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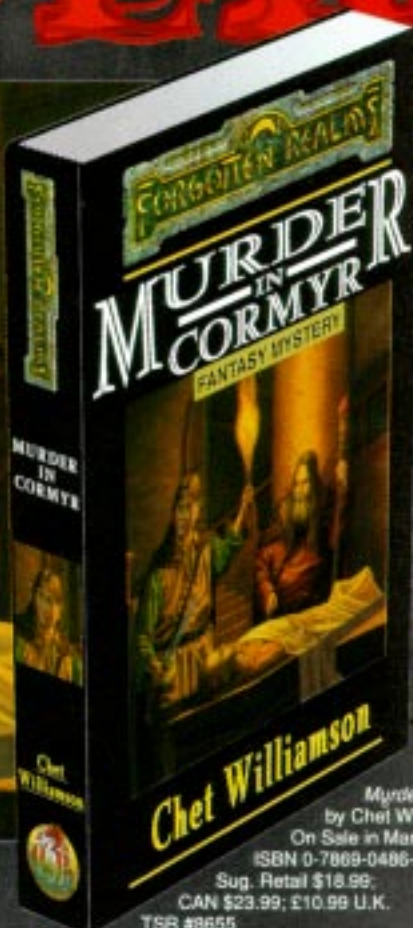


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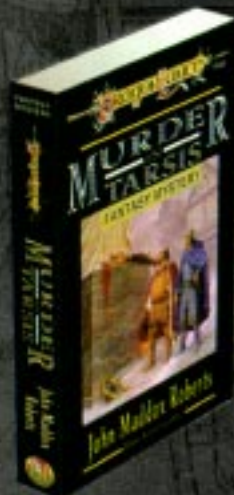


IN THE

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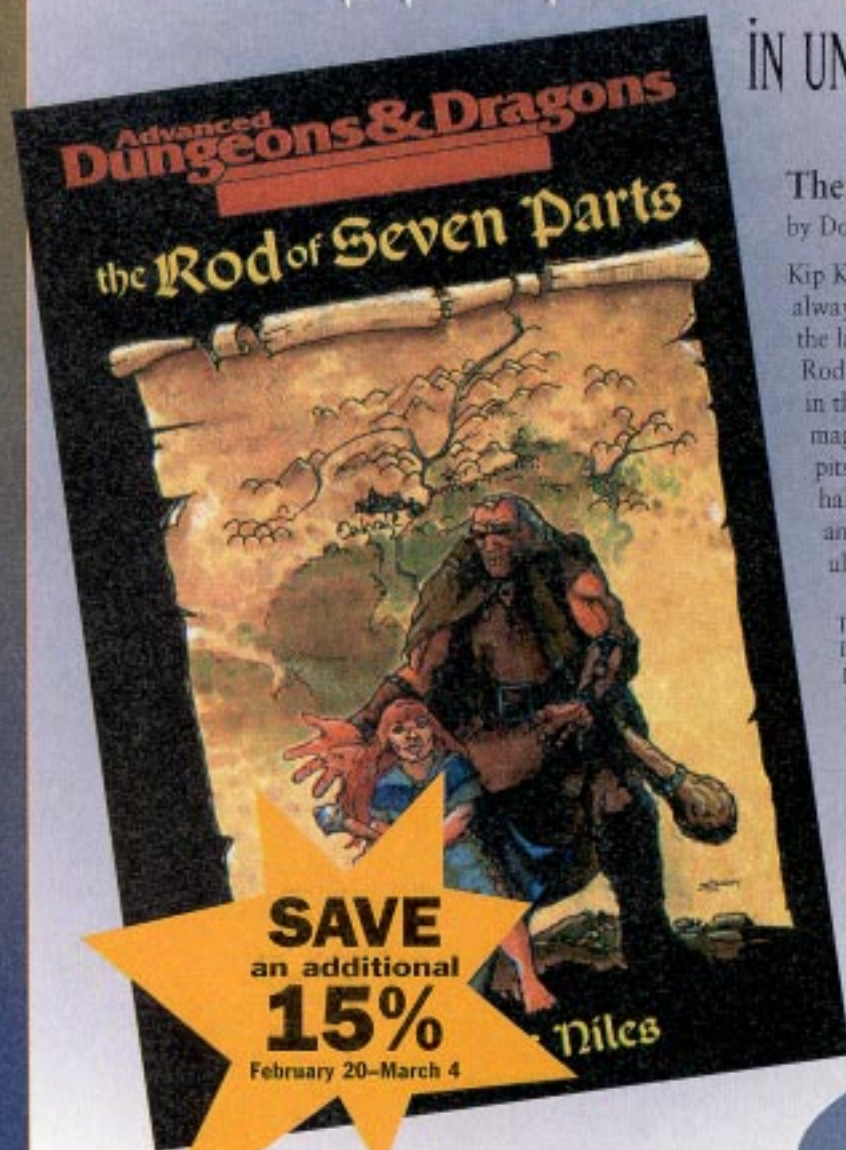


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The Wyrms' Turn

Breaking into print

One of the questions we receive most often is some variation on "How do I get to be a writer for TSR?"

Writing for *DRAGON® Magazine* is a good start.

The first thing you need is knowledge of the magazine, of our audience, and of the game system you plan to write about. (Don't write an article on *FORGOTTEN REALMS®* lore that includes defilers.)

You also have to know the mechanics — the how — of writing for a magazine. For *DRAGON Magazine* and *DUNGEON® Adventures*, the basics are in our writer's guidelines, which you should request by sending us a note and a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). Specify which set of guidelines you want.

There are other submission guidelines that are fairly standard in the publishing industry. These include having your name, the article title, and a page number on every page; double spacing your manuscripts; and using a font such as Courier in a legible size. The standard is 12-point type. The reason for this standard is twofold: legibility, and that each page is approximately 250 words in length, and we can get an idea of word count by looking at the manuscript. Small, single-spaced, proportional fonts like Times or Helvetica hurts our eyes, and tends to make us predisposed to dislike a submission. You can get more information from books and magazines on writing such as *Writer's Digest* and *The Writer*.

Now for the hard part. We return manuscripts full of basic grammatical or syntactical errors. For instance, know the difference between *their*, *they're*, and *there*. Punctuate your sentences properly. Know the difference between passive voice ("the ball was thrown") and active ("I threw the ball"), and why we prefer the latter.

If your cover letter is riddled with typos and misspellings, we can't take your work seriously. That's not being cruel; that's being realistic. We get dozens of queries and submissions every week, and we can spend only so much time on them. We have to know which ones to look at and which ones not to waste time on.

Okay, you have all this down. Good. You're ahead of the pack. The next step is to send us a query letter. Don't forget the disclosure form that's attached to our guid-

lines. Submissions without that form are returned unread. (You did remember the SASE, didn't you?) Remember to spell out what you plan to write. Don't just say "I've got 15 new magic spells" or "There are five new magical swords." That doesn't tell us anything. What *are* the spells? What do they do? What kind of swords, and why do we need them? That's what creates interest. Think of yourself as a salesman. Be convincing.

In your cover letter, tell us why you should write this article. If you are submitting something on Ancient Egyptian PC kits, for example, We'd be more impressed if you had a small library of on Egypt, studied the history, or even took classes in Middle Egyptian at U.C. Berkeley a few years ago. This tells me that you know your material and aren't likely to make whopping great mistakes.

We prefer queries to whole articles because we may not be interested. If we are, we'll ask for the article. We may give you a deadline if a particular issue is coming up that suits your idea.

I generally discourage e-mail queries for *DRAGON Magazine* (it's hard to put your best foot forward when you're used to the informality of online banter), but if you are on an online service and we are interested in an article, we may ask you to e-mail it to us.

Enough of the bad news.

If you want to break into print, an easy place is the departments. Bazaar of the Bizaare, Dragon's Bestiary, Arcane Lore, and the like are always popular.

I'm not trying to discourage anyone from submitting material. In fact, I actively encourage submissions from new writers. So why do some names pop up over and over in our pages? Because they do it right, and they do it well. If you have an original idea that is really good, and you can present it well and clearly, you may find your name in the magazine one day as well.

For an editor, few things are as exciting as opening an envelope from a new writer and finding a piece that is just what we need. Will your submission be the next one?



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February 1996
Volume XX, No. 9
Issue #226



The Magic Goes Away

Paul Fraser

What's the secret to game balance? Could it be limiting the number and power of users of magic?

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Rome May Not Have Been Built In a Day, But...

David Clarke

Your campaign world can be. This simple step-by-step walkthrough shows how to make one in just a few hours

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Off-the-Cuff NPCs

Melissa C. Thompson

The key to an enjoyable gaming experience is memorable NPCs, and now you can create a few in no more time than it takes to read this blurb.

Page 22

Improve with Improv

Jason Strasser

Improvational skills are not just for musicians. Good DMs need to be able to make rulings and come up with game elements on the fly.

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Dot to Dot

Michelle Bottorff

They may all look alike on the map, but not all cities are identical. Don't make all your towns clones of each other.

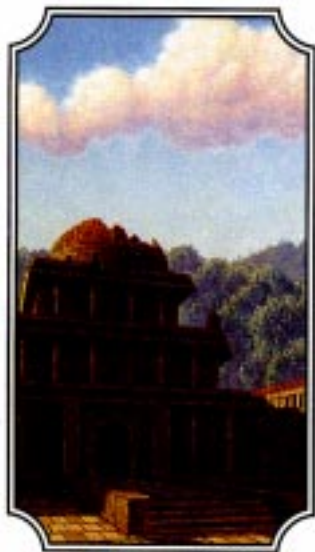
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Andrew Turpin

Sometimes it's the things people do that make their objects magical.

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Michael A. Selinker

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William W. Connors

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David Howery

Sometimes, it's not the sword that's magical. . .

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Rogue's Gallery: Theahtyn

Robert Martin

Meet Theahtyn, a powerful dwarven fighter. Just when his life was calming down, tragedy struck. Now he is coming out of retirement, and he has a mission.

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Rudy Thalberger

When your world is surrounded by sand, that becomes the fool you use. These wonderful sands were once the exclusive possessions of sha'irs.

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Replacing old magazines

Dear DRAGON,

In DRAGON® Magazine issue #166, you published a game called "Dino-Wars." I liked this game so much that I cut the pages out of the magazine and put them in a notebook. Recently, my notebook was lost in a move. Could you please send me a copy of this article to replace the one I lost? If it's not possible, could you tell me where to write to buy a replacement copy of the issue?

G.S. James
Lindale, TX

As you may guess, we can't photocopy part of an issue and send it out. You can order back issues from TSR's Mail Order Hobby Shop, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147 The number is 1-800-558-5972

Issue #166 costs \$3.50 (plus postage).

Exclusive material for RPGA® Network members

Dear DRAGON,

I recently sent for and received the TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop catalogue. When it arrived, I also found information on joining the RPGA® Network and a back issue (#96) of the POLYHEDRON® Newszine. As I leafed through it, I noticed an article by Ed Greenwood called "Mysterious Turmish." I play and DM in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, so this

caught my interest. When I finished it, I found that it was the first of a series of articles about the land of Tumish. Does this mean that nothing is to be issued on this subject for general publication? As I have never been an RPGA Network member, does this mean that I cannot read about this and other areas of interest within the FORGOTTEN REALMS that have also appeared in POLYHEDRON?

Phil Martin
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne,
England

POLYHEDRON has published a great deal of interesting material that has never appeared anywhere else. One of the good things about joining the RPGA Network is the access to all this exclusive material. You can possibly get back issues from the Network, but I'd suggest joining. I was amazed the first time I looked at a POLYHEDRON. It may be TSR's best-kept secret, but we're trying to let people know that it's out there.

Looking for Giants in the Earth

Dear DRAGON,

I enjoyed the series "Giants in the Earth." To my dismay, I only have a portion of the series. What I am hoping for is to obtain a copy of that entire series of articles. If you can help me, I would appreciate it.

John P. Hazen
Masury, OH

"Giants in the Earth" was a series from the old days of double-digit DRAGON issues. The series featured heroes from literature and legend done up with gaming stats. No compilation of them has ever been done, and there's never been an attempt to bring it back.

Sorry, but we can't photocopy articles and send them out, either. Your best chance to get any old pieces you want is to find available back issues.

There was an index for all past DRAGON Magazine articles in issue #214, so you can find out which issues you need. I'd suggest

then writing the Mail Order Hobby Shop and haunting gaming conventions looking for the issues you want. Good luck.

Castles and magic defense: taking a second look

Dear DRAGON,

I have a problem with Jeffrey Paul's article "The Castle Designer's Guide to Coping with Magic and the Supernatural" (issue #224). He's overlooking the basic principal of castle defense: the castle walls are the *last* line of defense.

In his example, he illustrates what happened to Hector, the hapless DM, who was stunned by his players' annihilation of his castle. Mr. Paul decided that the problem was a design flaw in the castle. With the exception of his improved towers, he had some very good ideas.

Unfortunately, any decently creative players would be merely slowed by his suggestions. Defending a castle isn't about how tall the walls are or how you have built them. Both are important, but defending a castle is about keeping an enemy from reaching the walls in the first place. Defending the walls is the last option of the desperate. The first line of defense is always information.

If someone wants to attack a castle, they have to come from somewhere and have equipment and support personnel or retainers. Any decent network of scouts will see them coming long before the party can get within spell range.

Devices such as the heliograph existed in Greek and Roman times. Systems like the pony express could be employed. This doesn't even consider such things as divination magic and *crystal balls*.

Once sighted, a small group of soldiers should be sent against the enemy to test their strength and resources. This determined, the castleholder can launch a series of appropriate attacks on the party.

If the party is able to reach the castle, the castleholder still has at his disposal one of the most devastating weapons of

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the middle ages: archers. Individually, low-level or zero-level NPCs are little more than sword fodder to a high-level fighter, but 50 archers are not. In the example by Mr. Paul, two towers of guards were wiped out by *fireballs* from ground-level arrowslits. Most castles in the real world avoided placing arrowslits that low; that was where the walls had to be the strongest. The only exceptions were castles built in the middle of lakes or rivers, where siege engine or battering ram use would be unlikely.

Toward the end of the article, he proposes a version of improved towertops. His idea was to dome over the tovertop because they were exposed to aerial attack. If you don't have a self-guided weapon, the best anti-air-assault defense is to fill the sky with weapons. By doming over the tovertop, the defenders have given up at least half of their arcs of fire. An open, flat-topped tower is ideal for massive arrow volleys.

One may argue that arrows alone are a poor defense against creatures like dragons or griffons, but if the defenders could launch several hundred arrows before the dragon were to come within breath range, how would the dragon likely fare?

One last point; if the party is blessed with this juggernaut factor, so too should be the castleholder and his lieutenants. If there is a powerful mage in the party, give the defender one. If one of the party is a high-level fighter, give the castleholder a powerful lieutenant. The point is that gadgets and gizmos don't defend castles. People do. Any DM who forgets that should change his name to Hector.

James A. Mieritz

Interesting counterpoint.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Takeda Shingen, one of my heroes. He was a Japanese daimyō of the Warring States Period (1570s) who was famous for among other things eschewing castles when castle-building was all the rage for his peers. He wrote a poem that described his moats,

walls, and castle defenses as consisting of his loyal retainers and vassals.

What is and isn't obsolete?

Dear DRAGON,

I haven't been gaming for very long but I've collected a moderate amount of material. Some recent events have me worried. With the new books out and coming out (the new *Player's Handbook* and *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, and the *PLAYER'S OPTION™* and *DUNGEON MASTER Option* books), are the old *PHB* and *DMG* supplements obsolete? Are they worthless now? Will there be any more of the *PHB* and *DMG* supplements?

Christopher C. Decker
Frederic, MI

If you mean the Complete handbook series (The Complete Wizard's Handbook, The Complete Paladin's Handbook, etc.), I don't think we'll ever run out of material. (Note the recent Complete Necromancer's Handbook and Complete Ninja's Handbook.) Does PLAYER'S OPTION make any of them obsolete? No, they just contain different information.

With this much optional material available for play, it is no surprise that some rules conflict with others. You'll have to decide which parts work better for the style of campaign you run. It may sound like work (and it is), but you'll have a really special, unique world when you're finished.

You could also do what a lot of gamers I know do; use everything you can find that interests you, and resolve the rare rule conflicts as they occur using common sense and DM fiat.

Reviewing the reviews

Dear DRAGON,

I notice in Rick Swan's reviews that he never approaches the most important point about the supplements he reviews. Do they make the game more fun? If not, then regardless of how well-crafted, they are useless and potential buyers should be warned.

On the Cover



Scott Burdick's unique vision of "The Eye of the Dragon" dramatically portrays the immense size and presence of these mythical beasts. It isn't often that we get a glimpse of the intelligence and sensitivity these fearsome creatures are capable of:

We here in the frozen tundra of the upper midwest were also drawn to the abundance of purple cone flowers. With such an image in circulation, can spring really be far behind?

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In *DRAGON Magazine* #222, Swan reviews *The Complete Book of Necromancers*. I would like to give my two cents worth.

The new nonweapon proficiencies and kits are useful. The Vile Pacts and Dark Gifts are unnecessarily unbalancing. They do have weaknesses, but I have added something. Good priests can turn any recipient of Dark Gifts as specials. This brings back game balance.

