaign and adventure books, to support the game.

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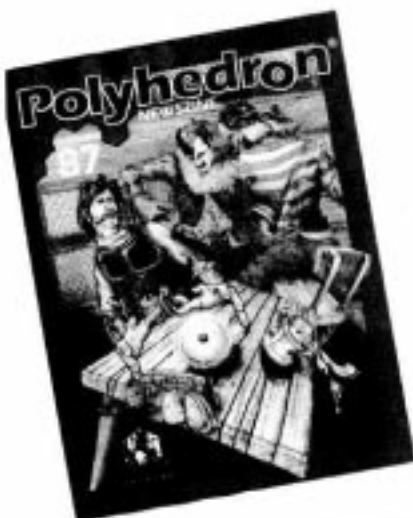


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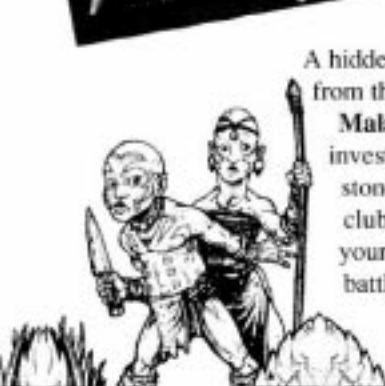
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# BAZAAR Of the BIZARRE

## Familiar Items

### Magic for Your Familiars

by James R. Collier

Artwork by Bob Klasnich

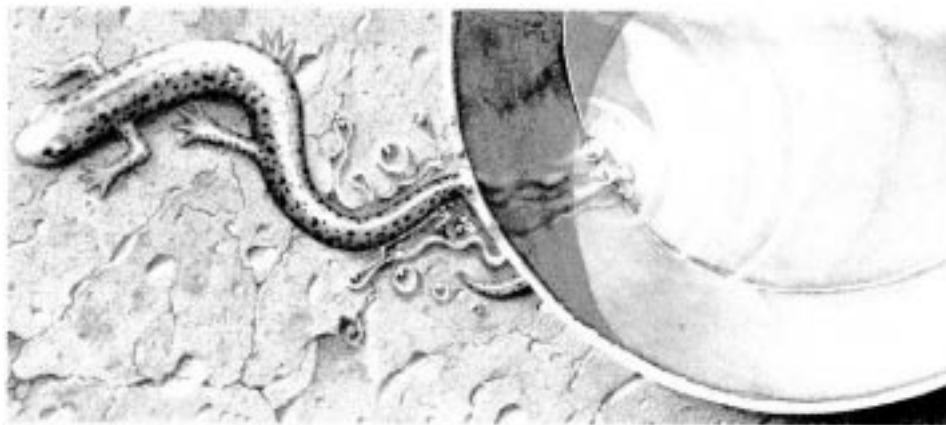
A familiar is one of a wizard's major assets, but he is also a major chink in any mage's armor. Away from the party on patrol or at home, the familiar is a small, vulnerable creature whose loss can cripple the mage at just the wrong time. Little wonder, therefore, that much research has gone into devising protective devices for familiars. This article presents a few of the more common ones. Unless noted, all items appear worn and common, just like nonmagical items.

**Amulets of Mutual Location:** Actually two items, these necklaces are worn around the neck of the mage and the familiar. They convey to each the ability to locate the other, so long as they are both on the same plane. The amulets also allow the wearers to deduce the quickest and shortest path between them, in the manner of an



*arrow of direction.* If one necklace is destroyed, the other becomes an amulet of *inescapable location*; otherwise, the amulets

do not affect the chance of detection.  
XP Value: 2,500



**Basin of Disguises:** This item can be used on any bird, although its full effects are only evident on familiars. When this basin is filled with pure water, and a bird bathes in it, the bird can be disguised to look like any other ordinary bird. Thus, a falcon can look like a wren, or a crow like an eagle. A familiar can be disguised as any kind of flying creature. The effects of a *basin of disguises* should be treated as identical to an *improved phantasmal force* spell, cast by an 8th-level mage.

XP Value: 5,000

**Boots of Manipulation:** These items look like sets of little bags, and they radiate alteration magic. When worn by a small mammal, they have no immediate effect. However, when a command word is spoken, the animal's paws change, acquiring opposable digits like a monkey. The animal can grasp and carry objects, use simple

tools, and in general perform any task a monkey could perform, subject to its intelligence. If the animal is a familiar, its master can trigger the items from a distance, through their mental link.

XP Value: 4,500

**Bowl of Dampness:** An item specially made for small amphibians, a *bowl of dampness* is a covered bowl 9" in diameter. When a cupful of water is poured into the bowl, the bowl keeps the contents damp, even in arid conditions, for 12 hours. Thus, a mage could transport his toad across the desert without endangering the animal. The bowl also preserves amphibians' eggs in arid conditions, and it can provide a constantly damp cloth for a lizard man PC.

XP Value: 3,500

**Coat of Adaptation:** Like all magical animal coats, this coat changes sizes to fit any four-legged animal, from ferret to wolf. When worn, it acts as a *necklace of adaptation* for its wearer.

XP Value: 1,000

**Coat of Slipperiness:** When worn, this item's dweomer generates an aura that acts like a coating of *oil of slipperiness*. *Dispel magic* negates this aura for the one round necessary to remove the coat.

XP Value: 1,000

**Coat of Displacing:** Made of displacer beast hide, this black or bluish-black coat must be worn by a semi-intelligent (Int 2-4) or more intelligent creature to function. When the wearer gives a mental command, the coat produces an effect similar to a *cloak of displacement*.

XP Value: 1,000

**Collar of Protection:** This item provides magical armor for the animal, just as a *ring of protection* armors a person. The collars range from +1 to +4 protection.

XP Value: 700 per +1 of protection.

**Collar of Defending:** This item uses the link between the mage and the familiar to give the familiar saving throws equal its owner's,

XP Value: 1,000







**Collar of Freedom:** This item protects the familiar from all enchantment/charm and summoning spells, giving the animal a saving throw against the former and immunity to the latter.

XP Value: 500

**Dropper of Good Measures:** This narrow tube has a flexible bulb affixed at one end. When the dropper is inserted into a potion container, the familiar's species is named, and the bulb is squeezed, two things happen. First, a measure of liquid sufficient for the animal's needs is drawn into the tube. (For instance, enough of a potion of *healing* to heal a frog is drawn up if the word "frog" is spoken). Second, all taste and color are removed from the potion, making it palatable to any animal, without altering the beneficial nature of the potion (i.e., the frog can drink the potion and heal). The remaining potion is not affected by *the dropper*. For reference purposes, an animal the size of a dog or wolf requires half a human dose, an animal the size of a cat needs 1/4 of a human dose, and a bird or frog needs 1/8 of a human dose.

XP Value: 500

**Hood of Suspension:** At first glance it appears to be an ordinary falcon's hood, but this item's magic places the bird wearing it into suspended animation. The bird requires neither food, water, nor air. Its body stiffens and hardens magically, so it makes all saving throws as rock crystal until the hood is removed. The bird is immune to enchantment/charm, summoning, and necromantic spells. For the bird, no time seems to pass. It does not age, nor

does it recover hit points. If the bird is a familiar, its master cannot sense its emotions, although he suffers no loss of hit points or other benefits.

XP Value: 1,500

**Legband of Sharpness:** Any bird wearing this magical ring becomes more dangerous in melee: its natural beak and talon rolls gain +1 to attack and damage rolls, and it can strike creatures immune to nonmagical weapons. However, the bird cannot harm creatures immune to +1 weapons.

XP Value: 250

**Legband of Identity:** So long as this band is worn, the bird wearing it is immune to *polymorph* spells.

XP Value: 500

**Legband of Haunting:** This rare and powerful device provides the familiar with a stunning revenge against its killer—the magic of the band brings the animal back as a ghost! The animal ghost conforms to the statistics for a human ghost, but it has twice the Movement Rate, half the hit points, and does half damage. However, aging and other powers are at full strength! The animal ghost can only seek out and attack its slayer, but it continues to do so until it is destroyed or the slayer dies. Once the slayer is dead, the animal's spirit departs to the Beastlands. (See the PLANESCAPE™ setting for details.)

XP Value: 2,500

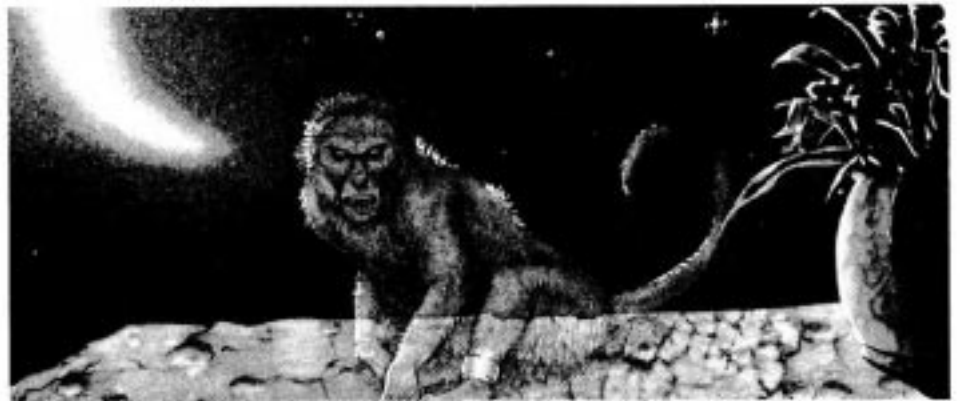
**Oil of Repulsion:** This liquid, while odorless in the container, alters the animal's scent when applied, making it unpalatable to predators. The animal itself does not notice the aroma, although it will smell the oil on another animal. A human, demi-human, or humanoid who puts it on



(a splash isn't enough, but a direct hit with a full vial would be) is affected as by *dust of sneezing and choking* until the substance is washed off, but the wearer need not worry about predators while doing so.

XP Value: 200

One final note: Humans and humanoids cannot gain any benefit by wearing these items, except where noted.





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# Brighter than diamonds, sharper than glass

by Rudy Thauberger

Talla unwrapped the glass shaft and handed it to Quarr. "Be careful now," she said, "If you grip it too tightly the edge will cut you to the bone."

Quarr held the glass in the palm of his hand, watching the light of the fire play of its surface. The edges were straight and remarkably sharp. "It's beautiful," he said.

Talla sneered. "Beautiful," she said. She leaned close and pulled back her hair. A web of scars ran down the side of the half-elf's face, from the tip of her ear to her jaw, each scar running across half a dozen others. "Is this your idea of beautiful?"

Quarr stared, afraid to speak. He looked down at his feet until Talla settled back next to the fire. The ranger made him nervous. He had paid her a fortune to teach him how to survive in the wilderness. As a merchant, he felt that the knowledge would serve him well on long caravan journeys. So far though, all she had done was drag him out into the desert and scare him with tales of monsters he never knew existed: kirres, agony beetles, sand cacti. After a week of it, he wanted nothing more than to return to the relative safety of Balic and never leave again.

Talla seemed to sense his anxiety. She smiled. "Ah, but you are correct," she said, "A crystal spider standing in the heart of its web is one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen, and very nearly the last. Listen closely now, merchant, for I will tell you all I know about this terrible beast."

The first thing you must understand about the crystal spider is that it may not be a spider at all. Its crystalline shell and glass webs are unlike those of any other spider on Athas. Most sages suspect that it is a creature of magic, created by a defiler or perhaps even a sorcerer-king as a weapon. Others claim that it is a mutation, spawned by the rigors of the Athasian wilderness. Even others say that it is a creature from a different world, or that it was a spider once, but has since become something else. Its appearance is merely an echo of its heritage.

Most travelers, when they first see a crystal spider, are astonished by its beauty. In full daylight, the spider scintillates with every color, shimmering like a desert mirage. It resembles a creature of living glass, magical and—like much that is beautiful on Athas—extremely deadly. Few realize that most of what they see is, in fact, not living tissue at all, but an unliving crystalline shell animated by the power of the Way.

# THE ECOLOGY OF the Crystal Spider

The living tissue of the crystal spider has a vaguely spiderlike shape when removed from its shell, but it is soft, boneless, and capable of only rudimentary movement. The body is a round segmented sack with eight long and several short ganglia extruding from it. These ganglia extend into the creature's legs, mandibles, and sensory organs. While safely hidden inside its shell, the spider's tissue is transparent, except on those occasions when the creature has recently fed on blood. At these times, the tissue turns faintly red, bringing a blush to its crystal shell. Once the tissue is removed from the shell, it blackens rapidly, especially if exposed to direct sunlight.

The shell itself both supports and protects the soft tissue, allowing the spider to move while shielding it from exposure. The tissue is nourished largely by sunlight, and the spider can survive for extended periods on nothing else. The hard outer shell is crucial to the spider's survival, focusing and amplifying the sunlight so that the spider gains the maximum benefit from every moment spent under the sun. The shell also retains heat, allowing the spider to remain active at night.

In spite of this highly efficient feeding system, the crystal spider periodically needs to ingest the blood of living creatures. Some say that it actually requires the blood of humans. The spider may prefer human blood, but I suspect any animal's blood will do. What is certain is that without an infusion of blood at least once a month, the crystal spider weakens and eventually dies.

Blood provides the spider with the

essential nutrients it needs to manufacture the two substances necessary for its long-term survival: first, a sticky goo that hardens into a tough, sharp-edged crystal; and second, a powerful acid that dissolves the crystal and serves as the source of the creature's poisonous venom.

The spider uses these two substances to build its shell. The crystal coats the spider's body and ganglia, building up layer upon layer, shaped by judicious applications of the acidic venom. Once completed, the shell is animated by the spider's psionic powers. The animation takes the form of a telekinetic field that radiates from the creature's ganglia. In moments of crisis, the spider strengthens the field, creating a barrier against missile attacks.<sup>1</sup>

The shell is several feet thick in places, giving rise to the notion that the creature is entirely made of crystal. The joints are lubricated by a diluted form of acid venom, which allows the spider to move quickly and silently. Most spider hunters, in fact, underestimate both the speed and the amount of noise a spider makes, thinking that something so big and solid should be clumsy and noisy. They fail to realize that, since the motive power of the creature comes from psionics rather than muscles, the spider can move with uncanny grace and precision. Fortunately, the crystal shell is vulnerable to *shatter* spells and other magic that affects glass and glasslike substances.<sup>2</sup>

In combat, the spider's crystalline forelegs inflict great damage and are remarkably strong. The creature's bite is its most feared attack, due to its venom.







Because the spider's venom is highly acidic, it quickly destroys all the flesh it touches. Most victims die quickly and in great pain, and those who survive suffer terrible burns from the acid and are often crippled or disfigured. If that were not enough, the spider's telekinetic powers extend to fine control over the very light it feeds on.

The spider's ability to control light has several functions beyond combat. It uses the power to communicate, to hide itself in shadows, and to illuminate its surroundings. When combined with the creature's glass webs, the power becomes deadly.

The crystalline webbing, on its own, is dangerous enough. Sharper than an obsidian blade, it is also nearly invisible. Because the spider doesn't hang from its web like most spiders, its web can lie on the ground or hang like a curtain, as long as it is exposed to sunlight. More than one adventurer has been crippled by walking over strands of the web laid out on a valley floor. More have suffered terrible wounds by walking into an invisible web hung between stone pillars or narrow canyon walls.

In addition to cutting damage, the spider's web can focus and amplify its ability to control light, producing an intense burning beam. The beam generally originates from somewhere near the center of the web, but not always. As long as the point of origin is more than 5' from the edge of the web, the beam can come from any point on the web.

Most spiders use the beam as their primary form of attack, but the control the crystal spider exercises over light creates effects other than heat rays. A few spiders can produce bright rays of light to blind or stun their victims. Others produce glowing balls of light that confuse and distract their foes. There are even rumors of crystal spiders that can create images of themselves on their webs, to deceive their enemies and lure them into traps.<sup>3</sup>

The strategies crystal spiders use to hunt prey are fairly complex. The creatures are smarter than most animals, although not highly intelligent by any means. However, they should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to the construction of their webs. They are experts at concealing the web's razor-sharp threads of glass, and they use a number of strategies to drive their prey into the heart of the webbing, where the victims are cut to pieces while trying to escape. Crystal spiders often create more than one web in a single location, one obviously visible and the others hidden, covering potential avenues of escape. The spider then uses its heat ray or other abilities to herd victims into a web. There is a limit, however, to how much webbing the spider can effectively hang, because the webs must be cleaned, lubricated, and repaired on a regular basis. Without proper care and repair, the spider's webs collapse.<sup>4</sup>

Among the elves, the webbing serves as

raw material for short blades, such as knives and spears, as well as arrowheads. Once removed from the care of the spider, the glass grows brittle unless polished and lubricated with oil. The blades must be replaced regularly because they tend to shatter after being wielded in combat a few times.<sup>5</sup>

The crystal spider reproduces only once in its lifetime—just before it dies. In order to reproduce, it weaves a large hatching web. Like its regular web, the hatching web is carefully positioned in relation to the sun, allowing the spider's gemlike eggs to absorb a maximum amount of energy. The web's razor-sharp edges deter most predators from raiding the eggs.

The crystal spider does not actually lay eggs. Instead, it constructs the egg's shells out of its own webbing material or from gems taken from unlucky travelers. The acid venom opens a hole in the gem, into which the embryonic spider is placed along with a supply of blood. The spider then seals the hole and sets the egg into the hatching web, where it is exposed to the amplified rays of the sun. Up to 200 eggs can be prepared, depending on the size of the hatching web. The strain of preparing the web destroys the spider's ability to produce additional webbing and venom, and it severely weakens its ability to absorb sunlight. Most spiders live only a handful of days after completing their last great project.<sup>6</sup>

After a few weeks, the tiny spiders begin secreting acid that dissolves the gems, and they hatch. Once they emerge from their shells, the majority of the tiny crystal spiders fall victim to the very sunlight that grants them life. Without a shell to focus and harness the sun's energies, the spiders grow sluggish, and their soft tissues lose moisture. The first thing a newly hatched crystal spider must do, therefore, is to spin itself an exoskeleton. This first shell is usually crude and clumsy, but once constructed, it allows the spider to move and hunt. Because the acid dissolves the exoskeleton, the crystal spider can easily modify and improve its shell in sections without shedding it completely. Usually no more than a single limb is exposed at one time.<sup>7</sup>

Once they complete a shell, the young spiders begin looking for sites to build their first webs. A few remain near the hatching web, but the solitary nature of the crystal spider and the lack of sufficient resources eventually drives all but one away.

The shell of a dead crystal spider quickly loses its beauty. Without the oils provided by the spider's venom, the shell's luster fades, and the crystal dries out and cracks. Within a few weeks, the shell breaks apart, becoming little more than a handful of worthless pebbles. Ω

## Notes

1. DMs may opt to substitute the Telekinetic Barrier power described in *The Will and the Way* for the Inertial Barrier power normally used by the spider.

2. Other spells that can affect the spider's shell include *shout*, which inflicts 6d6 hp damage, and *glassteel*, which actually improves the armor class of the creature to -4.

3. By manipulating light, the spider can duplicate such spells as *color spray*, *dancing lights*, *phantasmal force* (spider's image only), and *mirror image* (1d4+1 images).

4. The maximum amount of webbing the crystal spider can effectively tend is roughly 1,200 square feet. Each new web increases the spider's need for fresh blood, so generally a crystal spider spins no more than two 400 square foot webs. The exception is the hatching web, which is much larger than a normal web. Because the spider produces only 12' of webbing per day, the construction of even a small web is time-consuming. A 400 square foot web takes 13 to 20 days to construct (12+1d8 days). Twelve additional days are added for each web the spider must maintain while building the new web. If a web is left untended for more than six days, it must save vs. crushing blow each day until it collapses.

5. Blades must be oiled at least once a week. Each week without oiling results in a cumulative -1 modifier to the blades' saving throw vs. crushing blow. Such a save is rolled at the beginning of every melee. If the saving throw fails, the blade shatters within 1–4 rounds.

6. Each egg requires 50 square feet of web to nourish it. Therefore, a web capable of producing 200 spiders would have to cover roughly 100' x 100'. The gestation period is roughly 40 days, and all eggs hatch within 1-3 days of each other.

7. The newly hatched spider has an AC 10 and 1d4 hp. Once it has constructed its first shell, which takes only a few minutes, its AC improves to 7 and its hit points double. Within a few days, the AC of the shell improves to 4 and the spider can fight with an THAC0 of 19, inflicting 1d4 hp damage with its forelegs and biting for 1d2 hp damage. Since its body is constructed, rather than grown, the crystal spider can achieve its full adult size in less than a year, depending on the available supply of blood.

*(More than)*

by Kevin N. Haw

Artwork by Jason Walton

FOR

It's More than a  
**101  
USES**  
Big Backpack!

A

**PORTABLE HOLE**





"Well," the Dungeon Master announced. "You've defeated all the followers of Char-tek the volcano god and have gotten away with the forty-pound diamond that used to rest in the idol's navel. Unfortunately, the last act of the high priest (before you skewered him) was to summon Char-tek's minions and cause the Haldor volcano to erupt. You're now trapped on a thirty foot wide beach, oozing lava behind you and shark infested ocean in front. What now?"

Well, I guess swimming's out because of the sharks and the lava is gonna cook us if we stay," responded the party leader. Then, rummaging through his paperwork. "Let me check the portable hole to see if there's anything useful."

"Any luck?"

"Let's see . . . seven thousand ninety-four gold pieces, a +3 bohemian ear-spoon, three 10' poles, 950' of rope, 39 torches, 192 iron spikes . . ."

"Nothing else?" queried the DM. "Just the treasure and the stuff you originally had in your backpacks?"

"Well . . . yeah," the party leader said, sounding a little sheepish. "We didn't think we'd need anything else. We never did before."

"Hmmm . . . I bet you could've fit three or four canoes in the hole if you'd stacked them on end."

"Er, yeah."

"Oh, well. A shame you guys didn't do that back in town," the DM shrugged, face twitching with a poorly concealed smirk.

"By the way, the lava's now only twenty feet from the water. . ."

In an AD&D® campaign, few items are more useful than a *portable hole*. It commonly serves as a combination treasure vault, backpack, and hall closet to store an adventuring party's equipment. From the lowliest cutpurse to the mightiest of holy knights, every adventurer that ever crept through a musty cavern can be divided into two categories: those that had a *portable hole* and those that wanted one. The immense utility of this handy little gadget is, literally, the stuff of legend.

Unfortunately, many players tend to treat a *portable hole* as a substitute for the mundane backpack. In fact, the first thing almost every adventuring party does when finding a *hole* is dump the contents of their backpacks into it. While this little ritual might be a blessing for anyone with a bad back, it is also a criminal waste of this item's incredible potential. By stashing bulky, heavy, or rarely used "oddball" items in the *portable hole* while keeping other (more commonly used) equipment in the backpack, a party can be ready for nearly any scenario that might be festering in a DM's imagination.

This article presents a list of off-the-wall items that one might not immediately think about stashing in a *portable hole*. They range from the coldly practical to the absurdly frivolous. Many of them

should be easily obtained, while a few might require greater effort. While much thought has gone into this list, it barely scratches the surface of innovative uses for the simple, common *portable hole*.

## The Nature of a Portable Hole

Before addressing the many uses for a *portable hole*, it would help to discuss the nature of the device itself. While the DMG gives an adequate description, many questions remain unanswered. Before a *portable hole* is used in any campaign, the DM and players ought to resolve the questions presented here.

One thing clearly stated is the dimensions of the hole's interior. The DMG indicates that the *portable hole* forms a cylinder 10' deep and 6' in diameter. For the statistically inclined, that's 282 cubic feet of storage space. To put that in perspective, the average refrigerator has a capacity of 18 cubic feet; the common minivan, 110.

The DMG also states that there is no weight limit to the material placed in a *portable hole*. This means that anything placed inside, from goose down to anvils, will have the exact same weight—zero. The DMG gives an example of filling the thing full of gold. This is quite impressive, since 282 cubic feet of pure gold would weigh in at 339,618 pounds or 169 tons. Just remember to lift with your knees, not your back, when you have to haul all that junk back out!

While the basic dimensions of the *hole* are given clearly, other matters are open to interpretation by individual DMs. Specifically, two basic schools of thought exist regarding the actual nature of the "extradimensional space" described in the DMG. The first view is that a *portable hole* is actually a teleporter or gateway and that the space inside resides in another location, usually another plane. Thus, the fabric device our PCs carry around in their belt pouches is nothing but a magical link to some empty, oddly shaped room somewhere. The second view is that the *hole's* interior actually exists within the fabric of the device itself, the third dimension momentarily collapsed to nothingness by the magic.

Which school of thought your DM uses determines the limitations of the *hole*. Those subscribing to the "teleporter" theory generally believe the interior is rigid and that placing sharp or jagged objects inside presents no problem. DMs who use the "collapsible dimension" theory tend to feel that since the contents are actually in the fabric, the *hole* can be damaged from the interior. I am aware of one campaign where players used a chain mail liner for their *portable hole* so that they wouldn't have to worry about forgetting to scabbard every sword, axe, or penknife they acquire.

When discussing these two theories, there also arises the matter of the location of the items within a *portable hole*.

For example, if the "teleporter" theory were used, a spellcaster could not use scrying or ESP spells to examine the contents (or spy on the occupants) of a "closed" *hole* because the interior is actually on another plane and thus out of range of most magic. Even with the "collapsible dimension" theory many DMs still rule that the contents of a *hole* are off limits to magic, even though they might technically be in range. These matters should also be considered if magic were being cast out of a closed *hole*, say, by a prisoner.

Finally, the DM must consider the orientation of items within the device. Specifically, does gravity from outside of a closed *hole* permeate the interior, or does the interior somehow have its own local gravity? Subscribers in the "teleport" theory tend to believe in the local gravity argument while "collapsible dimension"ers seem split between the two views. While this might seem like splitting hairs, imagine how much jostling and bouncing the contents of a *hole* would receive during a single day in your back pocket. If a *portable hole* doesn't have its own local gravity, then spilled bottles, broken pottery, and dented armor are just the beginning of the mess.

## The List

Obviously, the *portable hole* is a "must have" on every adventurer's wish list. However, it is only as valuable as its contents. The list presented here has been divided by categories, each one presenting a situation where the suggestions might come in handy. Naturally, many of the ideas overlap.

This list serves not only as a guide for players, but also gives DMs ideas on what to place in a found *portable hole* and how to equip NPCs possessing one. Just remember: a *portable hole* is such a useful thing that the odds of finding one empty are nearly zero.

## For Underground Explorers

1) Four or five canoes or rowboats with paddles for crossing subterranean lakes or rivers. Quite useful on the surface, too.

2) A two-ton screw jack, similar to automobile jacks used in our world. Ideal for forcing open jammed portals, lifting fallen boulders, or just changing a broken wheel on a wagon.

3) A wheelbarrow for hauling rubble, treasure, or fallen comrades.

4) Mining and excavating equipment: pick axes, shovels, wrecking bars, chisels, sledgehammers, and the like.

5) Rock climbing equipment: pitons, grappling hooks, harnesses, arcane block and tackle.

6) A collapsible 3' ladder to transverse the tougher portions of a subterranean cavern. Better yet, portable scaffolding that can be rigged up for excavating a cliff

wall or used as a makeshift bridge.

7) A 50' rope footbridge to cross those inconvenient chasms that always seem to crop up.

8) Waterproof clothing similar to fishing waders for exploring flooded or mud filled passages.

9) Several bags of oil soaked marbles or sharpened caltrops to halt an enemy's escape or pursuit. Likewise, bags full of cheap glass baubles resembling jewels might slow greed-oriented individuals.