Another point; the AD&D game is not Call of Cthulhu*. Insanity spells and madness descriptions are unnecessary. The only thing I would have added is a complete spell description of all the necromantic spells now available in the game. Having them all under one cover would be a big help.

Steve Shawler

It would be great if we could put everything in the Complete series that we'd like; unfortunately, we're constrained by space. We can only include so much, so material appearing elsewhere, like other necromantic spells, have to be given only a mention. As for the insanity rules, I must disagree. Different campaigns call for different measures.

I've never had a brownie, pixie, or sprite in any of my campaigns, but I wouldn't say we should have no rules for them. Rick may not always say in so many words that "X is a fun supplement," but it should be fairly clear from his review if he enjoyed it. If he didn't, he'll let you know.

Jobs in the RPG industry

Dear *DRAGON*,

I'm a junior at a small college on the Chesapeake Bay. Graduation is rolling closer, and I'm facing the old question of what to do when I'm out in the real world. I recently got to thinking about turning my long role-playing experience and exposure to the gaming world into a career.

How does someone go about getting a job in the role-playing industry? Are there many positions available?

Justin C. Keane

I can't tell you about the availability of positions. My experience is that if the right person comes along, a position can be found. The best way to get hired by an RPG company is to send in your resume.

If you don't have much of a track record,

*you might want to establish a name for yourself by selling a few articles to gaming magazines like *DRAGON Magazine* or *DUNGEON® Adventures*. If that route interests you, write to us, ask for a copy of our writer's guidelines, and enclose an SASE for them.*

Good luck.



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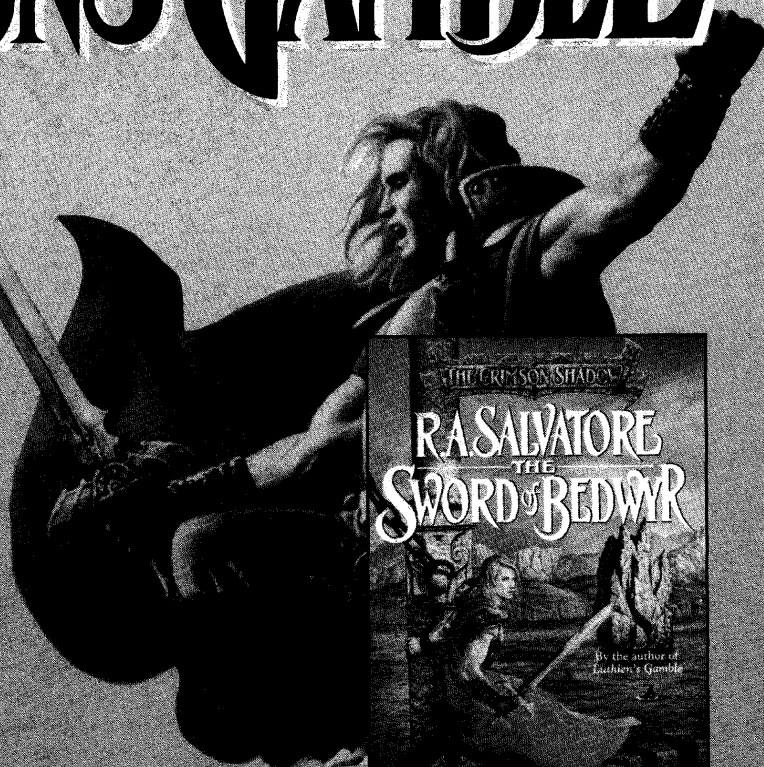
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The Magic Goes

Awful

by Paul Fraser

illustrated by Pamela Shanteau & Tom Baxa

Cutting down on spellcasters is the key to campaign balance

Every game master worth his dice agonizes over keeping his campaign balanced. The fiend Monty Haul stalks every self-respecting GM.

One reason to limit magic is that an overabundance is the easiest way for any fantasy role-playing campaign to get out of control. Spells and magical items can catapult a carefully balanced campaign into Valhalla faster than too much treasure or too rapid level advancement, because magic is the most powerful tool — and weapon — that player characters have.

Another reason for limiting magic is authenticity. To make a fictional world come alive to the players, it must be authentic. Many campaigns are patterned — however tenuously — on real-life examples. Medieval Europe seems the most popular choice, but even if your campaign is based on Homer's *Iliad* or Japan's Sengoku Era, you must still ensure your creation is faithful to its prototype.

Consider a typical *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® campaign patterned after Europe during the Middle Ages. Your players have probably pointed out the use-

lessness of traditional stone castles in a world with spells such as *fly*, *transmute rock to mud*, and *earthquake*.

Magic makes it difficult to justify the feudal society that forms the backdrop of most campaigns. How can mortality rates and food shortages exist when a cursory reading of *The Player's Handbook* suggests the head priest of every village temple is at least 8th level? That means every community has access to three *cure light wounds*, three *slow poison*, three *cure disease* or *create food and water*, and two *neutralize poison* or *cure serious wounds* spells per day.

What about wizards? What's the point of all those feudal armies when a 5th-level mage with a *fireball* can kill up to 30 Hit Dice worth of 0-level men-at-arms at a crack? Why should long-distance travel be difficult with *teleport* and *teleport without error* spells?

Magic also raises a much larger question about technological development. Why bother with technological innovations (windmills, crossbows, clocks) when magic can accomplish the same results more efficiently? Indeed,



some campaigns (such as the MYSTARA® setting) boast highly magical worlds with efreeti-driven steamships and the like.

Some GMs are uncomfortable with high-magic worlds and the logic problems generated by widespread magic, or they want their campaign worlds to be authentic reflections of a given era (such as those DMs who use TSR's excellent historical reference campaign source-books).

The historical reference books offer plenty of practical advice on limiting magic in a campaign, depending on whether the GM wants a historical, legendary, or fantasy flavor. Methods include lengthening spell casting times, limiting spell selection, and restricting available character classes.

There is more to consider than just how to limit magic; one must consider *why* to limit magic. The matter isn't just rules and campaign flavor; it's game balance, pure and simple.

For instance, what's to stop a clever priest or wizard PC from casting *continual light* spells atop wooden poles to create public lighting for a city or town, setting himself up as a sort of public utility company? Both versions of the spell are permanent, and both are available at relatively low level (3rd level for the wizard, 5th level for the priest).

A greedy wizard ought to make a killing selling easily produced magical items. Similarly, a character with a *decanter of endless water* could exact a huge sum from a desert kingdom.

Telling a player his character can't establish a public lighting utility "because of game balance" is likely to annoy him. Good DMs must offer their players reasons for the rarity of magic and its value within the context of the campaign.

The root of the problem

Limiting magic means limiting spellcasters. They're the ones who cast those troublesome spells. They create those pesky magical items.

Spellcasters must be rare. In too many campaigns (including some published worlds), priests and wizards are as common as fleas on a junkyard dog. The *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* stresses: "The great mass of humanity, elf-kind, the dwarven clans, and halflings are '0-level' (zero-level) characters."

The *DMG* goes on: "Only a few people actually attain any character level, no matter how low. Not every soldier who fights in a war becomes a fighter. Not every urchin who steals an apple from the marketplace becomes a thief character."

The *DUNGEON MASTER® Option: High-Level Campaigns* book proposes that only one person in 10 qualifies to become an adventurer and break that 0-level barrier.

In real terms, Florence in the 1400s, with a population estimated at 40,000, would have had about 4,000 adventuring characters of all types and all levels. Some DMs might feel even this guideline of one in ten too generous and consider ratios of 1:20 or even 1:50 more in line with the admonishment in the *DMG*.

It's worth pointing out that the *High-Level Campaigns* book establishes the ratio for the sake of an example. The ratio is based on the assumption that the minimum requirement for an adventurer is a 15 or better prime requisite ability score, a Constitution of at least 9, and no other score lower than 8. A DM might chose more stringent minimums.

Words of wisdom

The *DMG* explicitly states that spellcasting priests are rare: "Priest characters are (obviously) not required to take up arms and set out on adventures to smite evil. No, their hierarchies require administrators, clerks, and devout workers of all types."

No one expects a 10,000-strong army to be made up entirely of 1st-level fighters. Why should religious hierarchies be made up of 1st-level (and up) spellcasting priests?

According to the *DMG*, "it is possible to have leaders within a religious hierarchy who show no signs of special clerical ability, only proper faith and piety." The measure of a priest is devotion, not raw power.

Even the high priest of a faith need not have spellcasting powers. Remember that village head priest? He is most likely 0 level, with no ability to cast spells.

The *DMG* says only a few inhabitants of a temple or monastery will be members of the priest character class. Chances are good many such places won't have any spellcasters.

After all, the ability to cast spells is a powerful gift. Surely a deity will grant it only to exceptional individuals, in much the same way paladinhood is reserved for a chosen elite. And surely those abilities will be granted only to someone who really needs them and will use them daily — not the acolyte stuck at a monastery copying books, but an adventuring priest battling his faith's foes. Spellcasting priests should be the exception, not the rule, in any clergy.



The next time the PCs stumble into a local shrine seeking healing from the resident priest, they'll be in for a surprise. Characters will be forced to rely on their own resources. Resurrection and *raise dead* spells will be much harder to come by. Not only will characters be forced to pay through the nose or trade favors to secure such aid, they'll first have to track down the spellcasting priests. This could be an adventure in itself.

Plagues, famines, and high-mortality rates become a much more believable danger in the campaign world, both for the PCs and the NPC population.

In my campaign, only the members of certain elite fighting orders (patterned after the real-world Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller, and Teutonic Knights) can cast spells, plus a few adventuring priests who live in unsettled areas or near the borders of pagan lands.

The bulk of the priesthood are 0-level men and women. Historically, priests tended to better educated, so the non-spellcasting priests in my campaign have sage abilities. Local priests may not be able to supply PCs with magic, but they can offer information.

Whittling down wizards

The *DMG* takes a different view of wizards. Although it requires "highly specialized training," wizards are fairly common: "Almost every village has a fellow who can whip up a few useful spells to help with the lambing or simplify the construction of a house. . . . Nearly all major families, merchant princes and nobles have a mage or two in their employ."

That's a lot of wizards for the average campaign world. Better would be to have most village "wizards" little more than wise men who use non-magical herbal remedies to effect cures. A clever combination of chemicals and minor contraptions might produce "magic." At most, these hedge wizards would have access to the *cantrip* spell. Even 1st-level spells might be beyond them.

Many wizards should be charlatans who pose as spellcasters but are really little more than stage magicians. Their magic is trickery and deception. More than one noble patron could be fooled by a wily wonderworker posing as a mighty mage.

Consider real-life examples such as Cagliostro and the Comte de Saint-Germain. These conmen posed as workers of magic in the royal courts of 18th-century Europe, telling fortunes, conjuring spirits, and dabbling in alchemy. But their "powers" sprang from science and showmanship, not spells.

True wizards suffer many constraints in a given campaign world. They require the correct material components (often expensive and rare) to cast spells. And the long periods of time they need to devote to their studies tend to keep their numbers low.

The *DMG* implies that most wizards are low level, because only a few are willing to undertake the dangerous adventuring career needed to accumulate experience points quickly.

Most members of society wouldn't have the offspring to spare for such a pursuit. The lower classes need all the hands they can get just to produce enough food to survive. A nobility based on a warrior class might hold wizards in contempt for their poor fighting skills. The upper classes, such as the landed gentry, wealthy merchants and expert artisans, need their oldest child to carry on the family tradition.

Younger children are sent into the priesthood to hedge a family's bets, as it were. If the oldest child can't make a go of it, maybe the younger one can tap



into the wealth and power the priesthood likely offers. Or younger children are married off to make favorable alliances.

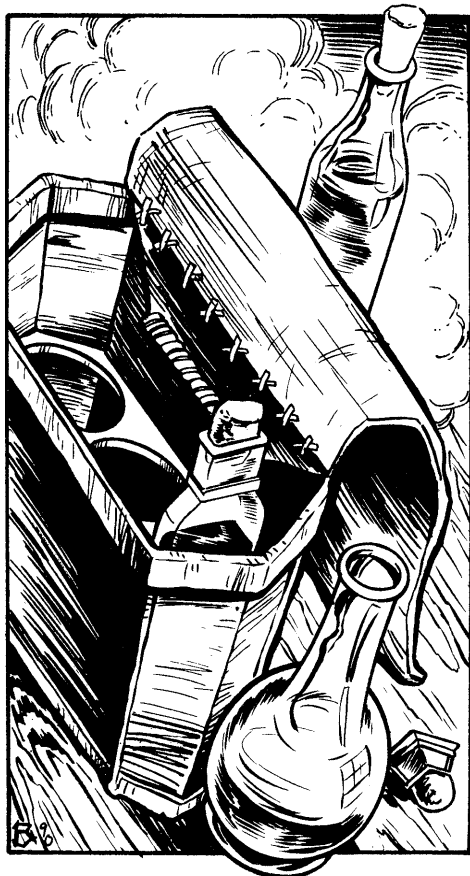
Iconoclastic and independent wizards, as the *DMG* describes them, go through money as fast as they accumulate it in pursuit of their studies. Although wizards possess great personal power in the form of spells, they do not necessarily acquire the influence or wealth (for long) that the upper classes find desirable.

Persecution and competition

Non-spellcasters would rightly view wizards and priests with grave suspicion. Think of the potential for havoc at a spellcaster's fingertips. Little wonder they should be mistrusted by commoners and the secular and religious authorities alike.

Priests are to some extent constrained by their hierarchies and their deities, but wizards have no such controls. Priests might view wizards as threats to their power, or at least capricious competitors. Wizards might feel the same way about priests. In *Glantri*, a wizard-ruled nation of the *MYSTARA*® setting, priests are hunted down as "heretics."

The degree of persecution that exists in the campaign is up to the DM. Wizards may have to hide their powers, pretending to be simple sages, apothecaries, or stage magicians. In wizard-dominated areas, priests might have to pose as fighters or pilgrims.



Perhaps spellcasters are merely dis-trusted, rather than hunted. They can practice their profession openly, while being careful not to provoke a backlash. A few bad apples might ruin things for the bunch, of course.

The more pious might look askance at wizards because wizardly powers don't come directly from a deity, unlike those of the priest. How, then, can wizards be trusted to use their powers wisely? Literature and folklore the world over are rife with stories of wizards who acted unwisely in the pursuit of knowledge, power, or magic, thereby inflicting great suffering on others.

The young apprentice wizard Ged, in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Wizard of Earthsea*, unleashes a terrible creature of unlife upon the world while conjuring up a dead spirit after being challenged in magecraft by a fellow student.

The sinking of Atlantis is sometimes blamed on some terrible experiment — whether powerful magic or technology — gone awry. Perhaps a mighty nation in your campaign world suffered a similar catastrophe thanks to a meddling wizard or priest, blackening the names of his fellows everywhere as a result.

Spellcasters might also suffer persecution at the hands of other spellcasters. Powerful wizards or priests would find it in their best interests to limit the number of young upstarts. It makes life safer for them — fewer young whippersnappers looking to knock off a “big gun” to make a name for themselves or rise in the hierarchy.

When you're on top of the heap, you have nothing to gain by shaking up the status quo. Inexperienced wizards and priests might be hunted down by their more powerful and less scrupulous peers and enslaved, imprisoned, or even killed.

For spellcasters in the business of providing their services to wealthy clients, reducing the amount of competition goes to the heart of being successful. The fewer of you there are, the higher the wages you can command.

Spellcasters will also compete for spellbooks (in the case of wizards), magical items and necessary material components. Depending on the alignments of the participants involved and the rarity of the item in question, such competition could get fatal very quickly. At the least, it will always be fierce. And one of the byproducts of “survival of the fittest” is that it helps thin the ranks.

Higher learning

Spellcasters might want to keep their profession an exclusive club. It might be for selfish reasons, like status, or for the best of intentions. They could argue the potential for harm is too great to teach magic to just anyone. Today, for instance, we expect surgeons to go to medical school before they begin cutting open patients on the operating table.

Like the modern legal and medical professions, spellcasters might establish a quota system to keep their numbers low. Perhaps aspiring wizards must attend officially sanctioned magic schools. Acolytes must spend time in a monastery or seminary.

Only a few students would be admitted at a time. Enrollment might also be expensive, making it affordable for only a few. Student training might involve hazardous tests and trials. Like a modern army bootcamp, not all cadets will pass (or even survive) basic training. Consider the tests of magic in Krynn, of the **DRAGONLANCE®** setting.

Spellcasters who practice their arts without proper accreditation risk arrest. Rogue wizards would likely have their spellbooks confiscated. Priests might be excommunicated.

Inherent powers

In some campaigns, spellcasting could require more than just proper training. Only those born with the power might be able to wield magic. Perhaps the forces behind magic can be manipulated only by those with a special gift for it (or curse, depending on how magic is viewed). Wizards and priests, in effect, are mutants.

Of course, proper study and training is still needed to actually cast spells. But someone without “the gift” could study for as long and as hard as he likes and still be unable to cast a single cantrip.

This raises questions the DM must answer. Do the gods decide who will and will not have this ability? Are there groups seeking to control or eliminate the gifted? Are the gifted revered or reviled? How is the gift recognized?

The *Tome of Magic* offers a spell that fits well with this view of magic. By analyzing a person's aura, the spell *wizard sight* permits the user to determine if someone is or isn't a spellcaster, or to sense if a non-spellcaster has the potential to learn and cast wizard spells.

A DM might expand the spell to

include priestly magic, or he might decide priests don't operate under the same restrictions. Perhaps priestly magic differs in nature from that utilized by wizards, and a person need not be born with a special gift to cast such spells, he needs only to be sanctioned by his deity.

Paying a price

It may be that the laws of magic demand that a spellcaster make some sacrifice or suffer a curse or taboo to be able to cast spells.

This is a common occurrence in folklore and fantasy literature. Wu jen (an Oriental wizard kit from *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*) who break their voluntary taboos lose levels, become ill and can even die. In the *Thieves' World* books, the wizard Randal was unable to cure himself of his allergies without greatly reducing his power to cast spells.

Taboos could range from relatively minor (not letting anyone see the spellcaster eating) to major (never casting spells after dark). Curses might range from premature baldness to the utter destruction of the character's health, as with Raistlin in the **DRAGONLANCE** novels.

Sacrifices might include fasting for long periods of time (to purify the body and mind) or ritual mutilation (running the gamut from simple body tattoos to scarification or worse). The Norse god Odin hung on the world-tree Yggdrasil for nine days and nights to learn the secrets of magical runes. He cast one of his eyes into the well of Mimir to gain wisdom.

As spellcasters grow more powerful (i.e., gain more levels), the nature of the curse or sacrifice grows more costly. At 1st level, a priest might need only to swear never to ride a horse in the rain. At 5th level, the priest might be forced to abstain from all alcohol. At 10th level, the priest might tattoo his face.

Given such costs, low-level wizards and priests would form the majority of the spellcasting population. Only the most power-hungry would be willing to pay the price for access to high-level spells.

Another price spellcasters might pay involves pacts with extraplanar powers. The witch, another kit from *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*, suffers periodic struggles with the extraplanar forces that teach her spells. The most famous example is Faust, who is granted sorcerous abilities after making a pact with Mephistopheles. Faust is able to conjure

up the shade of Helen of Troy as his paramour and satisfy his obsession for learning hidden lore. The price he pays, of course, is his immortal soul.

In some sense, priests make pacts with extraplanar powers in return for spellcasting abilities as a matter of course. But perhaps wizards are unable to cast spells in your campaign unless they too make some kind of pact or alliance with the Beyond.

Powers of Good are unlikely to exact as unpleasant a price as Mephistopheles, of course, but the cost might still be severe enough to give any would-be spellcaster reason to pause. Such a Power would likely want the wizard to advance its interests and conform to its tenets, even if they conflict with the wizard's own — and good GMs will see to it that they do.

On-the-job fatalities

Of course, spellcasting is a dangerous line of work. Job-related deaths and serious accidents should prune the ranks continually.

The relative weakness of low-level wizards has been discussed in the pages of *DRAGON® Magazine* many times. With only 1d4 hit points and one 1st-level spell, a 1st-level mage needs friends, brains, and luck to survive. Beginning priests have it slightly better, with 1d8 hit points and the ability to wear armor.

Adventuring spellcasters face many obvious hazards, including monsters, traps, and enemy magic. Even stay-at-homes are vulnerable to famine, disease (not the hardest folk, most wizards), accidents ("He never saw that runaway wagon coming!"), and old age. Wizards and priests might have access to powerful spells, but they don't make the spellcasters superhuman.

Spellcasters also work with dangerous substances in their experiments (monster body parts, acids, chemicals, etc.) and dabble in Things Best Left Alone. The accident rate is likely pretty high.

A DM could take inspiration from nearly any story by H.P. Lovecraft. His protagonists almost invariably end up crippled, insane, or dead as they pursue forbidden lore and traffic with terrifying Elder Gods and their demonic servitors.

Rather than limit your options, use several rationales to give yourself more flexibility in the face of players' efforts to push the envelope on magic availability.

A canny player will have thought up

plenty of reasons why her character should be able to establish a wizards' guild to attract other mages and apprentices, thus gaining access to allies and spells.

A DM worried about the effect on game balance will have a much stronger hand to play if he can point out that not only was the last such guild broken up by rival wizards fearing its power, but its founder was tried and executed for witchcraft by the local religious authorities.

A happy side-effect of deciding on rationales for limiting magic is that they add flavor to your campaign. A world where wizards are hunted by the Holy Inquisition — forced to work their magic while posing as sages or apothecaries — is going to be a lot more memorable than a campaign where spellcasters are just another group of mundane professionals, like innkeepers or armorers.

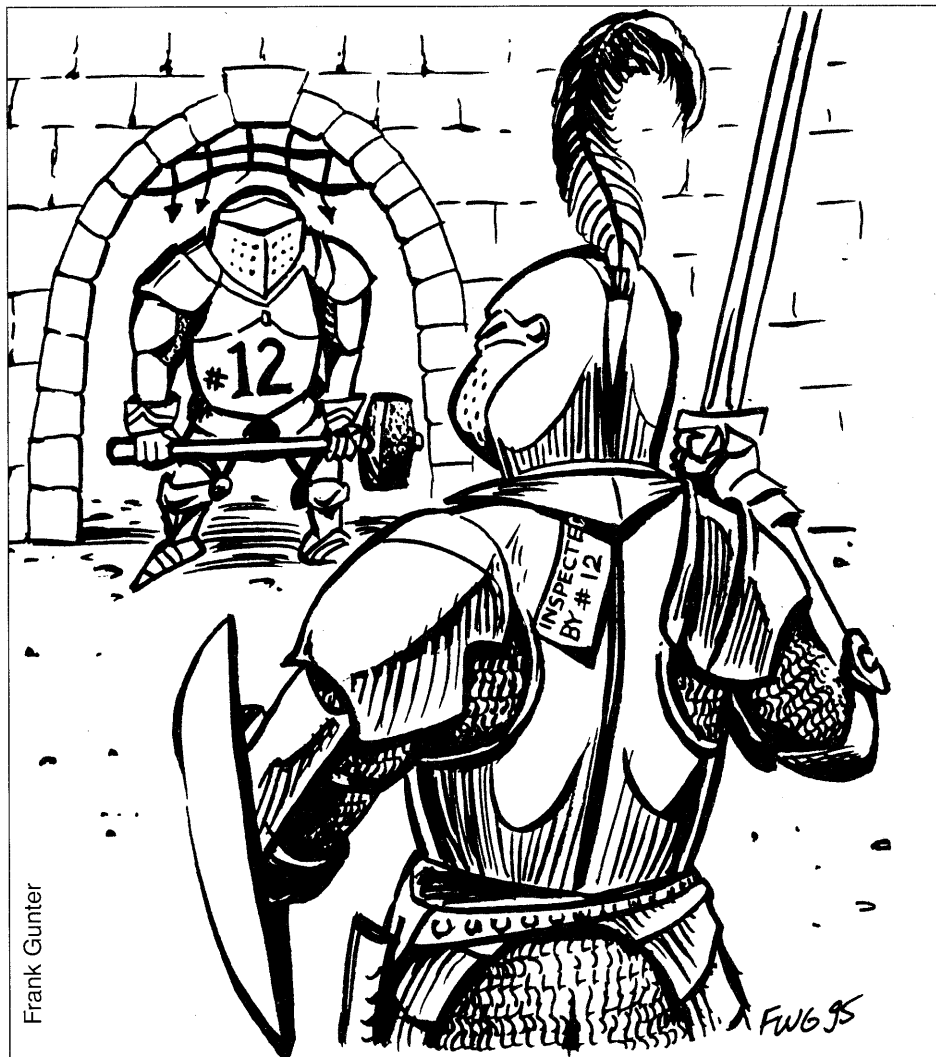
Although the AD&D game is used by way of example, the rationales offered here could be applied to any game system where magic exists.



Paul Fraser is a full-time journalist in Nova Scotia, Canada. He has DMed successive AD&D campaigns since 1983. He has written for DRAGON® Magazine before.

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ROME MAY NOT HAVE BEEN BUILT IN A DAY, BUT...

Quick and dirty worldbuilding

by David Clarke

cartography by Roy Boholst

At first glance, the process of creating your own campaign world may seem overwhelming. Consider the detail and breadth of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® and the GREYHAWK® settings. What DM, by himself, could create such a thing?

The answer is you; and in a lot less time than you think.

The process has only three broad steps — one of which you can do in a hammock with your eyes closed. Admittedly, each of these broad steps has smaller steps within, which is where the real work is. Based on what you do in Step One, though, creating your own campaign world can be as quick or easy or time-consuming as you like. (We can even design one as we go).

Step 1: Decisions, decisions...

You won't need any graph paper or pencils for this stage, though it may ultimately be the most important. You must make three decisions, but don't cast any of your choices in stone until you've considered all three.

First you will have to decide how much detail you want your world to have.

"More is better" is not necessarily the correct idea. If you spend 400 hours developing every burg and bramble, you won't have much time for actual DMing (or anything else, for that matter). Also, if you have all the details worked out ahead of time, you won't have much flexibility later on if you have new ideas, if your campaign changes, or if you find a module you like but can't use because your world is too defined for improvisation. What may be worst of all is that too often DMs create wonderful, rich adventures and settings for the places they think the PCs will go, then the PCs go in the opposite direction, and all the work is wasted.

The other extreme is to have very little detail. Perhaps a map and what type of culture you want to occupy each area will suffice for you and your players. In a combat-intensive campaign, who cares who the Pasha of Phlegnar is, as long as you get to kill the fire giants in his mountains?

The best approach for most people is one of moderation. This approach gives you the detail you need immediately and allowing flexibility to change things later on. You might decide to detail the areas where the campaign begins and add other details to areas as the players travel there. Obviously, this will be a problem if your players don't go where you expect them to. You might instead decide to add some detail to each area, just in case. The problem now is either that an area is short-changed with too little detail or that you've overworked detailing every tree and bird. A lot depends on how much information your players want and what type of campaign you'd like to have.

You must next decide where to place the balance between science and fantasy. If you choose a high-fantasy world, there can be steamy jungles in the middle of the arctic tundra, rain can fall up, dandelions can talk, and all unicorns can expect to be addressed, "Your Hornedness." In other words, you'll be making up the rules by which your world functions. This choice is a good one for those who don't want to add much detail, since you can make up whatever details you need, whenever you want and needn't worry about players arguing that "it can't be." Keep in mind, however, that in a fantasy world where the rules by which the players live are void, they will probably have a lot of questions. A high-fantasy DM must be very creative and inventive.

On the other hand, there's the scientifically accurate campaign world, based on the actual principles by which we live (at least to the extent that they're used in the AD&D® game). This is a choice favored more by detail-enthusiasts, because of the abundance of languages, flora, fauna, climate, topography, alphabets, political systems etc. While this method offers immediate answers to questions like



"What season comes after spring?" and "Is it cold up in the mountains?" it can be restrictive. If you follow geographical science, areas along rivers which flood yearly must be fertile, even if in the middle of a desert, whether you want them to be or not. Likewise forests north of a certain point will have to be strictly coniferous due to the extreme cold and lack of water. In such a world, you needn't be as creative, but you are somewhat more restricted in terms of what is possible. (For our sample world, we'll lean toward science but reserve the right to explain some things with fantasy).

The third thing you must decide is the type of campaign you want to play. As noted before, details like politics and personalities don't matter much to players whose goal is to kill monsters and collect treasure. If this is the type of campaign you'll be running, your job as world designer is much easier.

If, on the other hand, you like geo-politics and intend to run a role-playing intense or political intrigue type game, you can be pretty much assured that the

low-detail approach does not work. Role-playing and intrigue both rely on NPCs and good stories. NPCs need homes, backgrounds and experiences; stories need settings. No matter how heavily based on fantasy, a low-detail, highly improvised world soon develops people and stories that should be connected but aren't. Players quickly notice discrepancies and become disenchanted. This is not to say that a political campaign needs notes as thick as a phone book, but it does imply that more detail and work may be necessary.

Step Two: Get the crayons

Now that you've made your basic decisions, the concrete process of creation can begin. By the end of this stage you'll have a map with civilizations and topographical features a plenty.

First, list the various climates and topographical and geographical formations you want to use. You can also draw your basic land form(s) (e.g., a big island, several small islands, continents, etc.).

Your decisions may be influenced by the resources you have, such as the *Viking Campaign Sourcebook*. To incorporate this, use an area with a cold climate, mountains, and fjords on a sea that borders on other cultures.

Another option is to choose features based on the monsters who inhabit them, such as a jungle and vegpygmies and su-monsters. You may want hills for halflings and forests for elves. Bear in mind that you'll have difficulty squeezing it together realistically if you choose too much that is too diverse. It is better to have too many ideas and have to scrap some than to not have enough. If you're planning a high-fantasy campaign, your topography may be somewhat unusual (or even weird).

Next, list the various cultures and civilizations you want in your world. Keep in mind that any PC races you want need to have a homeland. If you have sourcebooks such as *The Roman Empire*, *Kara-Tur*, or the AL-QADIM® setting, you can count each of those as at least one culture. Really what you're doing is paving the



Map one. At this stage, you are mapping out the generalities. This includes geographic features and which cultures inhabit what areas. You may define some areas by the campaign materials you plan to use for them, as in the areas based on the AL-QADIM® and RAVENLOFT® settings above.

way for adventures and plots within your campaign.

If you intend to play a "Law vs. Chaos" campaign, you might be able to get by with two vast empires and some small independent states. If you don't want to have to detail too much, you can just have a few nations. Civil wars and other political forces could always diversify your selection later on. If you intend to do this, you may want to build cultural or religious differences into the country right from the start.

Cities are a special problem, since you have to either own one that's pre-designed, such as the LANKHMAR™ campaign, Golden Huzuz, or Waterdeep, or you must design your own. Consider that each country probably has a capital too (see Step Three). Important ruins, landmarks, and religious sites might also be added to your list.

You should now have a pretty impressive list of geographical and political features ready to be placed on a map. This is the third task. Depending on the diversity and quantity of features you listed, this

step can be easy or difficult. Likewise, if you're designing a more fantastic world, you needn't worry too much about the rationale of any decision.

Elves and dwarves may live together (maybe even underwater) in a fantasy world, while the more reality-oriented designers will want to separate them a bit. Keep in mind that if they're too far apart, you won't be able to justify their traditional racial animosity toward each other.

A quick glance at the first map shows that there are four states based on class, four based on race, and five "sourcebook states." Two states focus on political systems, three are centered around monstrous inhabitants, four are based on culture, and several areas are unoccupied by an established body. This arrangement is perhaps a little crowded, but so is Europe. Unlike Europe however, my states still lack borders.

Because borders are often geographical features, they require some attention at this point. As yet, we have no rivers on the map because I've saved them for this

purpose. Not all states need to be separated by rivers and mountains; they might use stone markers or have borders established only by tradition. As usual, fantasy worlds might have no borders and no sovereign states, thereby avoiding these problems altogether. For adventuring purposes, however, borders and border conflicts can be great plot motivators.

**Step Three:
Then what happened?**

At this point, we have a stage with scenery but no play. Four things remain to be done to make the production a success. The first (and easiest) is to name all the nations, cities, seas, forests, and so on. I find that taking names from the phone book or words from the dictionary and switching a letter or two is a good way to come up with names. You might also try twisting a synonym for the region, such as Arcania (from arcane) for a nation of magic users.

If you've chosen a rather scientific approach, be sure that the names you



Map two: Here is where you give everything names and draw the borders. Whether you actually delineate borders or keep them in your head, know where your empires and kingdoms are. Places previously identified only as capitals, major cities, and game world-based areas are named.

choose correspond to whatever language you assign to an area. One interesting alternative to this might be not to label anything except where your players start (and perhaps where they're from). As they travel through the world they can note names — which you've had plenty of time to think up — and draw their own map. The map would be very valuable to the party (and other less scrupulous parties) as would maps with information gathered by others. Imagine the PCs breaking into Hegel Keep just to steal a look at the Chamberlain's map of the northeast corner of the world.

If you chose this rather unorthodox approach, it could make your second step more complicated; namely, devising the plot(s) occurring in your world. This step is probably the most important if you want your campaign to exist in a vibrant, "living" world. Even if you chose a low-detail, high-fantasy approach, a certain amount of plot is necessary to keep the game from getting stale. If you chose a more political type of campaign, you'll definitely want these plans well laid.

For example, a civil war is beginning in eastern Rathuric due to some Paladins' beliefs that not enough is being done to oppose Gnashskull. This area, known as Tarnation, has historically been the home of "Good" extremists, in the "Lawful vs. Good, which is more important?" debate. The leader of this uprising is one Sir Derek, assisted by his advisor, Nemur. While Derek is Neutral Good, Nemur is Chaotic Neutral and an agent of the Lord of the Dark Lands. It is the Lord's hope that a divided Rathuric will be unable to stand against the continental war he is planning.

I've decided that the civil war will be in full swing after one month of game time (from the start of the campaign). After six months, the Dark Lord will begin to mobilize his forces, and within nine months the war will be well underway. If my characters pass through Rathuric or the Dark Lands, I know what's going on there. If they're in another part of the world and ask a Paladin for news, he can relate the most recent news of the war. If I were more interested in details, I could have five such plots for each country and region. Instead, I have one or two for each, some related to others, all interwoven into the Dark Lord's plans.