10) Heavy wooden beams to shore up the ceiling of a passage in risk of collapse.

11) A cage of pigs, rabbits, or other expendable creatures that can be sent down a passage ahead of the party to set off traps. If suspended animation is not used, a magical air source is in order.

12) A few barrels of lamp oil to keep the party well lit for weeks at a time.

13) Several large mirrors and stands similar to the ones the Egyptians set up in series to "pipe" sunlight into a tomb they were preparing. More useful than lamps or torches when working in a set underground area for an extended period.

14) A dowsing rod to help map underground water sources.

15) Several buckets, either to hold fresh drinking water or to bail out flooded chambers.

16) A very accurate scale, useful for assaying metal to determine its nature by its weight (gold vs. silver, copper vs. lead, etc.).

17) A large, hand-cranked water pump, similar to the bilge pump on a galley or sailing ship. Suitable for draining flooded rooms or passages.

## For Transport

18) A disassembled 20'x20' raft.

19) Extra barding, tack, and saddles for all known species of mount. Just because you're in a swamp, there's no guarantee that you won't stumble across a camel or an elephant, especially with summoning magic in use.

20) Spare sails and rigging for a schooner or smaller ship.

21) A disassembled wagon, or cart.

22) A hot air balloon. The fabric folds up into very little space, the basket might need to be collapsible to fit.

23) A 30'-long pontoon bridge capable of taking wagon traffic across a stream.

24) A horse, mule, griffin, or other mount in suspended animation.

25) A hang glider or parachute.

26) A magic carpet.

## Shelter and Structures

27) A 100'x80' circus pavilion with poles, spikes, ropes, etc.

28) Enough lumber to build a small shack, signal tower, wall or fence.

29) Two 5'x10' wrought iron gates, ideal for blocking off a corridor, passage, or doorway.

30) Mortar and bricks for permanent constructions. A *hole* could hold enough 4" thick bricks for 848 square feet of wall. That's a 10'x85' wall or a 25'x30' cottage with 7-3/4' ceiling (no roof, though).

31) A feather bed with fresh linen and a bed warmer make the *hole* the ultimate sleeping bag.

32) A chest of drawers, a desk, extra clothes, a bed (above), favorite paintings, etc. to make a portable, albeit cramped, apartment. Divided into two levels, this is ideal for halflings and gnomes. See "Making a Good Thing Better," below.

33) An armored trapdoor at the lip of the 'Hole and air vents creates an emergency "hidey hole" for forest fires, dragon stampedes, etc. Camouflaging the lid (magically or otherwise) is a good idea.

## For the Wizard

34) Any kind of fragile, toxic, or flammable spell component that is too risky to carry on your person.

35) An extensive magical library. See "Making a Good Thing Better," below.

36) A full alchemical laboratory (if disassembled and packed in the *hole*) or a moderate one (if the *hole* itself is used as the lab).

37) A desk and scrollmaking equipment.

38) An astrological observatory, complete with star charts, a compass, chronometer, and a large telescope that can be hoisted out of the *hole*'s top.

39) A golem or three.

40) A warren or lair for your familiar to bed down for the night.

41) With a magical light source the space becomes an ideal terrarium/greenhouse for magical herbs and plants.

42) Set up a permanent gateway to another plane inside the hole.

43) Use the hole itself as a teleportation portal. For example, link *two portable holes* so that they open into the same extradimensional space. It would thus be possible to pass from one to the other via this new device, a "Portable Tunnel."

44) Include a heat source to use as an incubator for dragon or dinosaur eggs.

## For the Fighter

45) Spare armor, arms, ammunition, weapon cleaning and maintenance kits, etc.

46) A good variety of well-labeled potions and rings.

47) A platform allowing a person to stand inside with the ground at chest level. Use as an instant foxhole or firing position.

48) A light ballista or catapult rigged to hoist over the *hole*'s edge. The medieval equivalent of a mortar pit.

49) A Nautilus-style weight machine or treadmill for after-hours workouts while on the road or during the campaign season for mercenaries. You'd probably have to commission such devices with dwarven

artisans, who'd most likely mistake them for torture equipment.

50) Wolfsbane, garlic, holy water, silver weapons and any other unusual items needed to combat specific, hard-to-kill species.

## For the Merchant

51) Any kind of contraband one might wish to smuggle.

52) A brewer's vat, wine aging kegs, or small distillery.

53) A tinker's, jeweler's, or tailor's workshop.

54) A portable bazaar booth.

55) The contents of a small pawnshop.

56) A burglar-proof treasury of profits.

57) Fill with hot coals and use as a giant oven. Roast dragon, anyone?

58) Magically cool it as a walk in freezer.

59) Rig up a giant pottery kiln.

60) A portable smokehouse for preserving game on the trail.

61) House an entire butcher's shop of equipment for a hunting party.

62) Fill with chemicals and use as a tanning vat for hides and leather.

63) Fill four-fifths full of water and then use magic or leave it out in cold weather to freeze into a solid block of ice, which can be worth quite a bit in arid regions. A similar idea would be to pack the *hole* with snow.

## For the General

64) Take a 6'-diameter, 10'-long wood or iron tube and place it inside the *portable hole*, then raise the hole to extend above ground level. This would form a "Portable Tower" anywhere one set it up—in a camp, on a hilltop, or even in the middle of a battlefield. A platform on the inside lip would create an ideal protected firing position. You could even nest several concentric tubes like a collapsible telescope to create taller, "multiple stage" towers. In that case a reduction of one foot of tower radius per "stage" is recommended to accommodate the lifting mechanism itself. A 50'-tall, 2'-diameter "crows nest" platform should be the upper limit of such a device.

65) An entire smithy including forge, anvil, tools, metal stock, etc. Use to maintain weapons and armor.

66) Disassembled catapults, ballista, or siege equipment.

67) Enough armor and weapons to equip 100 peasants as a makeshift militia.

68) Ten high level commandos in suspended animation—excellent if you can smuggle the *hole* into the enemy camp (ala the Trojan Horse).

69) Enough forage to feed 30 mounts for a week.

70) Enough food to feed 50 soldiers for a week.

71) A 5-ton battering ram, hoisted above the *hole*'s edge and swung from where the *hole* was laid down—right next an



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enemy's city gates.

72) A disassembled field kitchen. Use the emptied hole as a firepit.

73) A portable map room.

74) A vat full of Greek fire for instant use by catapults (it would also be safer to transport the stuff this way).

75) Fill with 2,115 gallons of drinking water, ale, or lamp oil.

76) Firewood. Lots of firewood.

77) Use as the largest stewpot in history to feed the entire army at once.

78) Put in a pigeon coop for carrier pigeons to keep communications open on the march.

79) Stash a hill giant, ogre, or small war elephant in suspended animation. They eat less food that way, and pulling them out gives you the element of surprise on any opponent.

### For the Priest

80) A portable altar, complete with vestments and other holy items needed to stock a temple.

81) Private meditation room and library of inspirational writings.

82) A full field hospital with stretchers, crates of field dressings, medicinal herbs, healing potions, etc.

83) A holy relic (i.e. the fingerbone of a saint, not a "relic" per the DMG) turns the hole into a portable shrine. Instead of pilgrims traveling to the shrine, the shrine can travel to them!

84) Font for creating holy water.

85) Use as an eavesdrop proof confessional. Ideal for the King's confessor.

### For the Rogue

86) An extensive wardrobe of disguises.

87) A forger's workshop—desk, lighting, a wide array of inks, paper stock, and sealing waxes, a library of handwriting samples from various prominent officials.

88) An entire locksmith's workshop, including every kind of lock pick, skeleton key, and pry bar known to mankind.

89) A treasury of coins from various cities and countries to better enhance a disguise.

90) A trampoline set up at the hole lip to allow an acrobat to perform his or her tricks.

91) Use as an eavesdrop proof meeting place to scheme and plan.

### For the Villain

92) Torture equipment.

93) A locked steel grate and a magical air source. When the hole is folded up, it becomes an escapeproof cell.

94) Fill with an ochre jelly, black pudding, or enough rot-grub-infested garbage for unpleasant uses. Use a hoist to lower victims in inch by inch. Variations on this theme might involve snakes, acid, or other sick items (The thought of 2,000 gallons of

leeches turns the stomach, doesn't it?). Practice your manical laugh.

95) An alchemical laboratory optimized for poisons.

96) A minor fiend stashed in a magic circle.

97) A vampire might store his coffin and native soil in a hole to evade capture. For even greater security he could command a minion to roll the thing up and carry it around during the day.

98) A necromancer might keep a dozen zombies suspended in a portable hole to do his bidding. Likewise, he might instead choose to keep a stack of fresh corpses close at hand as "working material."

### For the Frivolous

99) A bathtub, sauna, or hot tub heated by wood or magic.

100) A massage table and an unseen servant spell "programmed" as a masseur.

101) A folding feast table, fine china, table linens, and comfortable chairs.

102) Use as a wine cellar.

103) Use as a bathroom or boudoir.

104) Pack away a wardrobe fit for a queen.

105) A disassembled gourmet kitchen.

106) Use as game room.

107) Fill with water to create a small swimming pool.

108) A chimney and fireplace. Obviously only usable when the hole is "open."

109) Filled with water, aquatic plants, fish, and a light source the hole becomes a portable pond. Go fishing wherever you happen to be, or grow oysters for their pearls.

110) Fill with water to transport fresh fish, lobster, or a mermaid overland.

111) Use as a traveling trophy room for the big game hunter.

112) If your character feels guilty about being destructive, you can pack a hole with doors to replace all the ones you'll batter down during the adventure. Be sure to bring along spare hinges and tools, though.

### Miscellaneous Uses

113) If a party member is dies or is turned to stone, throw him in the hole until you can reach a cleric. It's not like they have to worry about running out of air.

114) In a desperate fix, you can always toss the hole into a bag of holding. The DMG states that this creates a gate that sucks everything within 10' to another plane. If you can get your opponent in range (say, as a dragon is lifting your battered body to its mouth to feed), this is a spectacular way of committing suicide. Your DM may rule that igniting or ripping a hole filled with gunpowder or oil might have similarly interesting results.



## Making a Good Thing Better

No matter how useful or wonderful something is, there is always room for improvement. The *portable hole* is no exception. Here are a few ideas to try.

The first improvement to the *portable hole* would be, naturally, to make the thing hold more. While a 40' deep *hole* would be of little use, making a 12' diameter opening at the standard depth yields the same volume and would be much more useful. Additionally, modifying the *hole* to work when hung vertically against a wall would allow a user to wheel items into the larger space. The idea of a "Portable Cellar" would not be unreasonable.

Another improvement is to create a "Portable Tunnel" as described above. To maintain game balance the device should cost at least twice as much as a single *portable hole* to create and require special ingredients, say, the claws of an exotic burrowing animal. While not as flexible as a *teleport* spell, a *portable tunnel* could pass a very high volume of traffic once both ends have been set up. Such a device would be ideal for invading a castle or city under siege. Another use would be bypassing damaged bridges or collapsed tunnels.

Other modifications to the *portable hole* might be the introduction of an integral air source, lighting, or temperature control. This would allow storage of items otherwise not possible — living creatures require air, ice requires a cold environment, etc.

Another environmental feature would be to actually evacuate the air inside to vacuum pack any bulk food stored inside. Installing extradimensional drainage would be a good idea if one is planning on filling the *portable hole* with fluids.

Modifying the *hole's* materials is another good idea. Making a *portable hole* of tougher, unrippable material eliminates the need for items like the chainmail liner mentioned earlier. Water- or fireproofing the thing may also prove useful. If disguise is your goal, changing the material to a flashy, bright fabric would allow an inactive *hole* to be worn as a cloak or cape, further hiding its true nature. Making a banner, tapestry, or sail out of a *portable hole* would be similar tricks. ("Really, sir, we don't know how the prisoners summoned that fire elemental. They only had the clothes on their backs when we locked them in the dungeon!")

To add further security, add a control phrase to activate the *hole*. Other control phrases might trigger *telekinesis* or an *unseen servant* to help in hauling heavy items in and out of the *hole*. A particularly subtle ploy is to have secret compartments open up in the interior of the *hole* like wall safes with the use of the proper phrase.

Several entries on the list above suggest using the *hole* as a residence, library, or workshop. Since the *portable hole* does not provide a great amount of living space, we can make an inexpensive, nonmagical improvement to make the most of what we

have. Creating a wooden liner in the form of a 6'x10' foot cylinder would allow furnishings like shelves, cabinets, desks or a bed to be built into the liner itself. Not only would these items be designed to make the best use of available space, but the liner also allows one to drive a nail into the wall of a *hole* without being sucked into an extra dimensional rift. The liner idea could be taken further, having multiple liners in a warehouse somewhere: one set up as a study or apartment, another with a hoist for heavy cargo, and a third lined with glass to hold acid or oil.

Finally, remember that a *portable hole* is not a container but a space. As such, the owner should protect it like any room in a castle or dungeon. Undead or magically animated guardians could be placed inside. A lethal glyph might be cast on the opening. The thing may be filled with caustic chemicals or flammable gasses, waiting for just the wrong person to open it. A *portable hole* might even be haunted by the spirit of some unfortunate who died inside, say by suffocation when trapped inside.

These are but the beginning of the tricks, spells, or deceptions in use to camouflage and protect the contents of a *hole*. After all, a *portable hole* can hold 282 cubic feet of treasure. . . or trouble. Ω

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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.

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

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, three months prior to the onsale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., 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.).

**Important:** DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the mis-directed call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

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

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## DEMI CON 6, Sept. 1-3 MD

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Conference Hotel in Towson, Maryland. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, an auction, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$25 on site. Write to: Harford Adventure Society, c/o The Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Road, Bel Air MD 21014.

## FOX CON '95/EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY CON XIV, Sept. 1-3 IL

This convention will be held at the Arlington Park Hilton in Arlington Heights, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$13/day, \$18/weekend. Write to: Randy Giesey, 1775 Ashford Circle, Wheeling IL 60090.