The plots in each country are mostly political, but the details I've devised vary from economic to political to social and historic. In Grundee, I've focused on the military fears of the Rift and relations with

the Nomads on the other side of the mountains. In Yeo, I've focused on the emergence of two new political and religious leaders, while the entry under "Elementia, League of" focuses on the social influence of the Elements in those countries. The only uniformity I've held to is defining a nation's borders, capital and leader(s). A more detail-oriented DM might want to define the political, socioeconomic, and historical background for each country. Likewise, they might detail each capital city (which I did not do).

With everything named and the story in motion, the third step is to define other major actors besides the PCs. In actual game play, most kings, queens, and emperors will probably not be vital NPCs to the party, as they will be far too important to waste time regularly on even high-level adventurers. The nobles, merchants, generals, priestesses, and other characters who will be helping, healing, and harassing the PCs however, should be considered.

Some DMs prefer to play NPCs as they arise, others have entire life histories written up. Whichever extreme you choose, this is the time to plan for those encounters. Again, if you know the route your players are likely to follow, you might be able to develop NPC's for the first few months of game time and worry about any others later on.

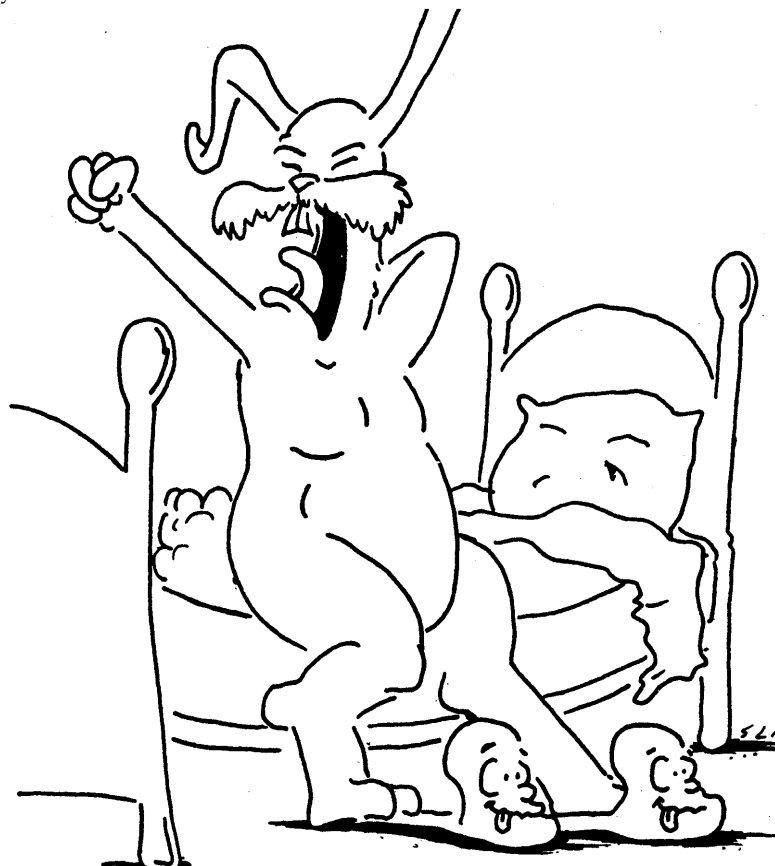
The final step is detailing. Even if you've chosen initially not to add many details to your world, you will eventually need some. If you've chosen to detail your new creation heavily, you'll quickly find that there's no end to what you could do. For the sake of playability, there are several other subjects you should probably focus on initially.

Religions, weather, and languages tend to have a lot of impact on actual play. Folklore, customs, and etiquette can be used a lot in dealings with foreign governments. You may also choose to design your world like this sample one, where there could easily be another continent somewhere off the map to the north. (My players have yet to learn that they can cross the glacier and reach another land).

Over the years, I've created four campaign worlds, and, using the aforementioned system, can now create a playable one in about three hours. Obviously, its not a high-detail world. For that I'd need several days. Adding details isn't as Herculean a task as it sounds. Nothing about creating your own world is difficult if you know what you want first and take it one step at a time. You'll find creating your own world is the most satisfying experience a DM can have.



David Clarke lives in West Allis, Wisconsin.



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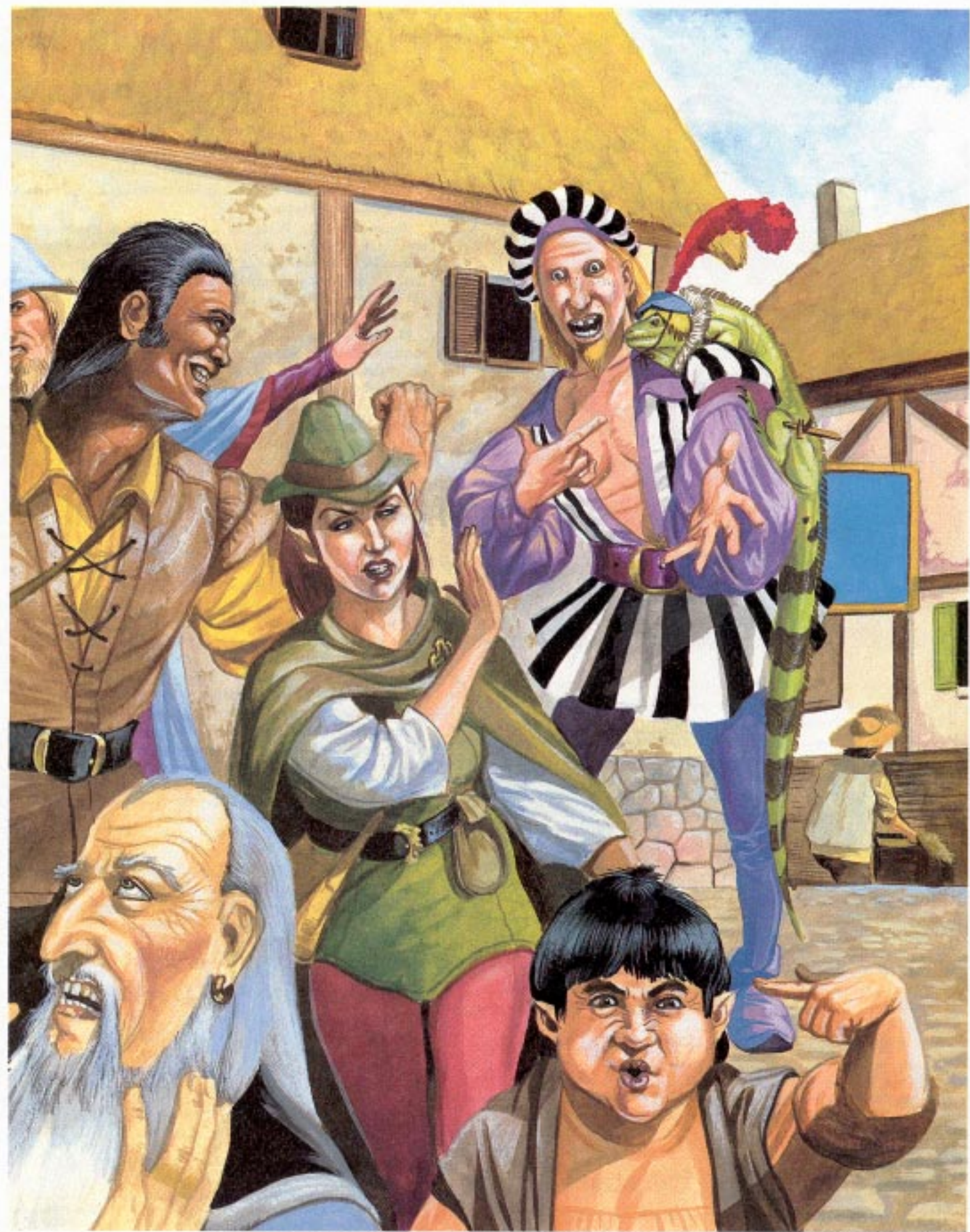
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Off-the-Cuff NPCs

by Melissa C. Thompson

illustrated by Jim Holloway

The crazy radish peddler; the swearing barkeep; the scribe who insisted that his pet iguana, Prissy, was once a famous adventurer: all of these are NPCs that I have run into during the course of gaming. The characters from the campaign I was in didn't interact with these NPCs for more than five or 10 minutes, and they had absolutely no significant bearing on the adventure at hand, yet they still stand out in my mind. Why? Well, they were quirky, funny, and just plain interesting.

All too often, numerous NPCs take on the same personality: that of the DM. This phenomenon has occurred in quite a few of the campaigns I have been in, but it is not necessarily the fault of the DM. Let's face it, players often do unusual and unexpected things, especially when it comes to meeting other characters, and the DM can't possibly be expected to anticipate them all. On occasion, the players will completely bypass the town sage, whose background and personality traits are listed in detail in the module, in favor of speaking to a miscellaneous street urchin. How could the DM ever guess that the party would try to question every single villager when the mayor's chain of office was stolen?

Times like these force the DM to think on his feet, and although many of us seem to forget, DMs are people too; they have their bad days just like everyone else. Maybe its late in the evening and the DM is tired, or maybe the players have interacted with so many NPCs that the DM just can't think of any more personalities. Whatever the case, the result is that the DM switches into "generic town constable" mode, or she uses her "average city merchant" voice. (I am just as guilty of this as the next DM.) While this serves its purpose well enough to get the characters through the plot, it does little to add to the excitement of the story.

The following tables present a possible solution to this problem. They include various physical and behavioral characteristics, ranging from the common to the downright weird. They are not intended as a substitute for NPC personalities generated by the DM, because as we all know, no chart or table can possibly top the creativity of the DM when he's on a roll; however, they can be very handy during city adventures, for example, when the players insist on conversing with every shopkeeper, barmaid, and street vendor in town. And with the help of the DM, they can provide unique details that will stand out in players' minds long after the adventure is over.

Give the tables a try. Maybe your next encounter with an NPC will be a moment you'll never forget:

"Oh, so you're adventurers, are you? Ah, well, I know all about that. My iguana friend here, Prissy, used to travel extensively before she hooked up with me. Didn't you now, Prissy? Go on, girl, and tell the nice humans about it. Now there's a good little lizard. . . ."

TABLE I - roll 1d6

- 1-3 - go to Table II.
- 4-6 - go to Table III.

TABLE II - roll d100

The NPC:

- 01 - talks at twice the speed of the average person.
- 02 - often falls into a reverie while talking, cutting off his sentences.
- 03 - has a habit of twirling a coin between his fingers.
- 04 - has facial twitches.
- 05 - hasn't bathed in 76 days.
- 06 - is completely bald, with a large tattoo of a dragon on the top of scalp.
- 07 - only speaks in a whisper.
- 08 - has no teeth.
- 09 - blinks very rapidly.
- 10 - has slurred speech.
- 11 - always flourishes his cape before introducing himself.
- 12 - speaks in a language that none of the PCs understand.
- 13 - has a potbelly that sticks out from underneath his shirt.
- 14 - will stop and stare at every attractive woman/man that passes by.
- 15 - has an obsession with any jewelry that the PCs may be wearing.
- 16 - has a pet ferret named "Stinky."
- 17 - is blind.
- 18 - will work the topic of her dead mother into any conversation, adding "May the gods bless her soul."
- 19 - hums under his breath. (If asked, he denies that he's doing it.)
- 20 - tries to teach one of the PCs the latest dance from Waterdeep.
- 21 - refers the PCs to Anchor's Aweigh, a very shady bar by the docks.
- 22 - tries to convert the PCs (except clerics) to the religion of the DM's choice.
- 23 - sighs loudly every three minutes.
- 24 - is too intoxicated to talk.
- 25 - loves animals and will speak to any horses or familiars that the PCs may have.
- 26 - is dressed in a court jester's outfit (but is not a court jester).
- 27 - has a hook instead of a left hand.
- 28 - invites the PCs to have dinner with her grandmother, her husband, and her eight children.
- 29 - speaks in an unusual dialect. (DM's choice.)



- 30 - constantly looks over his shoulder.
- 31 - has a nasal tone of voice.
- 32 - munches a raw onion during interaction with the PCs.
- 33 - pretends to cast spells, but is not a mage.
- 34 - is accompanied by a pit bull named "Petunia."
- 35 - begs the PCs for food and drink.
- 36 - has a beard 2' long.
- 37 - is 4' tall.
- 38 - loves to tell jokes.
- 39 - snorts when he laughs.
- 40 - hugs all of the PCs to welcome them.
- 41 - has a permanent sneer on his face.
- 42 - carries a staff with an ostrich egg mounted on the top.
- 43 - is a "mad scientist" type.
- 44 - has fangs.
- 45 - is dressed in black from head to toe and wears a veil.
- 46 - has very low self-esteem.
- 47 - carries a large bouquet of flowers and gives it to a PC before departing.
- 48 - is a noble in disguise.
- 49 - wears a large nose ring.
- 50 - has the physique of a body builder.
- 51 - plays the mandolin.
- 52 - tries to convince the PCs to take him adventuring with them.
- 53 - is hard of hearing and asks the

- PCs to repeat themselves more than once.
- 54 - wears a horned Viking hat.
- 55 - only makes sarcastic remarks.
- 56 - carries a small, potted plant.
- 57 - does not trust mages.
- 58 - does not trust clerics.
- 59 - does not trust anyone.
- 60 - is a "neatness freak" and tidies up after the PCs.
- 61 - talks to himself.
- 62 - tries to sell the PCs an elderly cow.
- 63 - attempts to pick the pockets of the largest PC.
- 64 - mistakes one of the PCs for a long lost relative.
- 65 - is a know-it-all.
- 66 - smells like a garbage dump.
- 67 - stridently insists that the end of the world is near.
- 68 - asks one of the PCs for a date.
- 69 - eats everything in sight.
- 70 - refers the PCs to his cousin's husband's best friend's son, Darien Stout, for blacksmithing work.
- 71 - is mute.
- 72 - has a habit of constantly winking at people.
- 73 - moves as if he were sneaking around, even in broad daylight with people watching him.
- 74 - falls in love at first sight with one of the PCs.
- 75 - sings rather than speaks.

- 76 - has a breathy tone of voice, a la Marilyn Monroe.
- 77 - offers to buy the PCs a round of drinks at the Rusty Nail Pub.
- 78 - wants the PCs to try his latest culinary creation.
- 79 - mistakes the PCs for members of the local thieves guild.
- 80 - shakes uncontrollably.
- 81 - asks to exchange a PC's valuable weapon (DM's choice) for five "magic" beans.
- 82 - has one pointed ear and one rounded ear.
- 83 - wears a white, powdered wig.
- 84 - mistakes the PCs for the minions of a personal enemy.
- 85 - is wrapped in a wolf skin.
- 86 - is a vegetarian.
- 87 - tells the PCs all of the local gossip.
- 88 - brandishes a dagger as the PCs approach.
- 89 - twirls his mustache.
- 90 - wears numerous gold necklaces.
- 91 - slurps his drink.
- 92 - laughs at everything the PCs say, humorous or not.
- 93 - has a chronic, hacking cough.
- 94 - is annoyingly cheerful.
- 95 - is annoyingly melancholy.
- 96 - has a romantic outlook on life.
- 97 - fiddles with a string cat's cradle.
- 98 - gives the PCs excessively long (and boring) directions.



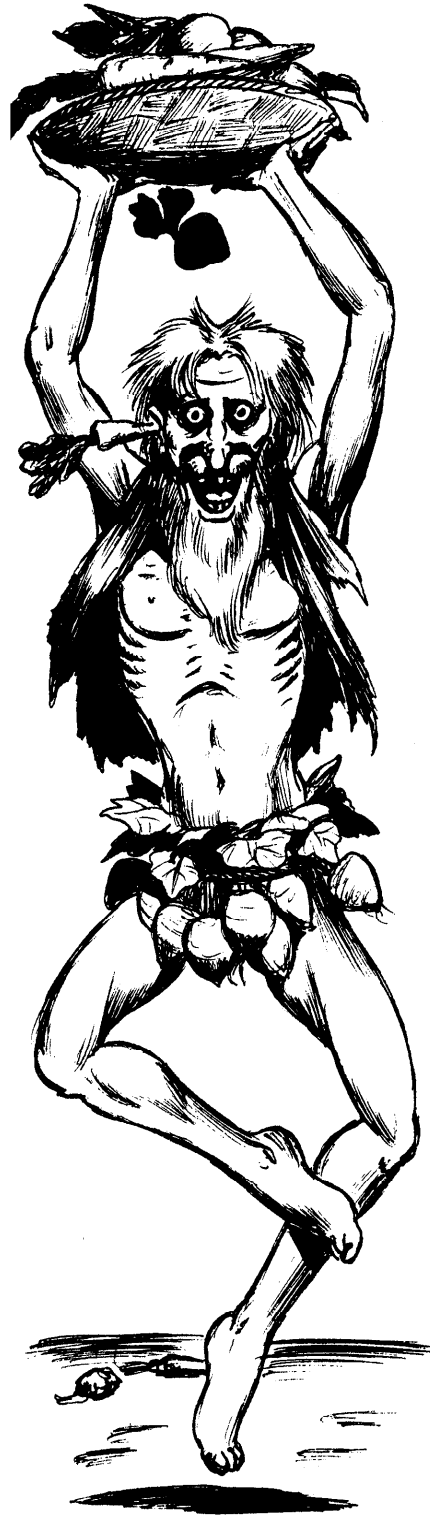
- 99 - speaks at half the speed of the average person.
- 00 - Go to Table IV.

TABLE III — roll d100

The NPC:

- 01 - prefaces every sentence with "Excuse me, but..."
- 02 - is always chewing on a toothpick.
- 03 - pants as if breathless.
- 04 - views the PCs as "beneath" him and acts accordingly.
- 05 - speaks in a shrill, high-pitched voice.
- 06 - spits often.
- 07 - informs the PCs of all of his health problems, from the corns on his feet to his migraine headaches.
- 08 - refers to the PCs as "young miss" and/or "young lad."
- 09 - advises the PCs that, when caught in a dungeon with a low food supply, rats really don't taste too bad.
- 10 - wheezes alarmingly every now and then.
- 11 - wears a fur hat regardless of the weather.
- 12 - is enamored by the stylish cut of a character's armor. (DM's choice.)
- 13 - tells outlandish tales of his own adventuring days, all of which are obviously not true.
- 14 - whines.
- 15 - feels the need to psychologically analyze each of the characters.
- 16 - argues with spouse while talking to the party.
- 17 - gives each character a piece of candy at the end of the conversation and says, "Now run along."
- 18 - has an intricate, tribal design tattooed on his face and neck.
- 19 - has an accent.
- 20 - tries to pick a fight with the smallest PC.
- 21 - wears a string of garlic around her neck.
- 22 - calls everyone in the party "darling," "dearie," or "honey."
- 23 - constantly interrupts whoever is speaking.
- 24 - wears bright red lipstick.
- 25 - gives a few coins to the shabbiest looking character as charity.
- 26 - has researched 127 different types of spores and fungus and shares his knowledge with the party.
- 27 - has built a secret flying machine.
- 28 - hisses sibilants.
- 29 - travels with a dancing bear.
- 30 - peddles wares by yelling, "Hey you! Buy this!"

- 31 - is dressed entirely in bright purple.
- 32 - speaks with a lisp.
- 33 - appears frightened of the PCs.
- 34 - speaks in a blatantly patronizing tone.



- 35 - asks the characters to join in a chant of blessing.
- 36 - dares a character (DM's choice) to a horse race.
- 37 - wears a medallion bearing a crossed wand and dagger.
- 38 - taps fingers impatiently.
- 39 - trips and falls during conversation with the party.
- 40 - asks, "Haven't I heard about you before?"
- 41 - tries to convince a character (DM's choice) to marry a brother or sister.
- 42 - cleans fingernails with a dagger.
- 43 - kisses a PC in order to make a spouse jealous.
- 44 - always smiles.
- 45 - never smiles.
- 46 - demands, "You want what!?" at any request.
- 47 - disagrees with anything the characters say.
- 48 - agrees with everything the characters say.
- 49 - espouses faith in the ability of local government officials.
- 50 - has a frog in a cage with a sign: "Kiss the Frog Prince, one copper piece."
- 51 - speaks with a drawl.
- 52 - is incredibly clumsy.
- 53 - has a tarantula on one shoulder.
- 54 - has pieces of straw stuck in his hair and clothing.
- 55 - often trips over his own feet.
- 56 - repeatedly shifts weight from one foot to the other.
- 57 - has the contents of an entire tool box hanging from belts and bandoliers.
- 58 - has hair so long that it drags on the ground.
- 59 - claims to have seen a tarrasque around the last corner.
- 60 - asks the characters for every little detail of their adventures.
- 61 - wears a ring on every finger.
- 62 - mumbles.
- 63 - peppers conversation with religious affirmations like "Selune be praised" and "May Tyr light your path."
- 64 - has a close friend who is "the best sword fighter in this part of the realm. No, I really mean it!"
- 65 - makes throaty, growling noises.
- 66 - goes out of his way to assist the characters.
- 67 - is a one-man band.
- 68 - has a witty retort for all of the characters' comments.
- 69 - squints due to extreme short-sightedness.

- 70 - has a bad case of the sniffles.
- 71 - wears too much perfume, causing one of the PCs (DM's choice) to sneeze uncontrollably.
- 72 - will answer only "yes" and "no" questions.
- 73 - speaks in cliches.
- 74 - is 96 years old (human).
- 75 - informs the PCs of the medicinal value of prune juice and cayenne pepper.
- 76 - complains about high taxes.
- 77 - has a limp.
- 78 - is an undercover constable.
- 79 - can discuss no topic besides war.
- 80 - is not wearing shoes.
- 81 - taps one foot rapidly.
- 82 - fusses with his hairstyle.
- 83 - has painted-on eyebrows.

- 84 - has a haunting voice.
- 85 - clears throat before speaking.
- 86 - flexes muscles for the characters.
- 87 - is painfully shy and will flee in embarrassment if dealt with harshly.
- 88 - uses rural, colloquial expressions such as "How do you like them apples?"
- 89 - has a quick temper.

- 90 - belches.
- 91 - cries easily.
- 92 - offers to tell the characters' future by reading tea leaves, all for the reasonable price of 5 gp each.
- 93 - speaks in a monotone voice.
- 94 - has pierced eyebrows.
- 95 - speaks in pig-Latin.
- 96 - composes a poem in honor of the PCs.
- 97 - wears a graduation-type robe and a mortar board.
- 98 - tries to sell the PCs rare "faerie dust." (It is actually finely-ground salt.)
- 99 - can only talk to the PCs for two minutes and 56 seconds, due to a busy schedule.
- 00 - Go to Table V.

TABLE IV — roll 1d4

The NPC:

- 1 - is schizophrenic and often hears "voices."
- 2 - is a Siamese twin, connected at the hip.
- 3 - is a maniac. There is a 50% chance he will make an attack on the party.
- 4 - is dead. It takes 1d6 rounds before the party realizes the NPC's condition.

TABLE V — roll 1d4

The NPC:

- 1 - has wings.
- 2 - is psychic and can anticipate the player characters' every question.
- 3 - is invisible.
- 4 - is undead.



Melissa C. Thompson lives in Grayslake, Illinois. This is her first appearance in DRAGON® Magazine.



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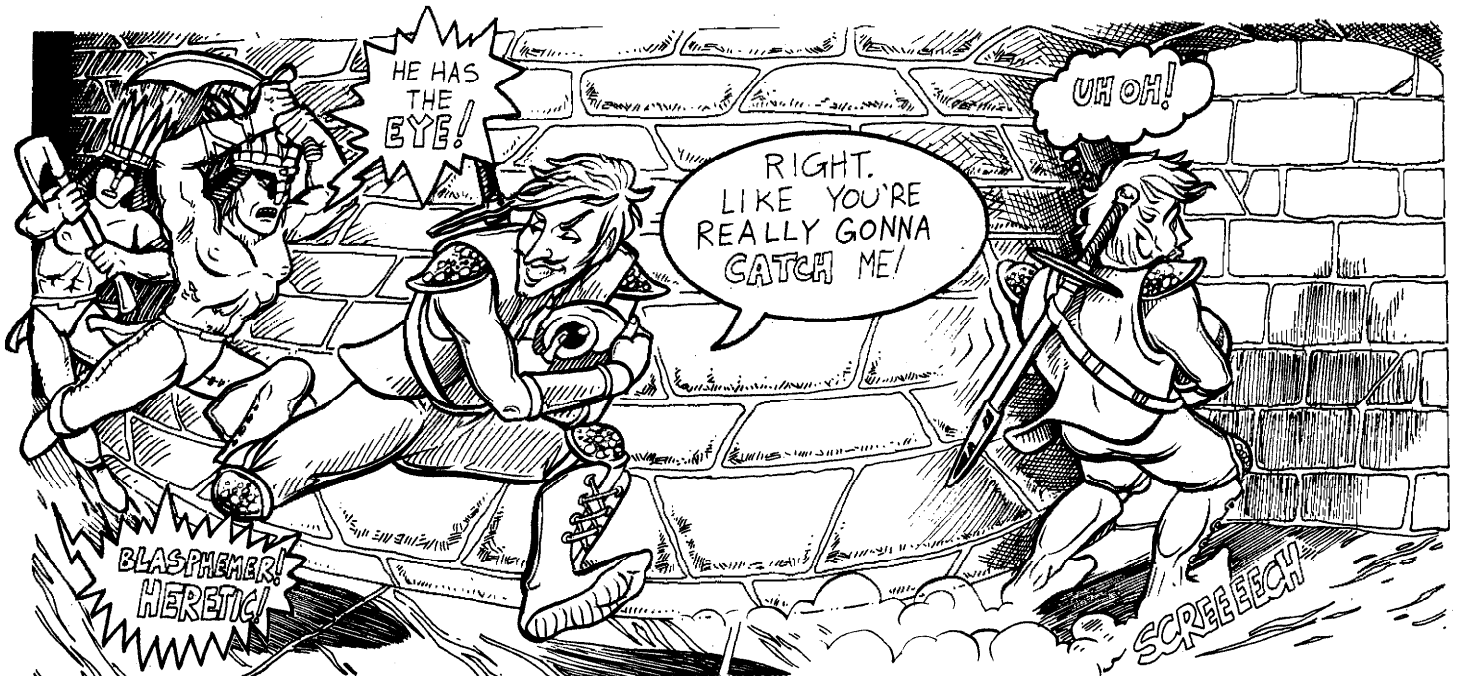



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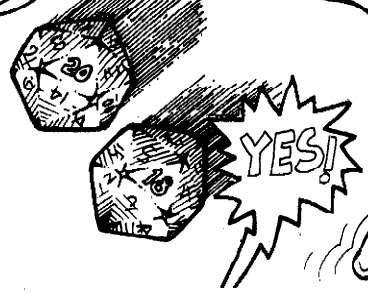
YOU HAVE THE INITIATIVE. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

THAT SOUNDS GOOD TO ME.

THANK YOU GREAT GODS OF GAMING!



OK. YOU'VE COMPLETED THE MANU-VER. NOW, ROLL TO SEE IF YOU HIT THEM.



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Improvise with WFRP

by Jason Strasser

illustrated by Phil Longmeier

Most people associate improvisation with jazz, yet improvisation is the heart and soul of being a good Dungeon Master. No skill is more useful or more called upon, nor so separates the masters from the novices.

It is essential to the seamless progress of a tightly woven campaign that you, the DM, be ready for any eventualities that the ever-crafty players may come up with. This is not merely a matter of assuming a few probable courses of events and planning for them, nor is it simply resorting to manipulation of NPCs and settings willy nilly. Players deserve a reasonable, consistent reality.

A DM who tries to influence the players to follow a carefully plotted adventure inevitably winds up restricting them and impinging upon the necessary illusion of freedom. No one wants to play in a world where everything is obviously predestined. Free will is important, as it draws the players deeper into the game. It therefore behooves the wily DM to give the players all of the rope they need to hang themselves. This is where the improvisation comes in.

Like a jazz musician, the experienced DM has a few scenarios (scales) and characters (chords) up his sleeve to throw out in response to any situation he may find himself in. The real art is in the spontaneous application of these templates in real time. As DM, you must be able to follow the changes, moving effortlessly between

scales in response to the chord changes. Changing the scenario to fit the changing characters is the key to improvisation. The flexibility to adapt constantly to the mood, sentiment, and attention span of your particular cast of characters lies in intelligent and tasteful application of this principle.

Improvisation is a delicate balance between order and chaos, a balance that constantly shifts and is extremely tenuous.

Say, for example, that your players are between adventures or embarking upon a fresh one. A poor DM would simply tell them what happens to lead them to the next scenario. This, however, is an excellent opportunity to draw your PCs in by using a little improvisation. Instead of telling the players what happens to them, let them do whatever they want to do. In fact, try to stay out of their way. Simply describe for them the locations they place themselves in. Then use NPCs and elements natural to the setting to introduce plot threads. Be subtle, allowing the players and the natural inclinations of the NPCs to dictate the action. On the other hand, something dramatic must happen in the first few minutes in order to hook your players in and perk up their interest in continuing.

I have seven "golden rules" useful in DM improvisation.

1. Listen to the players

DMs often ignore the valuable information that players knowingly and unknowingly hand them throughout the game. The most important information you can glean from your players is whether they are having fun. Sometimes we forget why we play these games, so it is vitally important to gauge the player's level of interest in a given subject or aspect of play.

Try to ascertain what sort of adventure they want, for what kinds of objects they would



quest, what kind of enemy they would fight, what causes they would defend, etc. Are they hackers and slashers or puzzle solvers? You need to know this right away.

Listen to what they say, especially their first impressions. Pay close attention to how your ideas work in execution. You may be able to tailor future scenarios if you are better aware of what has worked and what hasn't.

Use the words your players use. Sometimes even repeating back the last object they spoke about in your descriptive reply can be a useful device. For example, when Borundi the Bold says he wants to "grab the purple-headed serpent by the neck and crush the life out of it," then you reply with, "As you grab the purple headed serpent by the neck and attempt to crush the life out of it, it spits a stream of acid at your eyes. [Rolling the dice.] Oooh! You might wanna make a saving throw." Don't overuse this device, however, as it can get monotonous. When used in moderation, it gives the players the feeling that they have an effect on the outcome, or at least that you are listening to them.

Listen, listen, listen. This cannot be said enough. Listen to the tone of voice your PCs are using. You can give yourself a pat on the back and know that you have done well if you hear them laughing or displaying some other emotion. If they sit up and pay closer attention to your words, then you are on a roll... go with it.

2. Break scenarios into plot pieces and threads

Start by taking all of your scenarios and breaking them down into the smallest amount of action possible. Separate out all of the "plot pieces" that do not require any previous action for their logical usage at any time.

These are your threads, and with them you can weave any story into your players' destinies.

Compile a list of each thread with all relevant details (such as NPC and monster stats with a brief description). When the players find themselves in a likely location, you can apply any suitable thread. Good threads immediately create conflict and moves the story along quickly.

For example, a woman in the room is actually the goddess Artemis in disguise, and she is looking to abduct a few decent woodsmen for her annual mortal hunt. Having heard the PCs bragging and

exaggerating about their exploits, she assumes them to be worthy heroes and attempts to kidnap them. Neither brilliant nor boring, this is the type of thread that can be played at any time with a good chance of snagging all the players into a series of events that would never have otherwise happened.

Give players a chance or two to opt out of any situation, but also give them the chance to opt in. It is a good idea to have a few divergent threads going simultaneously, allowing the players to follow whichever they please or none at all.

Not all threads are huge events that just seem to happen; many are simply interesting NPCs or inviting locales (e.g.; scuffling noises emanating from a circus tent after hours). Once the players have taken a thread, however, you can choose plot pieces. Improvisation is about knowing where you can smoothly go to from where you are now. *Smooth* is the key word.

If you are paying attention to your players, you will know when to use which plot piece and which ones grab specific players. You may have to work a little to bring them all in. The PCs may require different threads. Seemingly dissimilar threads can, in fact, be different entrances to the same scenario.

Plot pieces from different scenarios can be used anywhere they fit, but they never force the PCs into anything. Allow free will to draw them into whatever scenario they would most thoroughly enjoy. Let them think they are choosing their own destinies; only you need know they are following your plans. Remember that storytellers are illusionists. Strive to use plot pieces in as unobtrusive a manner as possible. If the hand is quicker than the eye, then how much more so is the mind?

3. Practice creating details on the spot

No matter how well you plan ahead, there will be something in the course of play (more likely many somethings) for which you couldn't have planned. Your players will wind up asking questions for which you haven't prepared answers. It is therefore to your advantage to be able to create details on the spot. Many times this is just a matter of asking yourself some key questions.

Your scenarios should include a well answered *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why*, but you need to be able to come up

with the *how* and a bunch of logistical and descriptive details fairly quickly. Ask yourself what kind of things you would find in the current locale. Try not to be too cliched, but really go after those things we take for granted. Avoid simply telling the players about details; rather, introduce details with action.

For example, when Uther the Barbarian gets up and knocks a table over in the Red Crow Inn, this is a good time to mention details such as (a) the texture and consistency of the pea soup Uther was eating, (b) the relative positions of the PCs and NPCs to the flying debris, and (c) a more detailed description of Uther and his demeanor. You may want to describe some things with a magnifying glass, while allowing other details to go unreported.

Much of this is a question of style. Your campaign may be filled with jokers and be something of a comedy. On the other hand, your campaign may be more of a standard action adventure.

Even within the traditional sword and sorcery genre there is room for many styles. Dark fantasy requires a different touch from epic fantasy. It is quite possible that you prefer a minimalistic style, and just want to cut to the chase. Most campaigns jump genres to some degree while staying within a fantasy framework. Many times a perceptive DM will change the tone of the campaign to match the current mood of the PCs. Again, this is up to you as the DM, but in any case, be prepared to conjure believable details out of thin air, regardless of the style or tone of your campaign.