## NANCON 88 XVII, Sept. 1-4 TX

This convention will be held at the Ramada Hotel Northwest in Houston, Tex. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, an auction, and dealers. Registration: \$25. Write to: NANCON 88, 2011 Southwest Freeway, Houston TX 77098.

## MAGECON SOUTH X, Sept. 1-3 IA

This convention will be held at the Hilton in Sioux City, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, a computer gaming room, a costume contest, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$15 on site, \$8/day. Write to: MAGECON, P.O. Box 114, Sioux Center IA 51250.

## PACIFICON '95, Sept. 1-4 CA

This convention will be held at the Dunfey Hotel in San Mateo, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Write to: PACIFICON, 10519 Silverwood Way, Rancho Cordova CA 95670.

## RIVERCON XX, Sept. 1-4 KY

This convention will be held at the Executive West Hotel in Louisville, Ken. Special guests include Philip Jose Farmer, Robert and Juanita Coulson, and Andrew J. Offutt. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include a huckster room, an art show, and a masquerade ball. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$35 on site. Write to: RIVERCON, P.O. Box 580009, Louisville KY 40268.

## STRATEGICON, Sept. 1-4 CA

This convention will be held at LAX Hyatt Hotel in Los Angeles, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, computer, and miniatures games. Other activities include a flea market, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Write to: STRATEGICON, P.O. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510.

## CATCON 1, Sept. 2-3

This convention will be held on the FH Ulm campus, Prittwitzstr. 36 (Catcafe), Ulm, Germany. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Write to: Imp's Shop, Zinglerstr. 51, 89077 Ulm, Germany.

## KINETICON II, Sept. 8-10 CT

This convention will be held at the Comfort Inn in Darien, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Write to: KINETICON II, Connecticut Game Club, P.O. Box 403, Fairfield CT 06430.

## MAD MEDIA II-THE CON OF WRATH, Sept. 8-10 WI

This science fiction convention will be held at the Ramada Inn C.C.C. in Madison, Wisc. Guests include Peter Krause, Gordon Purcell, and Grace Lee Whitney. Events include learning to speak Klingon, an auction, an art show, and an ice cream social. Registration: \$20. Write to: Mad Media Productions, P.O. Box 9873, Madison WI 53715.

## BOGGLECON 3, Sept. 9 PA

This convention will be held at the American Legion Hall in Wind Gap, Penn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a raffle, and fund raising events. Registration: \$3 per game. Write to: BOGGLECON 3, c/o Mike Griffith, 118 Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091.

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention
- \* indicates a Canadian convention
- ⊗ indicates a European convention



**CARDCON 1, Sept. 9 PA**

This collectible card game convention will be held at the Wind Gap Fire Hall in Wind Gap, Penn. Other activities include dealers and a card swapping area. Registration: \$3, plus event fees. Write to: CARDCON 1, c/o Mike Griffith, 118 Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091.

**FALCON, Sept. 9 \***

This convention will be held at the Lord Nelson Hotel in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Guests include Bev Richardson and Terry Angus. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a costume contest and an art show. Registration: \$12. Write to: FALCON, 1469 Brenton St., Box 160, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H-3G6, Canada.

**SHAKA-CON '95, Sept. 10 TX**

This convention will be held at the Bellamead Civic Center just outside of Waco, Tex. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$5 on site. Write to: SHAKA-CON P.O. Box 84305, Waco TX 76798.

**TACTICON '95, Sept. 15-17 CO**

This convention will be held at Sheraton Hotel in Lakewood, Col. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, an art show, painting contest, and dealers. Registration: \$15. Write to: Denver Gamers Association, P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

**REGIMENT, Sept. 16 IN**

This convention will be held at the Century Center in Southbend, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and dealers. Write to: Mark Schumaker, 1621 Frances Ave., Elkhart IN 46516.

**COGCON III, Sept. 22-24 MO**

This convention will be held at University of Missouri Rolla Miner Recreation Building in Rolla, Missouri. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a contest, a raffle, and anime. Registration: \$8 preregistered, \$10 on site. Write to: GEAR, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla MO 65401 or email: gear@albert.nuc.umn.edu.

**FIELDS OF HONOR IV, Sept. 22-24 IA**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's Hotel in Des Moines, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and a painting contest. Registration: \$10/weekend; \$5/day. Write to: FIELDS OF HONOR, 6501 Douglas Ave., Urbandale IA 50322.

**THE 1st A.G.E., Sept. 22-24 NY**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's in Albany, New York. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events and dealers. Registration: \$20 on site. Write to: Albany Gaming Expo, 3344 Guilderland Ave, Schenectady NY 12306.

**SHORECON '95, Sept. 22-24 NJ**

This convention will be held at the Berkely-Carteret Hotel in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Guests include Jeff Menges, Len Kaninski, Dr. Lawrence Schoen, and Dr. Christian Ready. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$15 preregistered. Write to: Multigenre, Inc., 142 South St., Unit 9c, Red Bank NJ 07701. email: acd@hotmail.ho.att.com.

**CAPITALICON X, Sept. 23-24 IL**

This convention will be held at Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events, tournaments, and an auction. Registration: \$10. Write to: John Holtz, 400 East Jefferson St., Springfield IL 62701.

**ANDCON '95, Sept. 28-Oct. 1 OH**

This convention will be held at the Seagate Convention Center in the Radison Hotel in Toledo, Ohio. Guests include Scott Douglas, Frank Metzger, and Robin Wood. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures. Other activities include an auction, computer gaming, and interactive events. Registration: \$24.95 Write to: ANDCON '95, P.O. Box 1740, Renton WA 98057. email: andon@aol.com.

**CON OF THE LIVING DEAD, Sept. 29-Oct. 1 TN**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Airport Hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and dealers. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: Chris Maddox, Memphis Games & Hobbies, 3939 Summer Ave., Memphis TN 38122.

**NECRONOMICON '95, Sept. 29-Oct. 1 ❖**

This convention will be held at the Newton High School of the Performing Arts in Sydney, Australia. Events include role-playing and card games. Write to: NECRONOMICON '95, 12 Mason st., Parramatta NSW, Australia 2150.

**SILVERCON 4, Sept. 29-Oct. 1 NV**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Mardi Gras Inn, Las Vegas, Nev. Guests include Bob Tucker. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, dealers, films, and a banquet. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: SILVERCON 4, c/o Aileen Forman, P.O. Box 95941, Las Vegas NV 89193.

**KETTERING GAME CON XIII, Sept. 30- Oct.1 OH**

This convention will be held at the Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and an auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429.

**DIRE CONSEQUENCES III, Oct. 6-8 CT**

This convention will be held at the Sheraton in Waterbury, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events and tournaments. Registration: \$20. Write to: DC III, P.O. Box 251, Bristol CT 06011.

**GAMIN' THE VALLEY '95, Oct. 6-8 PA**

This convention will be held at the West Side Mall in Edwardsville, Penn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, a comic book show, and a SF and sports card show. Registration: \$10. Write to: GAMIN' THE VALLEY, P.O. Box 2017, Wilkes-Barre PA 18702 or email: jauftin@aaent.microserve.com.

**HEXACON '95, Oct. 6-8 NC**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Market Square in High Point, North Carolina. Guests include Tim Olsen, Tony DiTerlizzi, and David "Zeb" Cook. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events, and tournaments. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$20 on site. Write to: HEXACON, P.O. Box 4 EUC UNCG, Greensboro NC 27412.

**QUAD CON '95, Oct. 6-8 IA**

This convention will be held at the Palmer Alumni Auditorium in Davenport, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, a miniatures painting contest, and an auction. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$20 on site. Write to: QUAD CON 95, The Game emporium, 3213 23rd Ave., Moline IL 61265.

**BAY GAMES '95, Oct. 13-15 MD**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Maryland Inn in Laurel, Maryl. Guests include Bryon Wackwitz and John Staton. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$17 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: BAY GAMES '95, P.O. 883, College Park MD 20741 or email: avatar@wam.umd.edu.

**CONTACT 13, Oct. 13-15 IN**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Airport in Evansville, Ind. Special guests include Dr. Bill Breuer and Naomi Fisher. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an auction, panels, and a masquerade ball. Registration: \$17 preregistered, \$22 on site. Write to: CONTACT 13, P.O. Box 3894, Evansville IN 47737.

**INTERCON '95, Oct. 13-15 \***

This convention will be held at the Kamloops Exhibition Complex in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, movies, and a masquerade ball. Write to: INTERCON '95, 1021 McGill Road, Kamloops, BC, Canada, V2C 6H4.

**NECRONOMICON '95,****Oct. 13-15****FL**

This convention will be held at the Westshore Hotel in Tampa, Flor. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a masquerade, and an art show. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: NECRONOMICON '95, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569 or email: compuserve 74273,1607.

**TOTALLY TUBULAR CON III,****Oct. 13-15****CA**

This convention will be held at the Days Inn in Fullerton, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Write to: TOTALLY TUBULAR, P.O. Box 18791, Anaheim CA 92871 or email: partdragon@aol.com.

**THE WESTERN CHALLENGE '95,****Oct. 13-15****\***

This convention will be held at the University of Saskatchewan campus in Saskatoon, Canada. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and an auction. Registration: \$3 per event. Write to: WESTERN CHALLENGE, Apt 318-1311, Temperance Street, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7N 0P5.

**ADVENTURE GAMEFEST '95,****Oct. 20-22****OR**

This convention will be held at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore. Events

include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$18/weekend, \$10/day. Write to: Adventure Games Northwest, LLC, 6517 NE Alberta, Portland OR 97218 or email: dcbs85d@prodigy.com.

**LEX I CON XIV, Oct. 27-28****KY**

This convention will be held at the University of Kentucky's Student Center in Lexington, Ken. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include anime, a movie marathon, tournaments, and a costume contest. Write to: Miskatonic Student Union, 1328 Nancy Hanks Rd. #5, Lexington KY 40504.

**SIBCON 95, Oct. 28****PA**

This convention will be held at the Days Inn Conference Center in Butler, Penn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures. Other activities include RPGA Network events, dealers, and demonstrations. \$5 preregistered, \$7 on site. Write to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003.

**IMPENDING DOOM, Nov. 3-5****\***

This convention will be held at the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre in St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, and tournaments. Registration: \$8/day, \$15/weekend. Write to: Impending Doom, 222 The Esplanade, Suite 431, Toronto, Ontario M5A 4M8, Canada.

**SALVO '95, Nov. 5****\***

This convention will be held at the Highwoods Recreation and Sports Centre in Clochester, Essex, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: Phil Kitching, 88, Braiswick, Colchester, Essex CO4 5AY United Kingdom.

**SCI-CON 17, Nov. 10-12****VA**

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Oceanfront Inn in Virginia Beach, Virg. Guests include Mark Poole and Larry Bond. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Write to: HaRoSFA, Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670 or email: schaffer@me.udel or michaela@pinn.net or (on the Web) http://www.pinn.net/~michaela/.

**PENTACON XI, Nov. 10-12****IN**

This convention will be held at the Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, and computer games. Write to: Steve & Linda Smith, 836 Himes St., Huntington, IN 46750.

**CON ON THE RIVER II, Nov. 11-12****MN**

This convention will be held in the Kryzsko Commons on the Winona State University campus in Winona, Minn. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$10/weekend, \$15 on site. Write to: CON ON THE RIVER, P.O. Box 751, Winona MN 55987.

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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, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., 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, "Sage Advice" considers armor for rogues, samovars, and a few magical mysteries. Unless otherwise stated, page references are for AD&D® game rulebooks printed after April, 1995.

**The footnote to Table 29: Thieving Skill Armor Adjustments in the PHB says that bards (only) suffer an additional -5% penalty when wearing non-elven chain mail. Does this mean that a bard in normal chain mail suffers a -5% penalty to his read languages ability? What about other types of armor allowed to bards, such as hide or ring mail?**

A rogue's read languages ability is never affected by the armor the player character (PC) is wearing. For bards, I suggest amending table 29 to read as follows:

	None	Padded, Elven Hide, Chain, Studded Ring		
Pick Pockets	+5%	-20%	-30%	-25%
Open Locks	—	-5%	-10%	-10%
Find/ Remove Traps	—	-5%	-10%	-10%
Move Silently	+10%	-10%	-20%	-15%
Hide in Shadows	+5%	-10%	-20%	-15%
Detect Noise	—	-5%	-10%	-10%
Climb Walls	+10%	-20%	-30%	-25%
Read Languages	—	—	—	—

In the core AD&D rules, thieves are limited to the armor types shown on the original table (PHB, page 56).

**What are the effects of armor on a ranger's ability to move silently and hide in shadows?**

You can use the table given in the last question for rangers, too. Armor heavier than chain mail (AC 5) prevents the ranger from using these skills. Note that this is a change for the text on page 40 in the PHB. If you own a copy of the *The Complete Ranger's Handbook*, use the tables on page 11 instead of the one given here.

**Are armor adjustments to thief skills different if the armor is magical. That is, does a character wearing studded leather +2 have a lower penalty?**

No, only the armor type counts.

**Is it true that druids can wear only leather armor?**

The text on page 51 of the PHB certainly implies that leather armor and wooden shields are the only kinds of armor a druid can use. A druid, however, can use any "natural" armor, which includes padded, leather, or hide armor. Likewise, a druid can use any shield made from wood, bone, shell, or similar nonmetal substance.

**Why does magic resistance work against a defensive spell such as *protection from evil* when it doesn't work against a defensive spell such as *stoneskin*?**

As "Sage Advice" (and the article on magic resistance in issue #218) has explained before, magic resistance applies only when the creature with magic resistance is directly affected by the spell. A spell such as *stoneskin*, which protects the recipient from physical attacks, is never subject to magic resistance. *Protection from evil* is sometimes subject to magic resistance. Only when the spell's third effect (which forms a barrier against planar and conjured creatures and forces such creatures to recoil) comes into play does magic resistance have any affect on the spell. The spell's other two effects, which make the spell's recipient harder to hurt, are not subject to magic resistance (though if a magic resistance roll succeeds against the third effect the whole spell collapses). For example, a leprechaun has a formidable magic resistance, but because a leprechaun is not hedged out by the spell (because it is not a conjured or planar creature), its magic resistance does not affect *protection from evil* spells.

**When a wizard with the jackal kit (from *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook*) tries to steal spells from another wizard, the attempt has a pretty good chance to be noticed—all the victim has to do is pass an Intelligence check (and wizards tend to have high Intelligence scores). Does a wizard who has detected spells being stolen automatically know who the jackal is? How often can a jackal steal spells?**

Judging from the kit description, I suggest that a wizard who detects a jackal's spell theft can look at the jackal and know that character has stolen spells. This ability should last as long as the jackal is actually stealing spells and for one round thereafter per level of the victim. For example, an 11th-level victim could recognize a jackal who stole his spells for as long as the spell stealing went on and for 11 rounds thereafter. The wizard can study one other character each round when attempting to detect a jackal who has stolen his spells. Spell stealing requires concentration, which probably makes a jackal stand out in a crowd. Also, a jackal might notice when a victim begins searching. In any case, it is not necessary for a victim to know who the jackal is before attempting to overload the jackal (see CSH, page 63).

A jackal can steal spells as often as necessary to get his daily allotment of spells, but he can only drain spells from any particular individual once a day.

**Is it possible for a wizard or priest to begin casting a spell, but then stop at the last phrase or gesture and finish the spell at a more opportune time?**

No. Once a spell is begun, any delay or interruption ruins the spell.

**What is the purpose of a weapon's speed factor? How is it used in play?**

In the core AD&D game, weapon speed factors are used with the optional group initiative and optional individual initiative rules (see Chapter 9 in the PHB and table 56). In the *PLAYER'S OPTION:™ Combat & Tactics* rulebook, a weapon's speed factor determines the base initiative phase for a PC attacking with the weapon.



**I play the AL-QADIM® setting and I would like to know what a samovar is. Is this piece of equipment is listed anywhere?**

A samovar is a device for serving tea. It consists of a big metal urn fitted with a spigot and filled with boiling water. A tube of burning charcoal in the center of the urn keeps the water hot and ready to make tea anytime. Some versions of the device have a place to keep a pot of strong tea on top of the urn. When someone wants tea, all he has to do is put a little tea in a cup and fill it the rest of the way with water from the urn. In Zakhara, a samovar might very well be used this way to serve coffee.

Samovars are listed under the Miscellaneous Equipment heading on page 89 of *Arabian Adventures*.

**What kind of elemental spells can the wizards who use the various kits in Chapter 2 of *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook* cast? Can a Zakharan sorcerer, elemental, or sha'ir use one of these kits?**

I don't recommend that you allow sorcerers, elementals, or sha'irs to use the kits presented in the CSH because if you did you'd have player characters using two kits. I suggest that you allow PCs with these kits access to any two elemental provinces, like sorcerers. Unlike sorcer-

ers, these wizards do not gain the 20% bonus to learn their elemental spells.

**Is there any official ruling on firearms in PLANESCAPE™ campaigns?**

No. If the Dungeon Master (DM) and players want firearms in a PLANESCAPE campaign, then go for it (you'll find the updated firearms rules in the recently released *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* book quite helpful if you choose this option). That said, however, I heartily recommend that gunpowder be unavailable or inert on the planes. PCs who wish to use firearms have to charge their weapons with magical smoke powder. Note that smoke powder is a magical item that involves both fire and evocation magic, and it is prone to mishaps when taken into locales where those two forms of magic are altered. It's also a very good bet that the Lady of Pain does not allow firearms in Sigil.

**What happens to wild mages who cast spells in wild magic zones?**

Wild mages have no special ability to control or compensate for wild magic areas. The DM might consider ignoring the modifier for the spell's level (see *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures*, page 10, or *Tome of Magic*, page 6) if the wild mage casts a wild magic spell.

**Say a 7th-level human fighter is slain and then receives a *reincarnate* spell from a wizard. The wizard rolls the dice and the result is a half elf: will the character still be a 7th-level fighter? If the wizard is wearing a *stone of good luck* can she use it to affect the roll?**

When a PC is reincarnated, the DM is free to assign whatever character class seems appropriate for the new form. For many forms, such as normal animals, no class is appropriate. If the new form is a PC race that normally could achieve the PC's former class and level, the DM should allow the character to retain that class and level unless there is a very good reason to do otherwise. *The Complete Book of Humanoids* can be very helpful in deciding what kinds of character classes various creatures can aspire to.

A *stone of good luck* helps the wearer, not creatures who receive the wearer's spells. If the PC in your example were wearing the *stone of good luck*, he could use the stone's power to affect the spell's result. Ω

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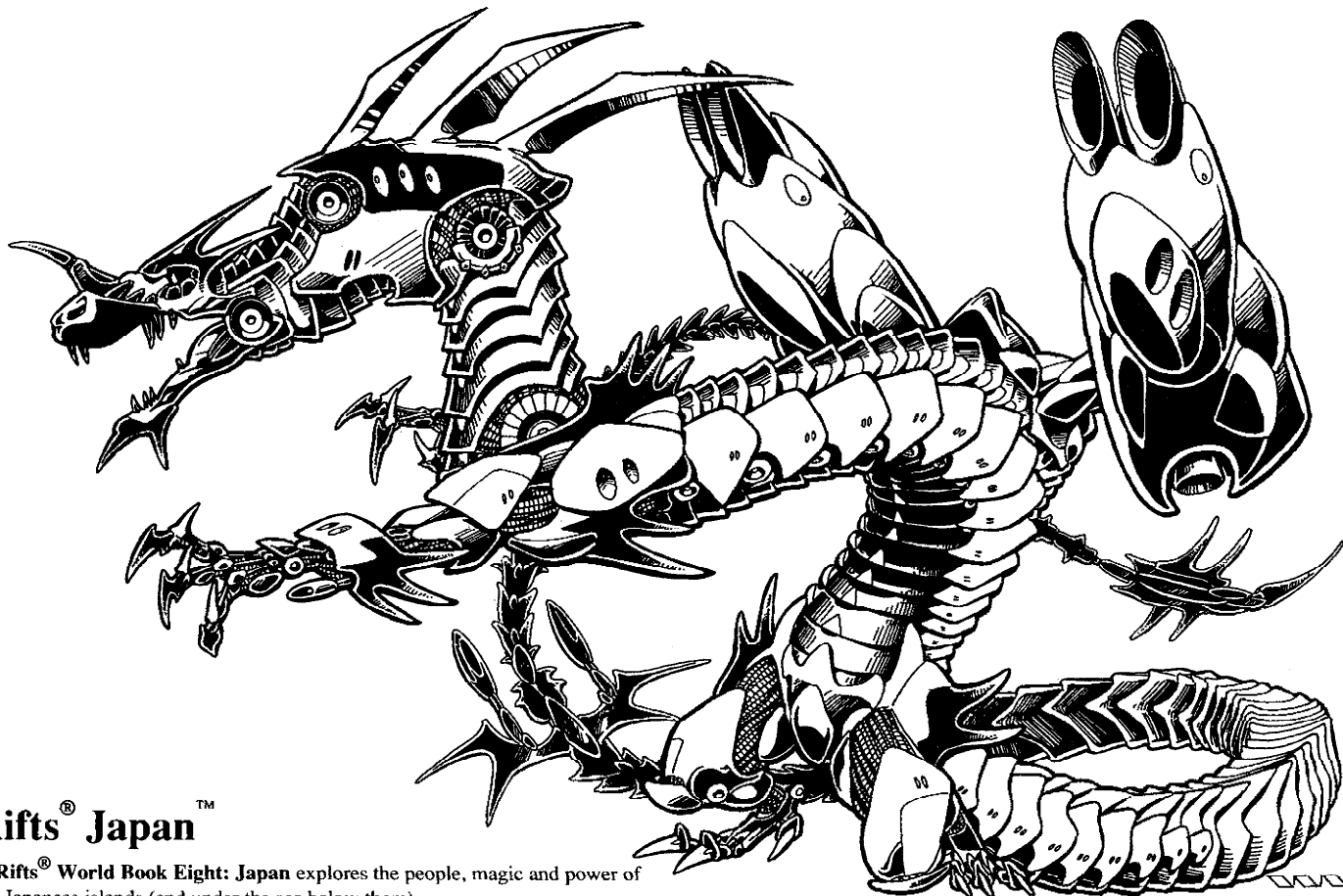
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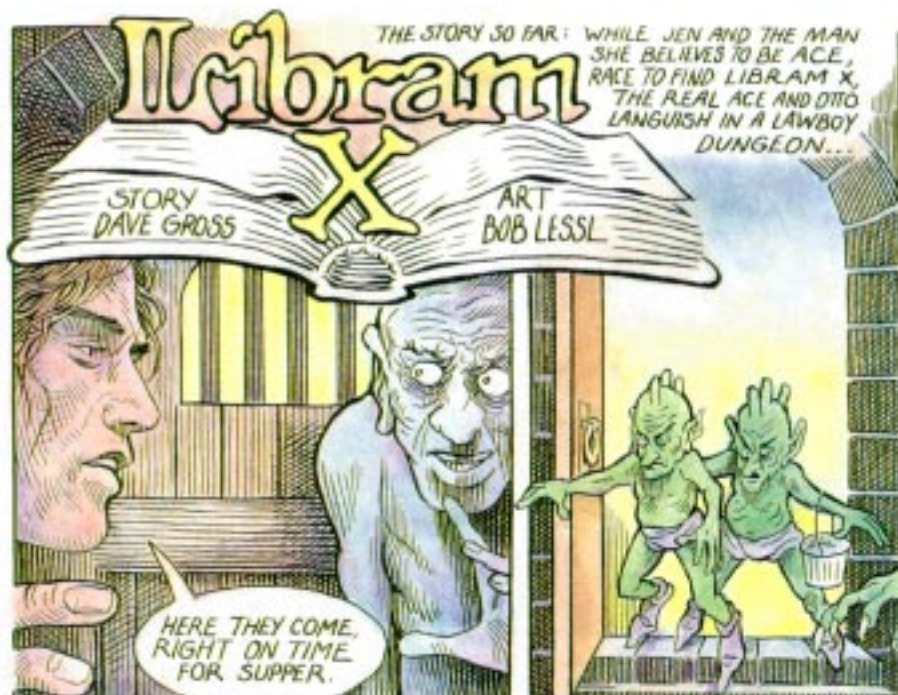
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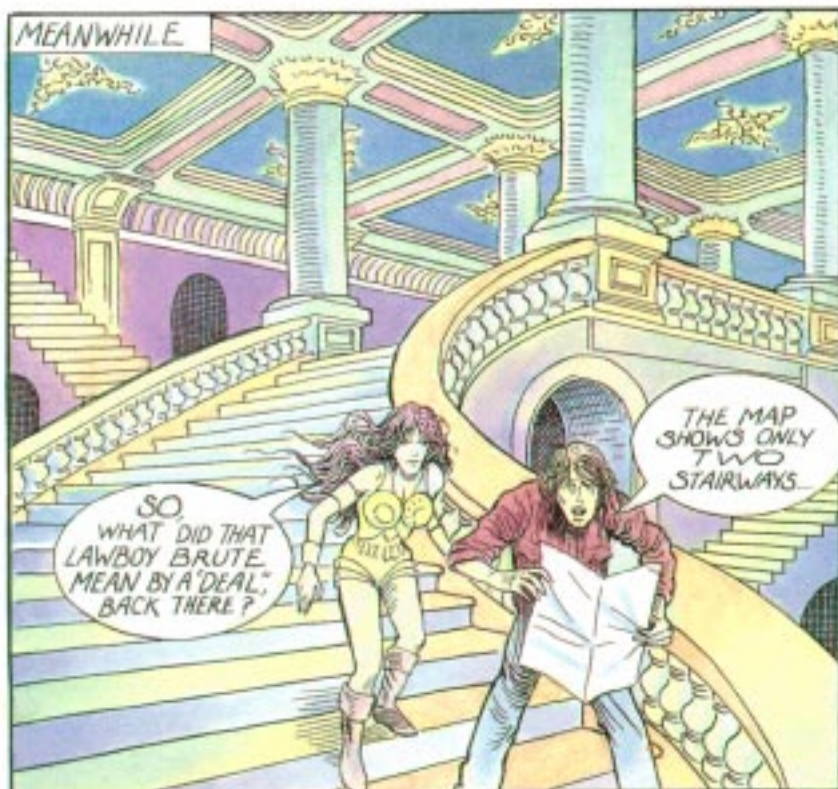
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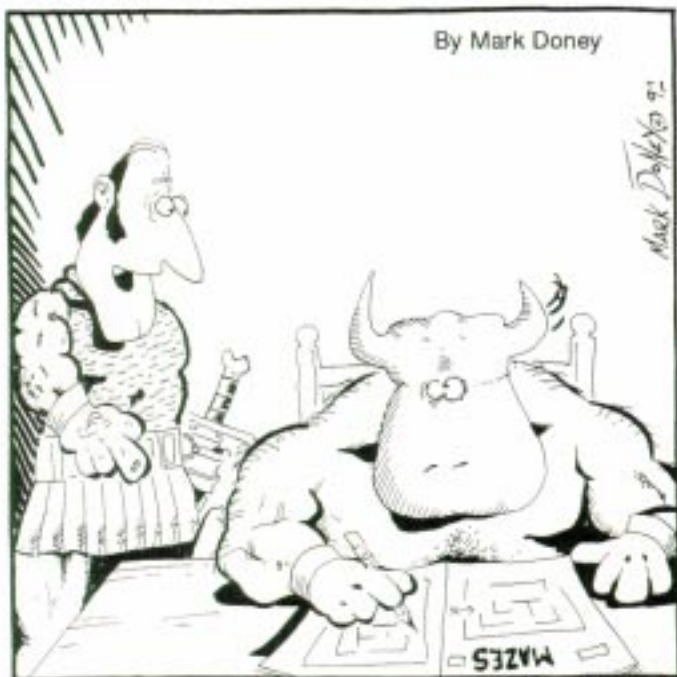