Even the best written modules are merely outlines that your words flesh out. Your spontaneous ability to turn flat, two-dimensional scenarios into vivid, larger-than-life, technicolor dramas is constantly called upon as a DM. It's worth spending a little time honing this skill by practicing visualization exercises and enacting multiple "what if" scenarios. Much of this is daydreaming, so to speak. In fact, the better you can daydream, and the more control you can exert in those dreams, the better DM you will come to be.

4. Determine the probability of success for any action

Many times, players attempt to do something for which you either can't remember the rule or for which there is no rule. Back in the early days of RPGs, when rules were more ambiguous, DMs had to make quick judgments on the

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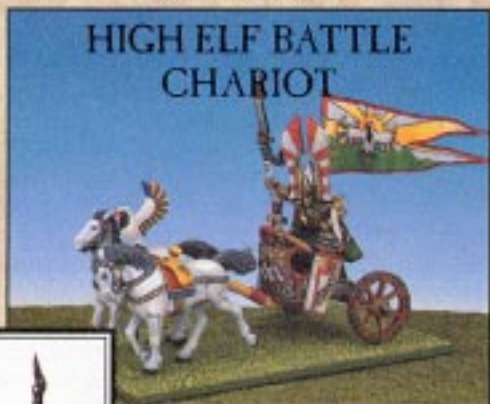
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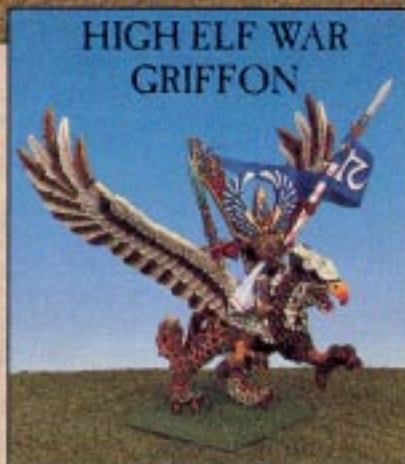
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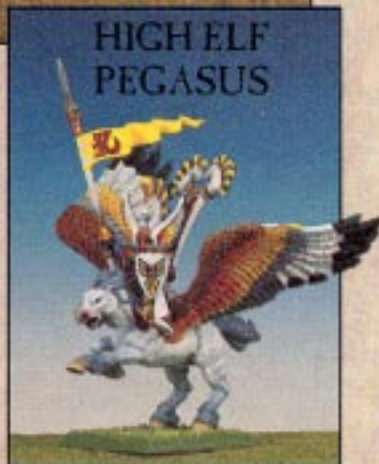
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spot as to what should happen. Even today there are many circumstances for which the rules are silent. You have to be able to judge the ease players will have in performing some action or another.

Once the players get into a flow and are quickly moving along, you should do everything in your power not to break the spell. In any event, a good DM should be familiar with all the rules; you should be able, when necessary, to come up with quick percentages or modifiers to speed things up and not break the flow of the game.

Begin by giving everything a 50/50 chance or an attribute roll, and apply modifiers as you see fit. For instance, if Phylo the Nimble has the priceless Eye of Imhotep and is running down a slick marble hallway from two burly temple guards, and he comes to a dead end, the player may desperately come up with some impossible move (probably seen in some movie) to save him. Say Phylo decides to run full speed at the wall with the intent to flip backwards off the wall and kick both guards in the head. Ludicrous, you say, and you are right; but Phylo wants to try it, and he does have a Dexterity of 17. So, instead of wasting time looking the issue up in the DM's guide, you bite the bullet and make a ruling. Due to the complexity of the maneuver, you may start with 51%, or three times his Dexterity rating. Then, because of the slick floor, subtract maybe 10%, and maybe another 10% for having his arms full, and you get 31%. Using percentile dice, allow Phylo the chance to pull off his Bruce Lee dream move. (Of course, even if he makes it, he still must successfully roll his attacks.)

Whether the percentage accurately reflects Phylo's chance of actually accomplishing the act is not as important as whether you have to spend five or 10 minutes looking up the actual rule. In general, if the players can think it up, then give them some chance at succeeding. This doesn't have to be realistic; the players are fantasy heroes and expect to be able to do things impossible for normal people. By all means, if someone rolls a 01, let him do just about anything. Even David killed Goliath.

5. Really get into the NPC's heads

NPCs are generally shop-worn stereotypes or thin, penciled-in extras. Worse, the typical DM plays NPCs with little or no differentiation and solely to further

the plot. DMs are missing out on a gold mine of overlooked methods to draw PCs further into the game. Interesting NPCs can provoke players into situations they might never have found themselves in otherwise.

Whenever you are called upon to play an NPC, do your best to get into that character's mind. What motivates that particular character? Put some thought into what this character would say or do in a given situation. Make them complex, realistic, and living beings.

NPCs are seldom privy to the deeper secrets of a campaign and may act for many very different reasons. It adds another layer to the scenario if the NPCs think that something other than what is happening is happening. It can be useful to allow a delusional NPC to steer the players down the wrong path.

Let the players get to know your NPCs, and use the same NPCs (especially the villains) over and over again during the course of a long campaign. Nothing adds more continuity than recurring characters and locations. Bring old characters back in new locations and old locations with new characters. This is a sure-fire way to grab the characters. (What is Father Johnston doing 1,500 miles from his church out here in the bush of some tropical island?)

It would be even more intriguing if in past adventures the PCs had stumbled upon some small piece of evidence that the church was involved in smuggling slaves. Perhaps the characters are searching for a treasure described in the journal of some shipwrecked slave traders. The possibilities are endless.

Never get too attached to your NPCs. You must be willing to let the PCs slaughter, ridicule, or — even worse — ignore your NPCs. They are fodder, grist for the mill, and as such their sole purpose is to give you a pre-made cast of characters to fall back upon. Sometimes they are just filler, like the dark-eyed rogues in the marketplace with the smug grins. Other times they become essential story movers, like the Dwarf prince who hires the PCs to escort him home.

When necessary, you can improvise and change things so the rogues from the marketplace can become would-be assassins hired by a rival kingdom to kill the sole heir to the dwarvish throne before he can get back to the safety of his homeland. It really doesn't matter. The important part is the ability to improvise well and to keep the player characters interested in the game.

The more thought you put into your NPCs, the better they will serve you in this regard. This paradox, like many of life's little secrets, is only contradictory on the most obvious level. It may seem like thinking about your NPCs beforehand would work against spontaneity and improvisation, but in actuality you are more likely to improvise well and generate believable dialogue if you have some idea as to what their principle motivations are.

If you have already run through all of your pre-generated NPCs and you need to come up with someone on the spot, think of some character from fiction, film, or your life who could be cast in the role. Even without statistics, simply having a personality in mind while you play the NPC adds a whole new level of reality to the scene. There is nothing worse than a DM who plays all of his NPCs the same way. Unless you're trying to slip a little *Twilight Zone* effect into the campaign, you should avoid making entire groups of people think and act the same way.

6. Juxtapose things to add variety and interest

Get creative. How many more balding, fat barkeeps or inn proprietors with an ear for gossip do we really need? And about those damsels in distress....

A quick and easy way for a swinging, jazzy improv-DM to be rid forever of clichés and overused stereotypes is to swap opposites in any traditional setting. For instance, instead of the ogre who crashes at the gates in the wee hours being a man-eating savage brute, make the ogre a scholarly priest fleeing from a hideous army of zombies and wraiths that have destroyed his temple and university. Why not? Ogres can be educated and religious, too. It makes for an interesting story.

Although few campaigns live up to their potential, RPGs are about the real-time interactive creation of a story with several people. Even though most campaigns wouldn't make it as reruns of *He-Man* cartoons, they have the potential to create interesting dramatic fiction.

Instead of having the characters start a new adventure by leaving their homes to go search dungeons for treasure again and again, try having the characters live in the dungeon (as prisoners) and go searching the palace upstairs for treasure after an earthquake releases them from captivity. If you need a blacksmith NPC because Gan-Win Chung has broken his

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spear and wishes to have it fixed, you could use your typical bare-chested, glistening bald guy with a hammer, but perhaps a young woman, the only daughter of a late master craftsman, might be more refreshing. (Even more so if she has a higher Strength than the strapping Gan-Win Chung and bests him in an arm-wrestling match.)

What seems frequently to be askew or wrong somehow is, in fact, inherently powerful. I would recommend trying as many off-the-wall characterizations and settings as you can come up with. Think of something you've often seen or read before and simply throw in a major twist. Oftentimes, this propels the scene along, practically doing all the work.

Take special care to flesh out the oddities realistically when using juxtaposition. Give bizarre things a bit of normalcy and vice versa. If done correctly, this technique has the ability to generate complex and rewarding scenarios for many sessions to come.

7. Always ask what the players want to do

The final golden rule is perhaps the most pertinent and useful of all. Throughout the game, the DM is constantly asking the players what they want to do. The key to artistic improvisation is deciding when to ask. Now, obviously, you can't play the entire game in melee rounds, asking the players what they want to do every minute of the game, but you can and should ask them after every new description or major action. The time frame in which they answer should set the pace of the game.

Asking the players what they want to do involves them in the decision-making process to a higher degree and gives you a break.

After any cursory description, especially one involving material previously unplanned, you owe it to yourself to stop and ask the players what they want to do. This gives you the opportunity to breathe and think about the situation. It also supplies needed feedback on what is getting through to the PCs and what they wish to pursue. A DM at a loss to come up with something often tosses the

ball back to the players only to find, upon the ball's return, that the players have keyed in on something the DM may have overlooked.

If you happen to be on a roll and the PCs are listening raptly, then ride, captain, ride. But, the moment you notice the players becoming distracted, start thinking about asking them what they want to do. Wind up the monologue, and get back to a moving dialog.

Allow players to do what they want unless or until something prevents or makes it difficult to do so. Say, for instance, that Brother Lawrence tells you he wants to try to sleep in a makeshift lean-to he built in the forest. Fair enough; he is basically successful in this, other than the fact that every hour or so, you may want to roll on the local wandering monster table. If a wandering monster is generated, then most likely Lawrence will have to wake up. The point is that his intent to sleep remains the same and carries him through hours of game world time. (Of course, hearing a troll gibbering outside his lean-to might get him to change his mind.)

Realizing that, while gaming, you are either describing something to the players or listening to their intentions, you can surmise that these are the two most important aspects of being a DM.

A DM can't plan descriptions ahead of time; it is impossible. Nor can a DM be expected to know the players' intentions before they actually express them. Improvisation therefore becomes an essential factor in the effectiveness of a DM.

The most essential tool any DM has in his improv-arsenal is the golden question, the role reversing, polarity shifting, rhythm defining question: "What do you guys want to do now?"

Spontaneity, as the central force in improvisation, is unrehearsed creativity. Although many jazz solos are unrehearsed, the musicians are in no way unprepared. This holds true for DM improvisation as well.



Jason Strasser is traveling. He was in Turkey recently, and when last heard of, he was somewhere in Israel.

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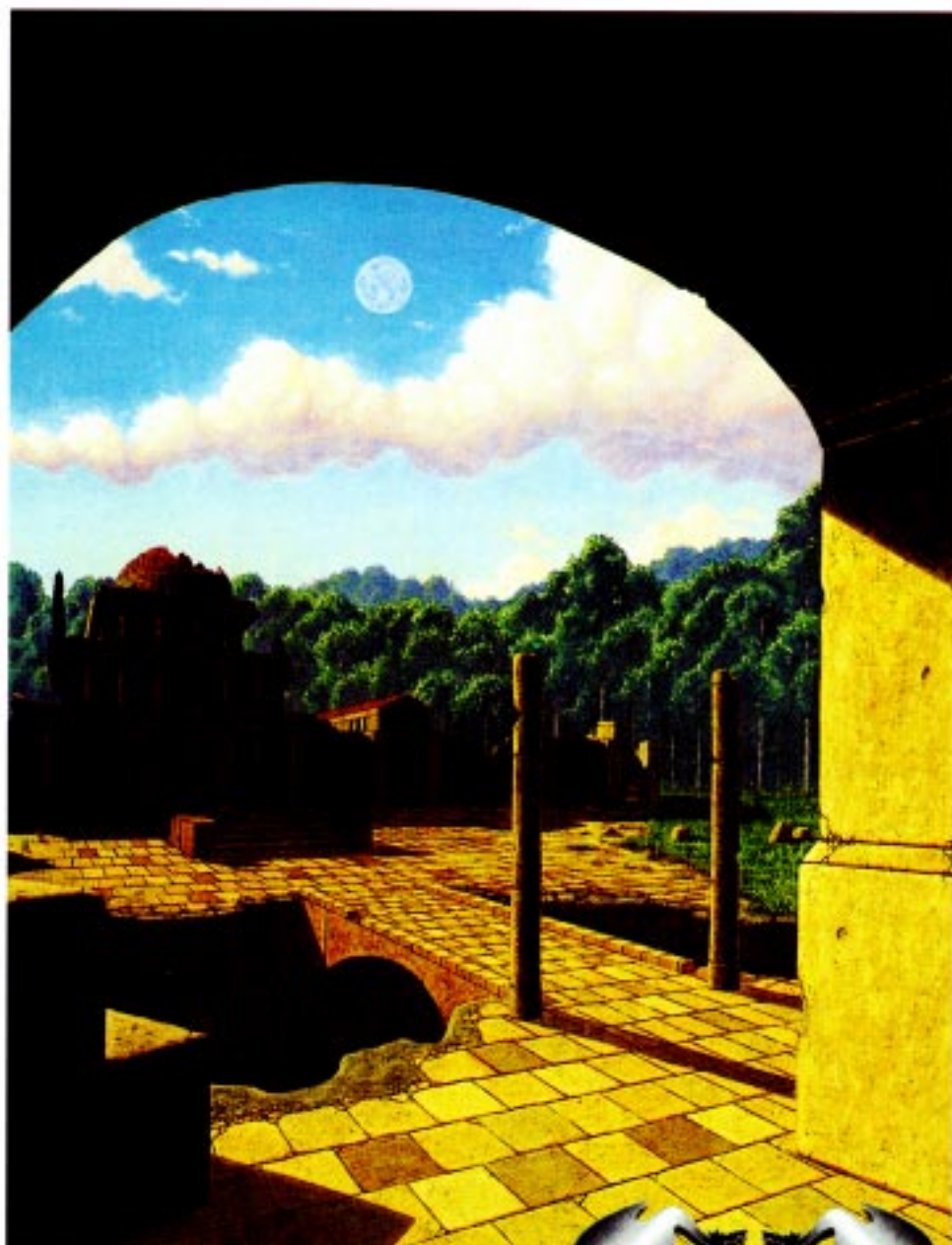
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DOT TO DOT

Ideas for interesting towns

by Michelle Bottorff
illustrated by David Home,
and Dee Barnett.



Exciting Actropolis is where the vile underlord Morticus spins his cruel plots. The adventurers have discovered a message from him on the body of one of his hirelings and are heading toward the mighty city. Fewmar eagerly looks at his map. "Look here! If we travel across country we'll cut weeks off the journey."

The adventurers head out into the wilderness, make a few bad rolls during a river crossing, and finally, sick and tired of roughing it, they run across the road to... Poketon? The DM stares blankly at the dot on his map. The players are sick of random wilderness encounters and are ready for some real role-playing, but he knows absolutely nothing about this place!

Just because the DM is improvising doesn't mean that all the small towns on the map need to end up generic and boring. The players may want a change of pace, or the characters may need a bit of nudging to get them back on the path of the planned adventure, or maybe the DM just wants to add some realism to his campaign.



Whatever the reason, here are some ideas for making improvised towns interesting, exciting, memorable and maybe even useful.

The personality of the place

One method is to give the town its own mood. The original edition of the AD&D® *DUNGEON MASTER*® Guide has many splendid lists of adjectives. (If you don't have it, try a thesaurus.) These were originally intended for the fleshing out of NPCs but work equally well when determining the character of a town. Pessimistic, aloof, dreamy, soft-hearted, spendthrift; all these adjectives, and a host of others, can be used to describe towns as well as people. With practice a DM can generate a whole town from a randomly picked adjective.

DM: Tall fences line both sides of the road. Past them and to the left you can see a farmer working in his fields. Though he shouts no greetings, you seem to sense his head turning as he watches you go by. Soon you find yourself among the stone buildings of the little village. Stout oak doors with peep holes line the narrow street. A little boy

playing with a cup and ball game stops to stare at you. Suddenly a door is flung open. A young woman runs out and grabs the boy, hauling him inside. The door crashes shut behind them.

Lady Ariadne: (Placing her hand on her rapier and frowning after the vanished child.) My friends, this town seems less than friendly.

Beran the Brave: Much less!

Fewmar: I wonder why they're so suspicious...

When creating a "mood town," most of the people in the community will share its dominate characteristic, but be careful not to overdo it. Even the most suspicious of towns probably has one or two friendly characters.