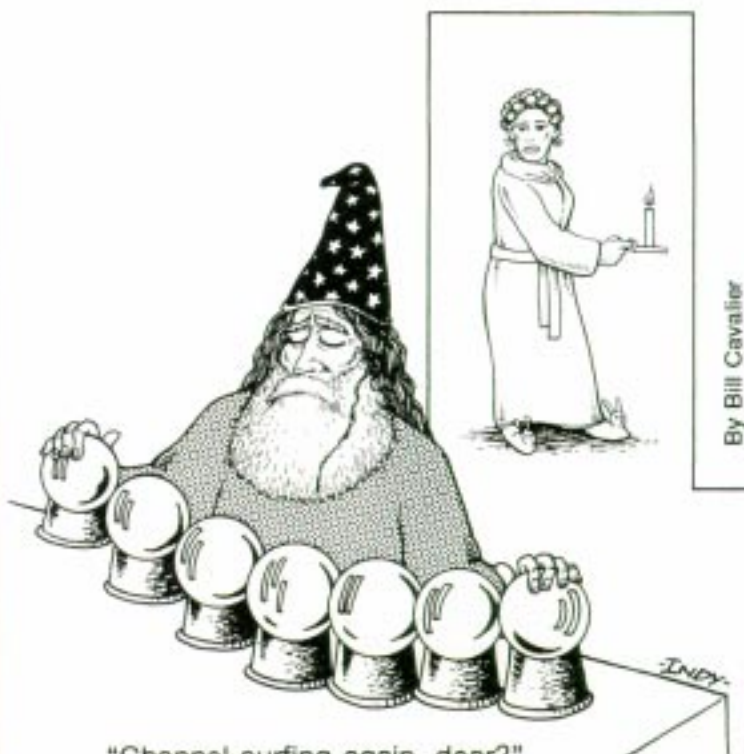


# Dragonmirth

By Mark Doney



"Say, you're pretty good at those!"



"Channel-surfing again, dear?"



"Hang on, Chauncey—I think I've got someone in my shoe."

By Aaron Williams



OKAY GUYS, LET'S SPLIT UP THE LOOT. ALAN, YOU FOUND THE ENTRANCE TO THE DUNGEON, DEFEATED A BUNCH OF NASTY MONSTERS, AND CARRIED OUT THE TREASURE... ONE FULL SHARE.



RON, YOU SKULKED AROUND AT THE BACK, DIDN'T CAST ANY SPELLS, TRIED TO SNEAK OFF WITH THE TREASURE TWICE, AND PUSHED ALAN INTO SIX PITS...

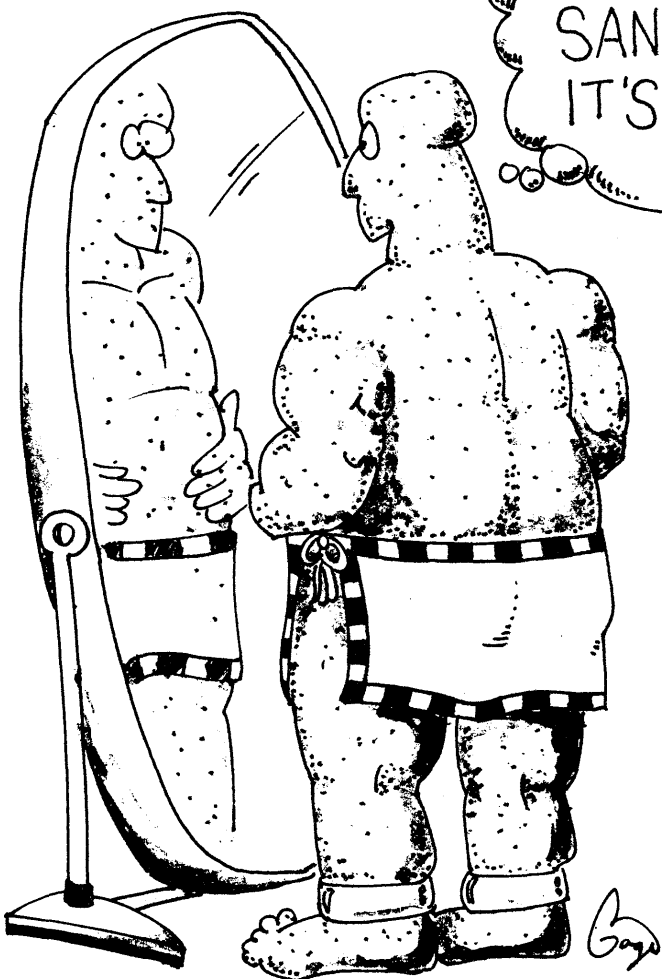


COMPLETELY DESPICABLE, ONE FULL SHARE.

I GOTTA BE ME.

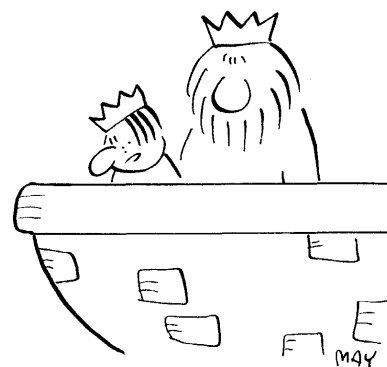


IT'S NOT SANDSTONE. IT'S GRANITE.



STONE GOLEM DENIAL

By Eric Gage



"How come there are so many commoners?"

## FLINT AND STEEL



"My name is Flint, and . . . I'm a pyromaniac."

By Rex F. May

SO... HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE INVINCIBLE?

AS A VAMPIRE, PERHAPS I AM.

BUT AS A PERSON, AND AS A WOMAN...

...I KNOW BETTER. MATRON STRESS? CAN IT BE DONE?

OUR GODDESS DENISE HAS GRANTED YOUR REQUEST. BUT THERE IS A PRICE, AND ALSO A QUESTION:

YOU WANT YOUR FOLLICLES BACK BEFORE OR AFTER THE RITUAL? WE ALL THINK YOU LOOK LIKE SOME KINDA REFUGEE MANNEQUIN.

YEAH, RALPH'S BEEN MAKING JOKES ABOUT YOU, PERSE.

WILL I NEED ANYTHING? I—WAIT. WHERE IS JOE'S CROSS? I HAD IT RIGHT—

COOEE. RIGHT HERE

...WHAT ARE YOU DOING—?

WHAT AM I DOING?! IT'S— CALLED—STEALING!! YOU KNOW— KIND OF LIKE OUR PROFESSION?! KIND OF LIKE WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE TRAINING ME IN?!

—AND BEFORE, IT WAS MISSING FROM MY SAFE—I'VE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH LIVILIC RAPELING AND PAETIC COMPOSITION IN THIEVES' CANT!! WHEN DO I GET TAUGHT OBJECT APPROPRIATION?!

CAPTAIN'S LOG AND ALMANACK; OOREK T. LINDISCIPLINED, COMMANDING.

STARDATE: WEDNESDAY. WEATHER FOR THE PLANET HARD FUN: INCREASINGLY VIOLENT CONDITIONS FOLLOWED

BY CESSATION OF WEATHER ALTOGETHER BY SUNDAY, WE HAVE MANAGED TO FIND SOME TAKE-OUT FOR OUR MANY VAMPIRE GUESTS THROUGH PRESSGANG™. TEMP AGENCY, THEY DELIVER.

YOU'VE STOLEN TWICE FROM A MASTER THIEF. NOW YOU ARE A MASTER THIEF.

HANG ON TO THIS FOR ME, WOULD YOU? IF I DON'T MAKE IT...

...I'LL TELL DEATH WHERE HE CAN COME TO PICK IT UP...

PERSONAL SUPPLEMENT. I SHOULD BE MORE APPRECIATIVE OF MY WIFE (STRESS). SHE CAN BE A VITAL PART OF AN INTERPLANETARY SPY MISSION, AND STILL FIND THE TIME AND ENERGY TO RAISE THE DEAD.

—MY WIFE. I THINK I'LL LET HER KILL ME.

I—I'M SORRY I WASN'T HIGH ENOUGH LEVEL TO RAISE YOU MYSELF...

CONGRATULATIONS, MR. HOLY, IT'S A GIRL.

...IT'S ALL RIGHT...IT'S ALL RIGHT... MAYBE NEXT TIME...


ME, I GET THE MONTH OFF! WHITHERS! SET ME UP A DECK CHAIR!

NOW, THIS IS THE TOUCHY PART. SHE HAS TO SAVE FOR SYSTEM SHOCK...





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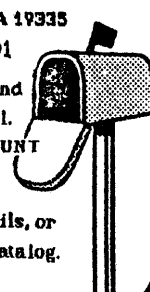
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# The Game Wizards

## Let Loose the Gods of War!

by Steven E. Schend

If you thought the planar battles of BLOOD WARS™ games couldn't get any wilder, you were wrong. The gods have arrived in force, and they've reset all the battle lines!

Released in early August, *Escalation Pack III: Powers & Proxies* brings the full power of all the gods into the BLOOD WARS fray. Finally, after patiently waiting since the DUEL-DECK releases of other Avatars, all the immortal powers can use their full powers! Why? Because *Powers & Proxies* includes all the Realms of Avatar Warlords from the first two sets and over 40 new Avatar Warlords and their Realms. Prepare yourself for the arrival of Odin, Zeus, Primus, Lolth, and other gods; the bloody planar wars have come to their notice, and they're ready to show their disapproval. After the deluge of Legions in *Factols & Factions*, this pack expands a player's supply of Warlords and Fates.

The *Powers & Proxies* set also introduces a number of new Fates into the BLOOD WARS card mix that twist some long-standing rules in the game. Try out cards that let you unflip Warlords out of sequence, such as Return to the Front. The "Campaign" cards help an entire Battle Hand but really boost the effectiveness of specific Warlords' Battle Hands—the Exiraati and Bahamut are even greater threats than before with Bast's Defense, Dispat's Campaign, Revenge of the Exiraati, and others in play! Eight Artifacts surface in *Powers & Proxies*, including Thor's hammer, Mjolnir, and other fantastic weapons. Finally, the Acolyte cards ensure that all the gods have ample Legions to worship them.

With no further ado, the card list for this set of 134 cards plus two special theme decks utilizing the best of the *P&P* set.

### Theme Decks: Powers & the Pit

These two 60-card decks, compiled from cards within the DUEL-DECKS and Escalation Packs II and III both represent an alliance of war gods and underlings. These Warlords wish to show the upstart baatezu (or anyone in their way) how little the Blood War has seen of true war! All cards in this deck are from Escalation Pack III except for those marked with an asterisk (\*) from the starter sets or Pack I or those marked with two asterisks (\*\*) from Pack II. There are two listed options for Legion and Fate mixes. The Acolytes deck is almost exclusively Legion: Acolyte cards from Pack III, and has other options for Fates. The New Recruits deck is easier to collect and put together. Use either deck or a mixture of the two to get the Powers into the fray!





## Acolytes Deck

**Battlefields (12):** Asgard\* (x2), Avernus, Baator\* (x2), Dis, Iron City of Dis\*, Minauros, Minauros the Sinking\*, Olympus (x2), and the Pillar of Skulls\*.

**Warlords (5):** Ares, Athena, Sif, Thor, Tyr

**Legions (24):** Abyssal Bats (x6), Knights Anarchic (x3), Legionnaires of the Light (x3), The Oracles (x3), Shator (x3), Valhalla's Finest\*\* (x3), and Valiants of Valhalla (x3).

**Fates (19):** Armor of Invulnerability

(x3), Axe of Anarchy (x3), Battleaxe of Discord (x2), Call to Arms\*, Gungnir, Lost Comrade Returns\*, Powers of Good Intervene\* (x2), Protection vs. Fate\* (x3), Return to the Front, Spirited Troops\* (x2).

## New Recruits Deck

**Battlefields (12):** Asgard\* (x2), Avernus, Baator\* (x2), Dis, Iron City of Dis\*, Minauros, Minauros the Sinking\*, Olympus (x2), and the Pillar of Skulls\*.

**Warlords (6):** Ares, Faerinaal the

Queen's Consort\*, Sif, Thor, Tulani Warlord\*, Tyr

**Legions (24):** Abyssal Bats (x3), The Entropy League\*\* (x3), Farastu (x3), Gladiator of Sigil\*\* (x3), Kelusar (x3), Shator (x3), Treant\*\* (x3), and Vorkhean Guard\*\* (x3).

**Fates (17):** Call to Arms\*, Emissary of Law (x3), Emissary of Chaos (x3), Emissary of Good (x3), Emissary of Evil (x3), Protection vs. Fate\* (x2), Spirited Troops\* (x2).

## BLOOD WARS™ Powers & Proxies Cards

**Distribution:** 15 cards per pack

**Frequency** = Common (C), Uncommon (UC), Rare (R), Ultra-Rare (UR), Chase (Ch).

**Card Artists** = Stephen Daniele (SD), Tony DiTerlizzi (TD), Jeff Dee (DEE), Diesel (DSL), John Dollar (JD), Newton Ewel (NE), Paul Jaquays (PJ), Rob Lazzeretti (RL), Erol Otus (EO), Jim Roslof (JR).