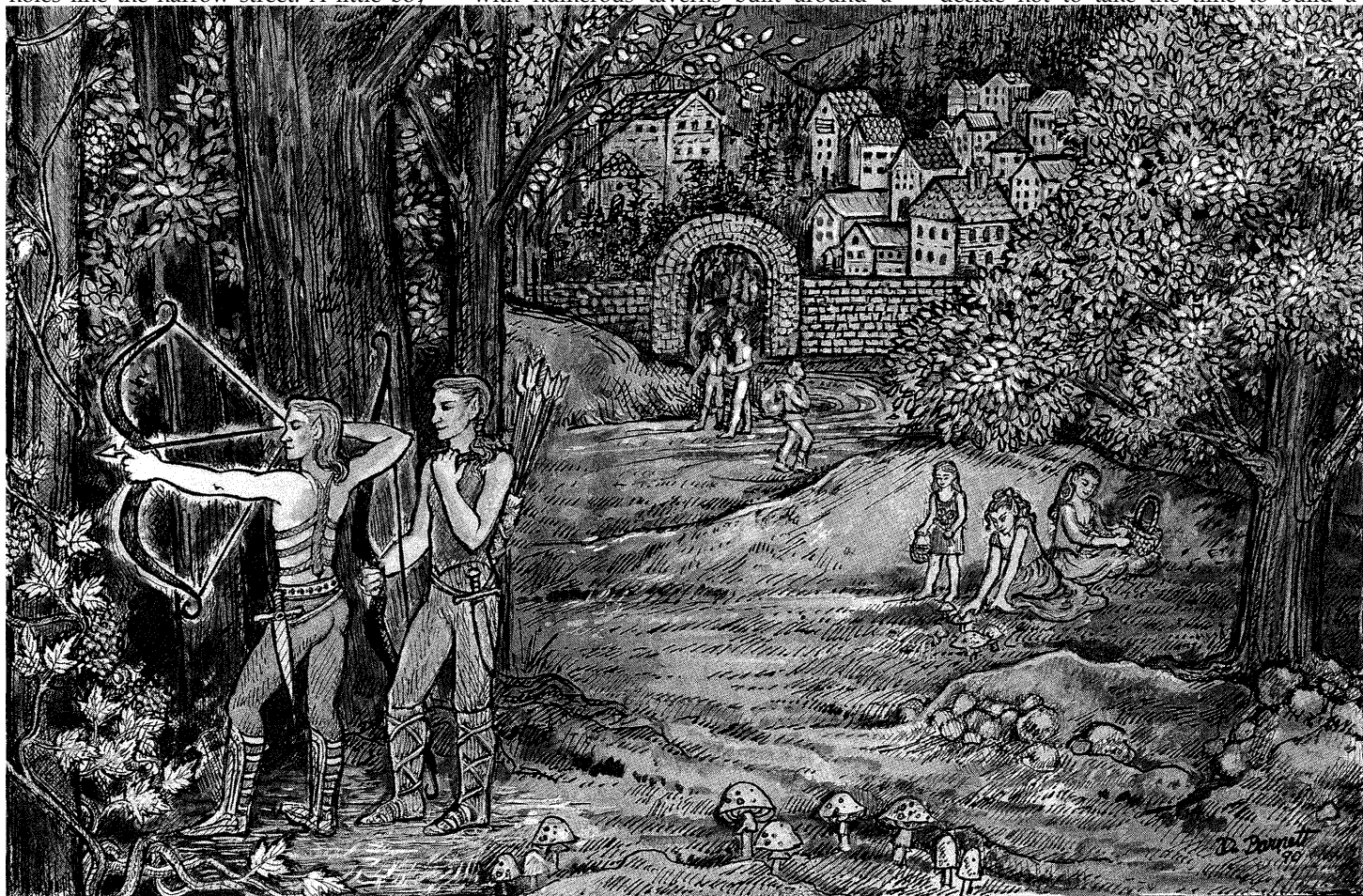
The inhabitants are not the only thing that affects the mood. Architecture is an important factor, and it is much more likely that the buildings fit the adjective better than the people. A friendly town for instance, might have thatched roofs and brightly painted cottages; an extravagant town would have peaked arches and impressive façades. Other things to take into consideration are the town layout and the types of businesses. A town with numerous taverns built around a

bustling town square conveys a totally different mood than one built on a grid, with one small tavern and no inn, with only a way-house at the nearby religious retreat.

Another more subtle indication of town personality is how quickly it accepts new ideas. Progressive towns are interested in news of other places and are delighted by anything that is innovative and new. Anti-progressive towns aren't interested in the rest of the world and are scornful of any device (or fashion) they haven't seen before. Some towns are mixed, with half the populace eager for change, while the other half clings desperately to the past. This alters not only the mood of the town but also its technology level. The technology levels that are possible depend largely on your campaign world, but don't hesitate to go to extremes. Inventors do not always live in the city, so Poketon may well be a few years ahead of the rest of the country, while the neighboring town is centuries behind the times.

Disputes

If the players are bored, the DM may decide not to take the time to build a



mood but opt instead for quick action. The easiest way to do this is to have the town already involved in some kind of fight. A special dispute not only keeps the players happy but also serves to make the town stand out in their memory.

Feuds work well. Take, for example the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. It's about two important families whose feud is so severe that they manage to involve a good part of the city. In a small town this sort of situation is even more deadly. It's virtually impossible for anyone to remain neutral; even chance visitors need to take sides at least to the degree of deciding whose inn they will sleep in that night.

DM: You awake to the smell of smoke and the sound of shouting. Footsteps are clattering down the hall outside your door.

Beran: (Leaping to the door and throwing it open.) What's going on here!?

DM: A peasant boy turns to face you, waving his dagger and shouting, "Death to all Saiger-lovers!"

Beran: (Picking the boy up and shaking him.) I love only Galyna, Lady of Hearthkeep, and I'll kill anyone who says otherwise!

Fewmar: What's a Saiger? Wasn't that the the name of the innkeeper?

Lady Ariadne: Never mind that; I think the inn is on fire!

Another interesting situation occurs when the town is divided politically. For instance, the last election was a tie, and both candidates now consider themselves mayor. If the situation is violent, the players will be called upon to choose sides, but there is always the possibility that there is no fighting, just two town sheriffs enforcing two sets of laws, two tax collectors, two places they must get their weapons licensed, etc.

Each mayor could have his own distinct territory, but it is generally more fun to just have each mayor claim the whole town or to at least have the border line between sections irregular and indistinguishable so the players never know which set of laws they are subject to at any given moment.

Guard: Ho there!

Fewmar: Yes?

Guard: You just used magic!

Fewmar: Err, yes.

Beran: You got a problem with that?

Guard: It's against the law to use magic in Poketon.

Lady Ariadne: Nonsense, my good man. That fellow in High street didn't say anything!

Guard: High street is in Upper Poketon. You're in Lower Poketon now. Come with me.

If Poketon has a close neighbor, then it would be quite likely for them to have developed a rivalry. This rivalry is most commonly expressed by strong competition in sporting events, with a number of towns going so far as inventing their own events. For instance there are two towns in England that annually compete over a side of ham. The ham starts at a midway point between the two towns, and the town that gets it into their own town square first gets to keep it. A fun variation could be to have a whole live pig, which would, of course, be doing its best to get away. Any type of contest will do: and there are many to choose from; team sports, wrestling, greased pole climbing, target shooting, seeing how high you can count before taking a breath. Try to pick something that will interest your player's characters.

Whether there is a sporting event actually going on, there are many people in a rival town willing to bore the players to death by giving blow by blow accounts of every event that occurred during the last 10 years. It is important to remember that according to Poketon's loyal citizens, Poketon is clearly superior. Anything Rivalburg does, Poketon does better. This attitude carries over from sporting events to industry and almost all other aspects of small town life; Poketon's cows produce better milk than Rivalburg's cows, their priest is more pious, their blacksmith better skilled.

In extreme circumstances a rivalry develops into a war,

DM: The small shifty-eyed man behind the bar leans towards you.

Bartender: Are you from Rivalburg?

Lady Ariadne: Use your eyes, my good man. Do I look like somebody from Rivalburg?

Beran: Never heard of the place.

Bartender: Then I'm glad you're here. You two look like you'd be useful in a fight. The sheriff asked me to look out for anyone who might be willing to join our march on Rivalburg!

Fewmar: Why are you attacking Rivalburg?

Bartender: (Ignoring Fewmar.) What do you say?

Lady Ariadne: Hmmm. Why not?

After all, a good fight is always amusing.

Bartender: Well, we're not attacking them, precisely, you understand. It's a protest march.

Beran: A what?

Fewmar: What are you protesting?

Bartender: Those scurvy knaves have been under-cutting our prices! We're going to lay down the law to those dastards! Either they put their prices back to where they used to be or we retaliate! (The bartender shakes a fist in the direction of Rivalburg, then realizing he's making a scene, looks back at the adventurers.)

Lady Ariadne: I'm sorry. I don't do demonstrations.

Bartender: (Shrugging.) Sheriff wanted some heavy-weights around in case there was trouble. We'll pay you, of course.

Poketon doesn't need to be fighting another town; they could be fighting outlaws, a renegade magic user, an appropriate monster or some kind of spell effect gone wild.

Points of interest

Some "points of interest towns" are considered so interesting that they expect people to come visit them. The PCs are not likely to turn tourist, but the townsfolk don't know that and will expect them to be fascinated by the local points of interest. Some points of interest can even prove useful to the characters. Tourist towns are usually easy for the DM to invent, since he can "borrow" a town that he has actually been to and alter it to fit his campaign world.

Buildings are common points of interest, though they rarely contribute directly to a campaign. Buildings are generally notable for their architecture, purpose, and historic association. Good choices for small towns are: the Deserted Tower of Joe the Ultra-magical, the tavern where Black Bart the famous Outlaw ate his last meal, or one of the Royal Hunting Lodges. Haunted buildings are also good, especially if the characters actually get to meet the ghost.

When inventing a notable building, keep in mind what people might be staying there. These people can often be useful to the characters. For instance, the country residence of a VIP will be populated by his dependents, who can act as a source of valuable introductions and provide an excuse for getting the players back on the road to Actropolis.

Lord John: You wouldn't by any chance be heading to Actropolis?

Beran: Yes.

Fewmar: Why do you ask?

Lord John: I was hoping you could deliver a message to my brother, the Earl of Swaite.

Lady Ariadne: We're entirely at your service, milord. Where is he staying?

Other points of interest are a trifle harder to make useful. Natural features, for instance are mostly just boring for the players because most of them look interesting. Of course you can use boredom to convince the characters that they are in a hurry to get out of town. After hearing eight or nine people tell them how spectacular the local waterfall (mountain, rock formation, centuries-old tree, etc.) is they will be happy to climb right back on their horses.

Much more interesting is the town with historical associations. This is the town that has a real place in history and capitalizes on it. Some towns may invent a place in history, and, unless one of the characters has an education, it comes out to much the same thing. As a rule of thumb, half of the people in a "historic" town have an encyclopedic knowledge of the historic event in question, and the other half thinks the whole thing is a great bore. At least half of those who know exactly what happened will know a vastly different version from the other half, and at least one person from each side likes nothing better than to argue about it.

Historic towns are a lot of fun but are easier to improvise if you already have a good grasp of the history of the campaign area. If the campaign area has no predetermined history and you are inventing it, remember to take notes. Absolute consistency, however, is unnecessary since most history tends to get distorted. In fact, it is more authentic to have several versions of a particular historical incident.

Miller: Don't you sneer at me milady! I've a respectable trade. And it was a miller, after all, that hid King Connie when his brother Ed tried to usurp the throne.

Lady Ariadne: I sneer at whom I like.

Fewmar: Besides, it was a blacksmith who hid King Connie.

Miller: Nonsense, it had to be a miller. Who else would have such a large supply of grain sacks?

Fewmar: Grain sacks?

Miller: Didn't you know that he was smuggled out of the country disguised as a sack of grain?

Fewmar: I thought he disguised himself as a serving maid.

Beran: The brewer told me he hid in a keg of ale.

Lady Ariadne: What? Not a cart load of cabbages?

Miller: It was a grain sack, I tell you! I know all about it.

It can be difficult making a historic town useful unless the town also contains a collection of historic artifacts. Often some historian or collector lives in a small town so he can pursue his hobby in peace, and many of these can provide genuine assistance to adventurers. He might lend them some special magical item, or they might be able to peruse ancient documents for clues to the location of this ancient ruins, or that powerful item.

Usually a collector demands yet another item to add to his collection as payment. This often leads to another adventure. If you do not wish to create another adventure (it does not have to happen immediately; the collector may be willing to wait) then another form of payment must be found.

Collector: I call it a collusion detector. It's a very rare item, and not very useful in a fight, but invaluable for uncovering secret plots. It's how King Connie finally discovered Prince Ed's treachery.

Fewmar: It must be very valuable. You wouldn't want to lend out something so unique!

Collector: Well, I offered it to his majesty when I first found it, but he preferred to rely on the services of the Royal Wizard. It's terribly easy to counter, you see, so it's really only useful if no one knows you have it.

Beran: What price?

Collector: You wouldn't happen to know where King Connie's Crown has gotten too?

Fewmar: In the capital?

Collector: Oh dear me, no! That one is quite fake. (Looks at adventurers and sighs.) Oh well, I could use some help about the place. There is a terrible manpower shortage here in Poketon. Inventory perhaps, and if you could help me move some of the larger pieces and do the dusting...

Lady Ariadne: Sir! I'll have you know, I don't dust!

Some collections are singularly useless; old theater props for example, and decorated chamber pots; but they still add immeasurably to the flavor of the town. In fact, useless items are often more distinctive than useful ones. Who could forget a giant hammer, a floating building, an illusionary organ grinder and monkey, or the statue of a moose? Things that are odd or out of place are noticed and remembered. You must use this technique sparingly, however, because if there is something peculiar in every town the players will come to expect it, and it will no longer be memorable.

Unforgettable Characters

Often a town is remembered not for itself, but because of someone who lives there. You don't even have to make up a character; you can just steal one from another source. Just remember that when you are in a town, character is established not just by how the DM describes a character but by how the other townspeople talk about them. A character that is interesting to the players is also likely to be interesting to his fellow citizens.

DM: It's a town, about average size. Only one street is paved, the one you are on, the rest are packed down dirt.

Players: Where's the tavern?

DM: A sign showing a foaming mug hangs over a building ahead and to the right. As you approach you pass close to a young man. He wears tattered rags, and his bright red hair looks like it has never been combed. He is looking about vacantly, but when his eyes pass over Lady Ariadne he starts and rushes over to her, grasping her sleeve.

Lady Ariadne: Hands off, sirrah!

DM: One of his eyes stares earnestly into your face, while the other eye wanders about. "Who?" he asks. "Who?"

Lady Ariadne: I am Lady Ariadne Wynn. Hands off knave!

Townswoman: Don't mind him none, Milady, he's just Moe, the town idiot.

DM: Moe releases your arm and wanders off to the side of the road. As you enter the tavern, the bartender, a tall man with a mop of improbable yellow curls addresses you.

Bartender: So you've already met the town idiot.

Beran: He seems harmless enough.

Bartender: Surely, but there is something about him. Normally he seems to

have the wits of a rabbit, but then he says something so remarkably apt... (Shakes his head wonderingly.) And then there's the way he arrived!

Fewmar: Oh? How was that?

The town's interesting character may not live there any longer. This is potentially very useful. If he is a personage of importance in your planned campaign, this is a great way to let the players dig up some back-ground information on him. Not only do the townspeople know all about his childhood, but they likely have a very good idea of what he is up to now.

Establishing the legal limits

A small town may have developed it's own set of laws and rules. Though most of these rules had a very good reason behind them when they were made, not all reasons last as long as the rule does. Not knowing the reason for the rule, (which may indeed no longer exist,) the players are likely to find some of the villagers' rules ridiculous in the extreme, such as: anyone walking down main street must wear a hat; no lighting fires out of doors; no talking in the town square; or anyone who sleeps in town overnight must first introduce himself to the priest.

Other rules are obvious as to the reasoning but irksome to the players: one way bridge, no wearing of unregistered weapons, no mounts allowed in the village proper, no killing the local wildlife without a license, taxes.

Sheriff: Have you got a license for that there creature?

Fewmar: Shasta is a marmot. She's my familiar.

Sheriff: Doesn't matter. All domesticated animals require a license if you want to bring them into Poketon. You also need licenses for your horses.

Lady Ariadne: Don't be ridiculous, my good man!

Sheriff: Oh, you needn't worry, horse licenses are easy to get. Just walk into town, take a left at the Mermaid, and pretty soon you'll find Jasper's stables. Jasper will come out here and inspect your beasts for a reasonable fee, and then I write out your license. Simple! I don't know about that marmot creature though. Never done a license for a marmot!

Getting any kind of a license requires finding the person with the proper authority. This is not necessarily any easier to do in a small town than in a big city. A common problem is that no one is sure who the proper person is. The land-lord sends you to the mayor, who sends you to the sheriff, who sends you to the priest, who thinks that really Lord So-and-such ought to be the one to sign it, only he's off hunting or something and no one knows when he'll be back. By having the locals waffle back and forth you can keep the characters running around for some time. This is not a good idea if you are trying to hurry the players off to Actropolis, but it works fine if you just thought of a neat adventure they could have right here if only you have enough time to work out the details.

Another important thing to remember is the powerful effect that organizations can have on a town. At some points in history, the guilds were more powerful than the monarch. A guild (or local equivalent) flexing its muscles is a good way to make a town memorable. Merriment and cheer are in short supply at the tavern if the brewers are on strike; the players may have to brave the picket-lines in order to buy supplies at a non-union grocer, or the Tanner's Guild may have picked this very town for their annual conference, and the stench is making the place uninhabitable. Even lesser organizations can have quite an impact. Never underestimate the power of the PTA or the Civic Improvement Association; the local busybodies may well decide that adventurers make rotten role-models for their children and attempt to run them out of town.