### Battlefields

P = Plane, L = Layer,  
Rm = Realm, S = Site

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Ankhwugat	Rm	R	NE
Avernus	L	C	RL
Bahamut's Palace	S	C	NE
Cania	L	R	TD
Court of Light	Rm	UC	NE
Dis	L	C	RL
Lolth's Grove	Rm	R	TD
Minauros	L	C	RL
Maladomini	L	R	RL
Malbolge	L	UC	RL
Nectar of Life	Rm	C	NE
Nessus	L	R	RL
Olympus	Rm	UC	NE
Phlegethos	L	UC	RL
Ruby Palace	Rm	C	NE
Stygia	L	UC	RL
Tiamat's Lair	Rm	C	NE

### Warlords new abbreviation:

Av = Avatar

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Apollo	Av	R	SD
Archduke Dispat	Av	Ch	TD
Ares	Av	C	SD
Athena	Av	C	SD
Artemis	Av	UC	SD
Baervan Wildwanderer	Av	R	TD
Baldur	Av	UC	DEE
Baron Molikroth	Av	UC	TD
Bast	Av	R	DEE
Bel, Regent of Avernus		C	TD
Dugmaren Brightmantle	Av	UC	TD
Dumathoin	Av	Ch	TD
Flandal Steelskin	Av	UC	TD
Frey	Av	Ch	DEE
Freya	Av	R	DEE
Garl Glittergold	Av	Ch	TD
Hod	Av	UC	JR
Ilsensine	Av	C	NE

Loki	Av	R	SD
Lolth	Av	Ch	NE
Merrshaulk	Av	R	NE
Muamman Duathal	Av	C	TD
Nephthys	Av	UC	DEE
Njord	Av	UC	SD
Odin	Av	Ch	DEE
Primus	Av	Ch	NE
Prince Levistus	Av	R	TD
Ramenos	Av	Ch	NE
Segojan Earthcaller	Av	C	TD
Selune	Av	R	NE
Semuanya	Av	UC	DSL
Set	Av	Ch	DEE
Shang-Ti	Av	Ch	NE
Sheela Peryroil	Av	UC	NE
Sif	Av	C	SD
Sung Chiang	Av	UC	NE
Surtr	Av	Ch	SD
Thor	Av	R	DEE
Thrym	Av	Ch	DEE
Tyr	Av	C	SD
Uller	Av	C	SD
Vergadain	Av	R	PJ
Wastrilith Dictator		C	TD
Yen-Wang-Yeh	Av	R	NE
Zeus	Av	Ch	SD

### Legions

AC = Acolyte, all of these Acolytes are  
Factions

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Abyssal Bats		C	TD
The Defenders Harmonic	AC	UC	JD
Farastu		C	TD
Garl's Faithful	AC	R	TD
Goristro		R	TD
Howler		R	TD
Kelubar		C	TD
The Kindred Souls	AC	R	SD
The Knights Anarchic	AC	UC	JD
Legionnaires of the Light	AC	UC	JD
Minion of Set	AC	R	TD
The Mythcarvers	AC	R	TD
The Oracles	AC	R	SD
Order's Battalion	AC	UC	JD
Shator		C	TD
Svartalfheim Drow		UC	TD
Tabaxi	AC	R	TD
Valiants of Valhalla	AC	R	SD
The Veterans Sanguine	AC	UC	JD

### Fates

AC = Acolyte, MI = Magical Item,  
AI = Artifact Item, O = Orders,  
SP = Spell, St = Support.

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
The Aegis	AI	Ch	JR
Apotheosis	Sp	UC	NE
Artemis' Bow	AI	Ch	SD
Arumdina	AI	Ch	TD
Axe of Anarchy	I	C	RL
Axe of the Dwarvish Lord	AI	Ch	TD
Bahamut's Charge	O	Ch	NE
Bast's Defense	O	Ch	NE
Battleaxe of Discord	I	UC	RL
Battlefield Revolt	O	R	RL
Bow of Law	I	C	RL
Bow of Order	I	UC	RL
Cavalry Rescue	O	R	NE
Chaotic Holy Symbol	MI	R	JD
Codex of Infinite Planes	AI	Ch	RL
Dispater's Campaign	O	UC	JD
Emissary of Chaos	AC	C	EO
Emissary of Evil	AC	C	TD
Emissary of Good	AC	C	TD
Emissary of Law	AC	C	DEE
Emissary of Neutrality	AC	C	JR
Evil Holy Symbol	MI	Ch	JD
The Floating Gods	Sp	Ch/UR	RL
Good Holy Symbol	MI	Ch	JD
Greater Coin of Fate	AI	Ch	RL
Gungnir	AI	Ch	SD
Holy Ground	Sp	Ch	NE
Lawful Holy Symbol	MI	R	JD
Marraenoloth Pilot	Sp	R	TD
Mass Desertion	O	Ch	RL
Mjolnir	AI	Ch	EO
Neutral Holy Symbol	MI	R	JD
Nightmare	St	UC	TD
Occupying Forces	O	Ch	JR
Pazrael's Onslaught	O	UC	JD
Prismatic Battlesphere	Sp	R	RL
Proxy of Chaos	Sp	C	TD
Proxy of Chaos II	Sp	UC	TD
Proxy of Evil	Sp	C	TD
Proxy of Evil II	Sp	UC	TD
Proxy of Good	Sp	C	TD
Proxy of Good II	Sp	UC	TD
Proxy of Law	Sp	C	TD
Proxy of Law II	Sp	UC	TD
Proxy of Neutrality	Sp	C	TD
Proxy of Neutrality II	Sp	UC	TD
Pyrrhic Victory	Sp	Ch	NE
Reenlistment	O	C	NE
Return to the Front	O	Ch	SD
Revenge of the Exiraati		O R	JD
Temporary Truce	O	Ch	NE
Throne of the Gods	AI	Ch	RL
Wrath of the Gods	Sp	Ch	RL

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# ■ Out with the Old, In with the New

Our theme this month seems to be transitions: We've got reviews for games on the ol' standard IBM platform, and we preview a pair of titles for the brand new Sony Playstation platform. We've got earlier and later games from the same design team that show the development of ideas, and we're even introducing a new reviewer, John Brunkhart.

## Reviews

### Hammer of the Gods

For IBM/DOS

Designed by HDI Software

Published by New World Computing

Requirements: 386 or faster, VGA graphics, 4MB RAM, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, DOS 3.3 or higher, mouse

### Machiavelli the Prince

For IBM/DOS

Designed by HDI Software

Published by MicroProse Software

Requirements: 386 or faster, VGA graphics, 4MB RAM, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, DOS 3.3 or higher, mouse

**Dee:** We're going to begin things this time with a comparative review of two games from HDI (Holistic Design Inc.). Their latest, *Hammer of the Gods*, is about norsemen, Vikings, and their gods.

**Jay:** HDI's other game is contemporary in publication but actually much older in design: *Machiavelli the Prince* is pretty much *Merchant Prince* (formerly published by QQP), with a facelift and a few new features.

**Dee:** *Machiavelli* was given an in-depth review last issue by David "Zeb" Cook, but we thought we'd bring up certain features of that game and compare it to *Hammer of the Gods*.

**Jay:** I liked *Hammer of the Gods*. It's not every day we stay up until 2:00 A.M. playing a review game.

**Dee:** Nor is it every day that you spend all the next day playing the game instead of writing the review!

**Jay:** I was doing additional research.

**Dee:** Yeah, right. Actually, Jay's fixation is a testament to the game's addictive nature. Both games also share some similarities. For instance, in *Machiavelli*, you have a particular art style of map (including a clever sepia-tone overlay that gives

### Ratings at a glance

Game	Jay	Dee	JB
<i>Hammer of the Gods</i>	4	3	—
<i>Machiavelli</i>	3	3	—
<i>Toh Shin Den</i>		3	—
<i>Ridge Racer</i>		2	—
<i>High Seas Trader</i>			2

# EYE OF THE MONITOR

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High Seas Trader (Impressions Software)

you an idea of what you'll find out there, but not the whole picture) and units, and a movement-point turn-based movement system with a smart "go to" feature. *Hammer* also has these features, and the two games look EXACTLY the same.

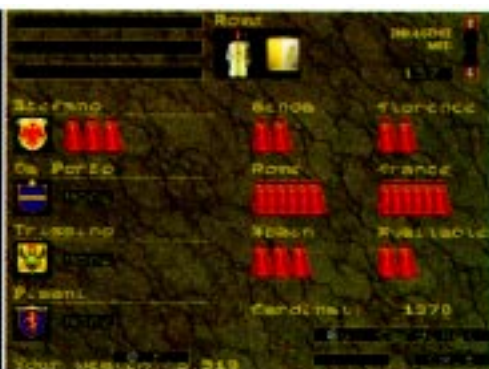
**Jay:** I agree. Both games have towns and a little digging-tool icon to lay roads between them. *Machiavelli* has a "here's what you can aspire to" gameplay feature—you want to control the Pope or the Doge, or possibly both—which makes you want to keep playing. In *Hammer*, the objective is to climb to the top of the "tree of quests" and complete the final quest.

**Dee:** So the burning question is: If you've played *Machiavelli*, does *Hammer* give you anything substantially different? If

you liked *Machiavelli*, will you like *Hammer*, or are they too similar?

**Jay:** The answer is yes, because I like them both. They are obviously the product of the same designers but each is a fun and absorbing game in its own right.

**Dee:** I still can't quite figure out what makes *Hammer* work so well. If you look carefully at each component of the game, there's nothing special; no new technologies in game design, art, or programming. You begin the game with a handful of Vikings and choose a starting quest offered by the gods (some of the quests can be completed at the end of the first turn). You sail your ship and its crew, searching the coastlines for towns with weak defenses. You attack by using a com-



Machiavelli the Prince (MicroProse Software)

bat interface that looks like it came from Sun Tsu's *The Ancient Art of War*:

**Jay:** Tactical decisions are important in combat: Should I shoot the toughest fellow 'till he dies, or just weaken him so my swordsmen can take him out? How do I maneuver so I get the first blow (a critically important advantage)? Do I have enough strength to take that walled city, or should I cut my losses and run? How do I keep my hero from getting killed?

**Dee:** You've just summarized the entirety of the tactical decisions. After that, you might as well put the combat on AUTO. In fact, that's what we ended up doing most of the time.

**Jay:** But it's a nicely thought-out feature. You can choose to run combats at several different animation speeds, including the ultra-fast "blur." It makes foregone conclusions go much faster. And I found the AI of the autopilot to be adequate for most combats.

**Dee:** If you win a combat you can choose to raid, pillage, raze, or subjugate the city you've just attacked. Each increases your gold supply and kills more people, but uses additional movement points which you might need later to escape from nasty counterattacks.

**Jay:** Not every city has defenders who will counterattack (if there's a road leading into the city, it's a good bet they've got castle-quartered back-up, even if you haven't discovered it yet). If you don't expect a counterattack, the razing or subjugating options allow you to colonize that town by leaving some of your Vikings behind. The town then grows and generates income, which goes directly into your coffers.

**Dee:** I found that a little odd at first but then I realized this was the way the Vikings actually did things. It's a shame that you can't do anything exciting with your cities in this game. You just leave them behind (hoping they're not in turn razed by another player) to start earning money which you use to outfit more and more Vikings.

**Jay:** The two things that make this game stand out from other run-of-the-mill games, are the diplomacy options and the quest screen. Diplomacy is an interesting option from a design point of view, since it has some nifty features.

**Dee:** Although most of these features aren't used very much during the game. You can offer people deals by specifying, in two different boxes, what you want and what you're willing to offer. You can only offer and want one thing, there are no multiple-point deals. Still, it's unlike diplomacy options in other games. That's exciting, until about a third of the way through when you realize there's nothing more to say to anyone, and all the work that went into diplomacy is no longer being used. It's cool, but not enough to make the game great.

**Jay:** Okay, I'll give you that. The quest screen, on the other hand, gives the game its heart. Quests consists of things like donating 250 pieces of gold to the gods, settling new villages, or pillaging settlements of village size or greater. Each time you complete a quest, you choose your next quest from a smaller list. You work your way up Ygdrasil, or the tree of the gods, toward Odin's final quest and victory!

**Dee:** Ygdrasil is a neat little "family tree" with accompanying digitized voices explaining each god's background. What's really cool, though, is the way the quests drive the game forward.

**Jay:** Exactly. You are never at a loss for something to do; even if you're a neophyte strategy gamer, completely overwhelmed by all the cities and choices out there, you can always attempt your next quest. The final Odin's quest forces you to get competitive even if you've been completely peaceful and non-interactive up to that point. Although if you're playing against humans with the network option, I'm guessing you're already raiding your buddies.

**Dee:** There are four different trees for the four races you can play: human, elf, dwarf, and troll. Each race has different goals; dwarves want gold because it's their path to success; elves want to multiply so colonization is their path, and so on. This gives you at least four replays of the game, trying out each race to see which suits your style. And of course, just like in *Machiavelli*, there's a random map generator that's pretty detailed, and new maps can extend the challenge even further.

**Jay:** In summary, although Dee's right, there's nothing you can point to that's substantially innovative in *Hammer of the*

*Gods*, but the HDI guys have nevertheless found a formula for success that kept me playing long after I should have gone to bed. I give it.\*\*\*\*

**Dee:** I agree. As I said before, if you look closely there's very little there in terms of complexity or innovation, but sometimes simple is best. The quest system pushes you forward and that's all that really matters.\*\*\* from me.

Now let's continue with a quick preview of two titles coming out for the Sony Playstation. I don't think Playstations are available in the U.S. yet—when I called my local toy retailer, they were expecting to see 'em in September—but I understand they're selling well in Japan.

**Jay:** I haven't played the games—is this another 3DO, or something big?

**Dee:** Hard to predict, of course, but I'm guessing something big. The first game I saw, *Toh Shin Den* from Japan, is a stunning fight game similar to *Virtua Fighter*. There are those who say *Virtua Fighter* is better, but *Toh Shin Den* has many engaging features and isn't terribly difficult to play, even for people like me who normally fail miserably at fight games. And the graphics are just amazing; they really show off the power of the Playstation.

*TSD* uses a neat swinging camera feature that zooms in and out to keep all the action on the screen, no matter how far apart the two combatants get. And all the characters have cool, distinguishable personalities. The biggest lack in *TSD* is that the game features only a few hidden moves. Most fight games have lots of hidden maneuvers to find, but each character in *TSD* has about four. Still, that's one of the things that made it easier to play.

**Jay:** I must say, the graphic smoothness and detail was impressive. Watching fights was darn close to watching an animated movie. Was the racing game as amazing and new as *Toh Shin Den*?

**Dee:** Unfortunately, no. *Ridge Racer*, from Namcot, is based on the arcade game of the same name, so the graphics are very high quality, but when you come right down to it there's not much new you can do with racing games. The best feature, I found, was that the steering was not as sensitive as it is in most console





conversions from the arcade: I was actually able to stay on the road by my second race, and by my fourth I was pulling cool maneuvers. That's partly due to the good design of the original game, and partly to the neat controller of the Playstation. It's similar to other console controllers, but it has two wings for gripping and handy finger buttons at the top so your thumbs don't lose their place.

Overall, I give *Toh Shin Den* ★★★ because it looks so amazing and it's fun (even if it doesn't have cool hidden moves) and *Ridge Racer* ★★ because it's "just another racing game."

## High Seas Trader

For IBM/DOS

Published by Impressions Software

Requirements: 386 or faster, VGA graphics, 4MB RAM, hard drive, CD-ROM drive,

DOS 3.3 or higher, mouse

Reviewed by John Brunkhart

Most seasoned computer adventurers have fond memories of lost hours spent in front of a 16-color display, plying the Caribbean courtesy of Sid Meier's now-classic *Pirates!* game. It wasn't just the clash of steel or lust for booty that kept devotees returning to the game. Instead, *Pirates!* had the ability, like all great adventure games, to transport players to another place and time. Sure, your little ships slid around on a flat blue screen, and all your sword fights progressed by shuffling left and right in a line as strict as any Olympic fencing match, but still the *feel* was there. To be a truly successful swashbuckler, *Pirates!* ensured you had to be concerned with more than just lengthening your string of victories at sea. There were governor's daughters to marry, long-lost relatives to be found, and estates to build back home. And you had to accomplish all of this while your precious years of youthful vitality were being leached away by the harsh life of a buccaneer.

Now, a decade later, computer speed and multimedia technology can bring us games in living color, with stereo sound and cinematic animation sequences. Yet the magic that can take us from our dens and offices to another world remains elusive. The impression I got from the back of the box was that *High Seas Trader*, the latest offering from Impressions Software, takes *Pirates!* one step further by delivering an upgraded, 3-D version of a classic swashbuckling adventure, with a trade-oriented flair.

### The Basic Idea

You are an aspiring ship captain of the latter seventeenth century, during Golden Age of Piracy. Arrr! *Shiver the timbers and hoist the mizzen!* Time to go pluck a few ripe merchantmen and fill the coffers with ill-gotten plunder, right? Not so fast!

This time, you're sailing that ripe merchant ship and all of those pirates are after you! Money is still the name of the game, but fortunes are to be made from successful trade runs and full cargo holds rather than cannons and boarding parties. A good head for figures and an eye for profits can earn you the recognition of your peers (and the right to command bigger and better ships), titles from your government, and (most importantly) a posh estate filled with rare art treasures.

### Gameplay

The object of *High Seas Trader* is to amass as much wealth as possible. Bravery and honor are measured in the game, but they only increase your personal standing. This allows you to purchase larger, faster ships—whose principal advantage is that they can generate larger profits that much faster. Trading is at the heart of this game. Sea combat and international politics take a back seat to the game's economic aspects, while exploration, romance, and intrigue are non-existent. This is truly a game for merchants only!

At first glance, *High Seas Trader* looks promising. You begin by stocking your ship with cannons, supplies, and crew. Prospective captains can choose from a wide variety of armaments for their vessels, from tiny swivel guns to gigantic cannons. The game offers a choice of historical ammunition such as round shot (cannonballs good for putting holes in the enemy's hull), grape shot (small balls which wreak havoc among enemy crewmen) and chain shot (nothing tears sails to shreds faster).

Supplies are broken down into meat, fruit, rum, and water to keep the crew in good repair, and sailcloth and planks to keep the ship in good repair. After your ship is outfitted, it's time to take on a crew of sailors, soldiers, and apprentices. Make a final stop for charts at the chart house, and it's time to get down to business and haul cargo.

The trading aspect of the game is similar to *Machiavelli the Prince*, and is quite frankly the game's best feature. A variety of commodities are available to trade, from simple goods such as cotton and grain to more exotic wares like silks, jewelry, and opium. Dozens of seaports, from the Far East to the Americas, serve as markets. The secret of making money is to buy your cargo where it is plentiful and cheap (tobacco in Charleston, South Carolina, for example) and then sell where demand is high (tobacco always goes for a good price in London).

If you flood a market with goods, prices begin to drop and so do your profits. In this respect, the economy is realistic. It prevents you from finding a safe, high-profit route and exploiting it endlessly. Sure, they may like Russian furs in Bombay, but once every household has two or three, the novelty wears off.

The trading screens are straightforward and easy to use. You are presented with a series of log sheets showing the price of all goods at the current port-of-call, as well as the quantities available for sale and the amount aboard your ship. It takes a bit of electronic page-turning to check the prices at other ports (to determine where to take that load of cargo you just picked up), but is still relatively easy to get used to.

Unfortunately, there aren't any pages representing both the supply and demand of goods at port. Goods also have two prices at each port, one for buying and one for selling (more realistic, perhaps, but be sure you've made up your mind before you close a deal, because you can't sell those kegs of rum back for the amount you bought them at).

In contrast to many other trade/economic games, *High Seas Trader* does not give you the option to command a fleet of ships and manage a merchant empire. Your vessel is the only one you've got. The designers address this in their notes by saying that they didn't want anything to interfere with the game's "first-person" perspective. To further put the player inside the game, *HST*'s centerpiece is a port-to-port, ship's-bridge 3-D view for sailing. Rather than a little ship moving around on a map, you see the coastlines slide past and ships appear on the horizon.

Unfortunately, while a fine concept, the first-person sailing falls short in execution. The endlessly scrolling coasts all look pretty much the same. The sky never changes, except in stormy weather, when it instantly becomes dark and uniformly overcast. Ships suddenly appear sitting flat on the horizon (à la *SeaWolf* that great arcade game from the late Seventies) and then slowly grow larger, presenting just a few standard renderings relative to the direction your ship is facing.

Five years ago, such a presentation would have been ground-breaking, but today, it seems rather uninspiring. After ten minutes of watching the same coast

pass by and staring at the same clouds, I gave up on the 3-D sailing feature. I began plotting my courses on the charts and letting the game's "first mate" feature do the sailing. I was back to watching a little ship move around on a map, but at least it was faster.

Still, I had to return to the 3-D screen when it was time for ship-to-ship combat. Here a good first-person perspective would really have a chance to shine, as the player would be thrust into the role of a fighting captain, judging ship positions, the wind, when and how to turn to present a broadside, and how to avoid the fall of the enemy's shot. Unfortunately, again, the 3-D gameplay, such as it was, was not up to the task.

Combat consists largely of turning the helm in circles, trying to keep the rapidly advancing or receding enemy lined up with the middle of the broadside view and then firing the cannons. Line-up, shoot, reload, line-up, shoot, reload was the order of the day.

Wind plays little or no factor, which I found both unusual and unforgivable in a sailing game. Ships can sail directly upwind (albeit a little more slowly) without tacking, and a more maneuverable ship can always dart easily into and out of range. Ship-to-ship combat, hard-pressed to entertain even the hack-and-slash set, seems to simulate a contest between motorboats with side-mounted shotguns far better than the age of fighting sail.

I wouldn't advise using the auto-combat feature unless your firepower is vastly superior to that of the enemy. As tedious as combat in *HST* can be, it is still better to endure it in person than suffer the beating an enemy can inflict when you turn your ship over to computer control.

Of course, if you get tired of cannons, you can always close to point-blank range and attempt boarding combat. In *HST*, this is guaranteed to end the battle quickly one way or the other. As captain, the only choice you get is when to retreat from the fight. Otherwise, you just sit back and watch as the computer plays a standard "boarding combat" animation sequence and sends the two crews at each other. Since you have no control over the fight itself, it is absolutely necessary to have a well-armed and well-trained crew. Soldiers fight better than sailors, who in turn fight better than apprentices, and a healthy, happy crew with lots of flintlocks fights harder.

Still, the lack of player control is not the most irksome aspect of boarding. In the course of about 20 boarding combats, I never once saw the crew which started out with the upper hand (in combat strength, if not numbers) lose a battle. Forget those see-saw, hair-raising sword fights that are a staple of the genre. As long as you begin a fight with the stronger crew, the outcome is never in doubt.

## The Final Analysis

I suppose, in all fairness, *High Seas Trader* was not designed as a combat game. Still, I found myself similarly disappointed in other areas where the game seemed to show some initial promise and then did not follow through. For example, at certain ports of call, there are smugglers and passengers which seek to employ you for errands both noble and nefarious. Yet smuggling never pays, because the amount you can make from a smuggling run is dwarfed by the profit of a single legitimate trade voyage, and you buy yourself a load of trouble from the authorities to boot. Passengers ask for your aid, but the risk is seldom worth the reward. Simple trade routes prove to be the single road to success.

Again and again, what seemed like obvious chances to make *HST* into a truly entertaining game were not expanded upon, or were outright overlooked. If combat were not so simplistic, the choices of ammo and cannon types would be more meaningful. If the sky scenery in the 3-D sailing view indicated which direction bad weather lay, the first-person perspective would be useful. Though a crew needs many different supplies to survive, except for fruit (which spoils faster), the supplies are pretty much identical in cost and the rate at which they are used. Though you can carry sailcloth and planks for repairs, at few points during the game does repair at sea seem to be a crucial factor.

Even the estates which you can buy as a symbol of your wealth and success are differentiated only by the number of art treasures each can hold. I would have preferred a more active ranking system whereby I could gage my progress from, say, shopkeeper to city councilman to Earl of Ipswich, as I climbed the ladder of monetary success.

I had originally thought to review *High Seas Trader* as either an updated *Pirates!* or as a possible trade-game competitor to *Machiavelli*, but in both cases there is little comparison. If combat, smuggling, and the passenger missions had been expanded, or a storyline of sorts added, the game might have been a worthy successor to *Pirates!* If there had been more I could have done with all the money I was collecting, such as bribing port authorities or buying noble titles, the game might have been a worthy competitor to *Machiavelli*. The trading aspects of the game are well-developed, and could have been the cornerstone of a fine game, but as it was, *High Seas Trader* didn't keep me interested for long. Still, one good thing came out of all this sailing about-I suddenly discover myself with the urge to dust off my old copy of *Pirates!* and set sail. . . .

**Overall Rating: ★★**





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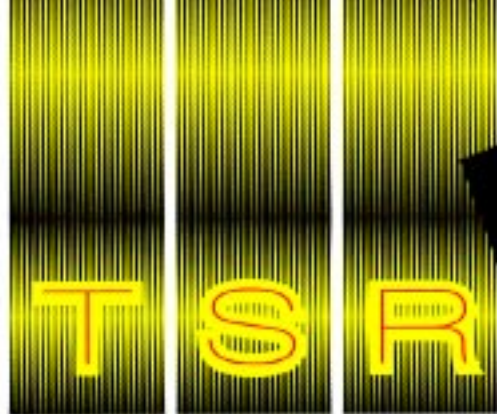
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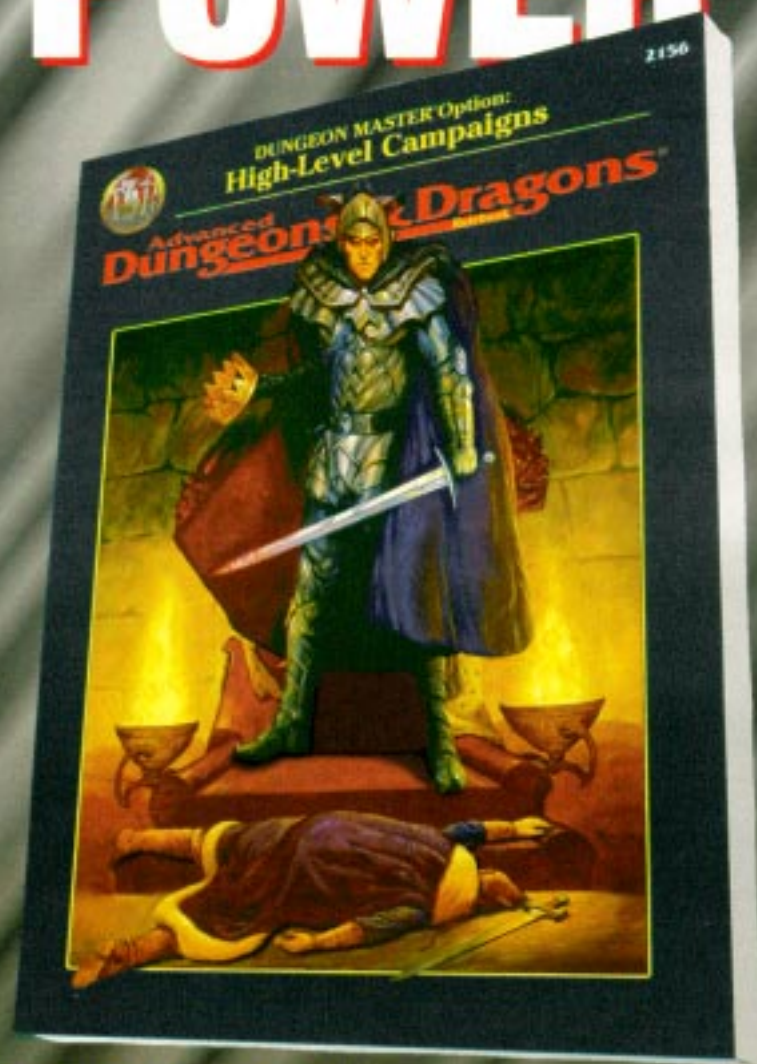


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