Townsmen: Are you a member of the Magistar and Wonderworkers' Union?

Fewmar: No, I can't say that I am.

Townsmen: In that case we would really rather you moved on, this being a union town and all.

Fewmar: Can't I just promise not to use my magic?

Townsmen: If I just say a few words to my fellow citizens this town would become less than comfortable: ridiculously high prices, full inn, that sort of thing.

Lady Ariadne: We will not be threatened!

Beran: We are trying to get to Actropolis. We only stopped here to get some more supplies.

Townsmen: Oh? Well in that case I would be happy to direct you. Our grocer

is on High Street, he carries hardtack guaranteed to survive flood, spell, and hard journeying. Our armorer is just there, across the square, and...

Yes, Poketon is certainly an interesting place. It will be long remembered by your players, who are now back on the road to Actropolis. At least they were back on the road to Actropolis until a random encounter with some horse thieves somehow put them on the road to Sameville. Sameville is another dot on the map, but there is no problem making it distinctive. The dots themselves may look identical, but by using one of these ideas you can guarantee that Sameville won't be the same at all!

Things to remember:

Personality

1. Pick an adjective, any adjective
2. Technology level

Disputes

3. Feuds
4. A Town Divided
5. Sporting Rivals
6. Other battles

Points of interest

7. Buildings
8. Natural features
9. Historical
10. Collections
11. Oddities

Characters

12. The Character
13. He used to live here

Legal Limits

14. Ridiculous rules
15. Bureaucracy
16. Guilds
17. Other organizations



Michelle Bottorff lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her husband and three children. This is her first appearance in DRAGON® Magazine.

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ARCAINE



MONSOONS AND THE POWER OF OM



by Michael A. Selinker

illustrated by Terry Dykstra

These magic spells for the AD&D® game are inspired by Indian history and legend, but they are not meant to be historically accurate. These spells can be integrated into existing campaigns or used in conjunction with the article "Caste of Characters" in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #225. Together these articles can help form the basis of a campaign set in a civilization based on India.

"Caste of Characters" described Indian kits for different character classes. The Indian mage kit is called a Swami. Mage spells below are available to all Swamis as well as Fakirs (an Indian bard kit) and Yogis (ascetics; see *Legends & Lore*, page 125). Yogis do not need material components for any spells, including those below; neither do they need spellbooks to cast spells. Conversely, they cannot read mage scrolls. Non-Swamis and Fakirs (i.e., "conventional" mages and bards not from Indian-based civilizations) may have access to the spells below at the Dungeon Master's discretion, perhaps after seeing them or learning them while on some quest to an area based on Indian culture.

Brahmins (the Indian priest kit) gain spells as do most other priests, with the highest-level spells being granted by avatars (manifestations) of their deities. Brahmins have access to all priest spells listed below, provided the spheres are compatible. Non-Brahmins may gain access to these spells at the Dungeon Master's discretion, though steep soma-juice should be limited in its travels. In campaigns set in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS®* or other settings that do not feature an Indian culture, modifications may have to be made to some spells before they can be included.

Several spells below deal with concepts unique to Indian philosophy, all of which are explained in *Legends & Lore*, pages 123-126. Karma should be a ruling force in the lives of those playing PCs based on Indian culture. Specific attention should be paid to the rules on reincarnation on page 126, with the practical restrictions on *raise dead* and resurrection spells used on Indian kit characters, who should automatically be reincarnated within a day. Attempting to alter this cycle is dangerous.

Swami Spells

Cloud messenger

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 1
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

This spell, based on a classical panegyric poem, can be cast only on a day with cloud cover: mist, rain, snow, and so on. The spell summons a small cloud to act as a messenger for the caster. The caster can impart a message of up to five minutes length to the cloud, which then hurries across the sky to the intended recipient. Its maximum Move is 96, though favorable gales might increase this. The *cloud messenger* must be told the location and general appearance of the recipient; it is incapable of asking for directions. It is not entirely substantial and so can go through tiny openings and survive heavy winds. It can carry objects weighing up to 10 pounds for delivery. When it reaches its recipient, it relates the entire message including whatever emotion it heard in the caster's voice. The *cloud messenger* then returns to its caster; one may follow it to the caster's location. The material components are fresh flowers and a bottle of rainwater.

Waking light of dawn

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 1
Range: 10 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 2
Area of Effect: 1 creature/level
Saving Throw: None

This spell causes sleeping creatures to awaken. If naturally asleep or affected by a *sleep* spell, the creatures awaken instantly. If under the influence of a more powerful enchantment, the creatures are given new saving throws against the effect, modified by +1 per four levels of the caster. If the creatures are suffering from a sleeping poison or disease (such as that from the tsetse fly), the spell works exactly as a *slow poison* on the affected creatures. The spell does not simulate the effects of a good night's sleep, nor can it reduce the sleep neces-

sary before memorization of spells. The material component is a lock which must be unlocked during casting.

Distract

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 3
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2 rounds/level
Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: Special

A mage can use this spell to distract all within hearing distance who are trying to do any sort of work other than combat. The material component of the spell is a flute. While the caster plays the flute (no proficiency necessary), those wishing to continue in their work must make a Wisdom check each round to concentrate on their task at hand. Wisdom checks are at +4 if stopping work would result in imminent harm (failing to shore up a seawall during a monsoon, for example). Distracted persons cannot formulate strategies, instruct others, write, draw, or otherwise do complex work. However, the spell does not pacify those present, so they may attack the caster if they desire. If the caster stops playing the flute before the duration is over, the effect ends.

Skin of the fire tiger

(Alteration)

Level: 3
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 3 rounds/level
Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: 1 creature
Saving Throw: None

When cast on the caster or another creature, this spell imbues the subject with glowing orange stripes across his skin. These stripes generate a deep internal warmth that acts as a *resist cold* spell. While in effect, the subject's skin is scalding hot to the touch, so anyone touching the subject's open skin suffers 1d3 points of damage. If the subject uses an unarmed combat attack or is attacked by an unarmed foe, the damage is applied to the subject's foe. The subject and his garments are unaffected by the scalding effect but are not otherwise protected from fire or heat. After the spell elapses, the subject will be incapacitated for one round due to shivering unless *endure cold* or *resist cold* is cast on him. The material component of the spell is a tiger-eye gem.



Serpent garland (Alteration)

Level: 4
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: 1 item
Saving Throw: Special

By casting this spell, the mage turns his ordinary scarf, necklace, or other neckwear into a poisonous snake. The snake appears to be the normal piece of clothing or jewelry until the caster desires it to attack. It strikes as a Warrior with a level equal to that of the caster. Its bite causes 1d2 points of damage, plus it also injects a poison if the victim does not make a saving throw vs. poison. The poison may be of the caster's choosing: lethal (save or die), paralytic (save or be paralyzed for 4d4 turns), or soporific (save or fall into a coma for 1d4 days). The snake may attack once per round, during which time it is revealed as a serpent. Reversing the *sticks to snakes* spell cancels this magic, and the snake is subject to snake charms. When the duration elapses or the effect is dispelled, the garment or jewelry returns to normal.

Mourning stone (Abjuration)

Level: 4
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Permanent
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: Up to 1 ton/level
Saving Throw: Special

This spell channels a person's grief over loss of a loved one into stone. When cast upon a subject and an amount of stone, the spell pulls the grief from the subject's heart and forces the stone to grieve instead. The subject gets a saving throw vs. magic to avoid the effects if he wants to retain his grief. When affected by the spell, the subject feels the weight of sorrow unburdened from his heart. The stone shows its grief by becoming pristine white and refracting light like a prism, never appearing exactly the same twice. Persons viewing the stone are awestruck and saddened for one round though not stopped from acting. Within 10' of *mourning stone*, *emotion*, and other such spells and effects are cancelled. Stone enchanted by this spell can be used to erect buildings, in the manner of beautiful and enigmatic mausolea like the Taj Mahal.

Third eye (Evocation)

Level: 7
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 7
Area of Effect: Caster
Saving Throw: Special

This spell creates a swirling spiral on the caster's forehead which casts beams of annihilation. The *third eye* fires a ray which has the same attack roll as the mage. The beams must attack a target every round, living or otherwise. Creatures hit by the *third eye's* ray must save vs. spell or be killed, while inanimate objects must save vs. disintegration or break apart. While this spell is in effect, the caster may use no other spells or attacks. At the end of the spell, the caster must make a System Shock roll to avoid falling unconscious for 3d4 rounds.

Life illusion (Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 8
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 8
Area of Effect: 1 creature
Saving Throw: Special

Similar to a *maze* spell, the *life illusion* spell creates a new mental world in which the subject can live. The illusory life (*maya*) can include any manner of new persons, surroundings, and even new classes and abilities for the subject. The subject is allowed a saving throw vs. spells to avoid entering this new world, but if he fails, the subject retains only dream-like memories of his real life. Entire months or years can pass in this new life, though time passes much faster here than in the real world. No method of exit is allowed while in the illusory world, except the priest spell *penetrate cosmic ignorance*. The illusion seems real but may contain flaws and misperceptions based on the subjects lack of understanding of his new surroundings. Thus, the subject is allowed new saving throws vs. spells every so often based on his Wisdom score. If a saving throw is successful, the subject returns to reality with much of the memory of the illusory life, though no new abilities are retained. New saving throws are allowed on the following schedule:



Subject's Wisdom Score	Time Between Saving Throws
under 3	2d4 days
3-6	1d4+1 days
7-10	2d8 hours
11-14	1d8+1 hours
15-18	1d4 hours
19 and up	1d4 turns

The material component is a sketch of the environment in which the subject will stay. If the sketch is marred or destroyed during the spell's duration, the subject immediately returns to reality.

Monsoon (Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 9
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2 turns/level
Casting Time: 1 turn
Area of Effect: 10d100 square miles
Saving Throw: None

This spell can only be cast in a climate which could have monsoons, such as a semi-tropical coastline. When cast, the spell conjures up the most powerful of wind and rainstorms to ravage the area. Winds come at hundreds of miles per hour, smashing boats and unstable structures. Rain pounds the area, swamping piers and depressions. The spell causes siege damage as by a screw or drill on all structures and trees in the area of effect, and all unmoored ships must make seaworthiness checks. (*DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, pages 105 and 170). Creatures that cannot take adequate cover on high ground must save vs. paralyzation to avoid drowning. From the caster's point of view, the most dangerous aspect of this spell is its range of zero. This means the caster must be amid the effect; if he is not protected, he is subject to the same effects as everyone else. The monsoon can be countered using a *control weather* spell, but the caster of that spell must roll greater than the monsoon creator's Intelligence on a d20, with +1 added to the roll for each level that the *control weather* caster exceeds the level of the monsoon creator. Once the *monsoon* is unleashed, the caster has no control over it, and it may combine with existing weather conditions to have greater duration and effect than anticipated.

Brahmin Spells

Om
(Abjuration)
Sphere: All
Level: 1
Range: 0
Components: V
Duration: Until ceased
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Caster
Saving Throw: None

This simple chant creates a deep clarity in the caster's mind. All outside sounds and sights are blocked out, allowing the priest to regain spells or hit points at a 50% faster rate; however, the priest cannot focus on anything outside himself. Anything that disrupts concentration, such as an attack on the priest or a conscious action by him breaks the spell. Spells cast on the priest are affected by the *om* spell. The priest is immune to sleep and *charm* effects while chanting, and receives a +4 on all saving throws that allow Wisdom bonuses; however, the priest forfeits saving throw bonuses for Dexterity or anything else requiring-conscious thought. Magical healing is not affected by the spell's increased healing rate.

Sanctify ghi
(Alteration) Reversible
Sphere: All
Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Permanent
Casting Time: 8 hours
Area of Effect: 2 ounces/level
Saving Throw: None

This augments the holy clarification of butter into a liquid substance called ghi. Cow or buffalo milk must be churned, boiled, and blessed to make holy ghi, which can be used on undead as holy water. When drunk, the holy ghi acts as a mild curative, healing 1d3 points of damage per ounce. The reverse of this spell, *desecrate ghi*, is used by evil priests to create a liquid butter version of unholy water, which harms paladins and Kshatriya. Either of these spells can be used to counter the other.

Karma sight
(Divination) Reversible
Sphere: Divination
Level: 2
Range: 10 yards
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 2
Area of Effect: 1 creature/level
Saving Throw: Neg.



This spell determines the number of karma points that a target creature has. (For rules on karma, see *Legends & Lore*, pages 124-126.) In creatures from societies not based on India, it determines level or Hit Dice. Unless the creature is a willing target, it is allowed a saving throw vs. spells to avoid the revelation of its karma. This spell does not directly affect the mind of the target, so Wisdom bonuses and mind shielding do not help avoid the effect. The priest may examine multiple targets, but if a creature saves against the effect, it cannot be examined again during that casting of the spell. The reverse of the spell, *karma musk*, hides a subject's karma for 24 hours, though any divine being can see through the mask.

Steep soma-juice
(Allegation)

Sphere: Protection

Level: 2

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: One week

Casting Time: 8 hours

Area of Effect: 2 ounces/level

Saving Throw: None

This spell is per *Legends & Lore*, page 132. It is primarily for those of Indian societies, though others could be allowed to use it or their deities could grant it if the Dungeon Master desires. When the priest brews and blesses the soma plant's leaves, he creates a powerful magical juice. Those drinking at least one ounce a week receive two benefits: an increase of one point of Constitution and immunity to non-magical disease. These effects dissipate at the end of a week without soma-juice. The priests generally restrict the usage of the juice to nobles and priests.

That art thou
(Divination)

Sphere: Divination

Level: 3

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 30' radius sphere

Saving Throw: None

By uttering the phrase "*tat tvam asi*" ("that art thou"), the caster's senses become one with all beings and objects within a 30' radius sphere centered on

the caster. The caster sees and feels everything sensed by every person, caterpillar, tree, and rock in the area of effect. (A first-time caster will be surprised how much a rock feels.) The onrush of sensory information allows the caster to know of all beings and objects in the area, including hidden and invisible creatures, traps, and magic items. The caster does not sense thoughts or detect powers of creatures and objects contacted. Because the spell accesses thoughts, any being whose thoughts are masked cannot be spotted solely with this spell. While the spell is in effect, the caster may take no other action, including movement and speech. The caster may discontinue the effect at any time during the spell's duration.

See all faces

(Divination)

Sphere: Divination

Level: 4

Range: 10 yards

Components: V, M

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 4

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: Neg.

This spell requires that an item belonging to the target be in the caster's possession. When cast, an unwilling target must make saving throw vs. spells or have all major aspects of his personality revealed to the caster. Thus, if the target is a mage, a rajah, a lothario, or a liar, the caster knows it. Note that the *see all faces* spell reveals only truly major aspects; if the aforementioned target also liked chocolate and raga music, this would not be revealed. Since this spell does not affect the mind, mind shielding and Wisdom bonuses are not effective defenses.

Pool of deeds
(Enchantment)

Sphere: Divination, Elemental (Water)

Level: 5

Range: 10 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 24 hours

Casting Time: 6 turns

Area of Effect: 1 pool

Saving Throw: None

The *pool of deeds* spell turns any pool of water, from as small as a birdbath to as large as a small lake, into a storyteller. The enchanted pool can recount the pub-

licly known deeds of any one individual exactly as they happened. The subject may be living, dead, or even not yet born; the deeds may reflect the past, present, and even possible futures. The surface of the water reflects the images as if they were happening at the moment, and at the speed at which they occurred. The caster must know of the stories that he wants to reflect, but he need not know the details. If the caster wishes to reflect deeds that are not publicly known, he may try *The subject makes a saving throw vs. spells to keep secrets unrevealed*; this roll is at the subject's level at the time of the revealed deeds.

The caster may create a *pool of deeds* that reflects his own future, but the images may leave out critical details to prevent tampering with the future. The caster should expect whatever appears to come true, regardless of his efforts to change it. The pool is activated by tossing in a handful of colored powder.

Conceal lifeforce

(Abjuration)

Sphere: Necromantic

Level: 5

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 day/level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

This spell hides a being's lifeforce (*shakti*) from detection, preventing spells like *karma sight* and *reincarnation sight* from working on the creature. It can also be used for a much more dangerous purpose: to prevent the creature from being *reincarnated*, at least temporarily. By casting *conceal lifeforce* on a creature within an hour of its death, the creature's self (*atman*) is hidden from the divine agents who attend to reincarnation. During the spell's duration, the character may be *raised* or *resurrected*. (This should be the only way *raise dead* or *resurrection* can be used on a character from an Indian-based culture or with an Indian-based PC kit more than a day after death; see *Legends & Lore*, page 126.) Using this spell for this purpose is a violation of the cosmic order and may trigger divine wrath.



Reincarnation sight

(Divination)

Sphere: Divination, Necromantic

Level: 6

Range: Special

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 6

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

This spell reveals the presence of a reincarnated character. Using a piece of clothing belonging to the original character, the priest may use this spell to discover the reincarnation of that character's name, appearance, and approximate location. If found, a reincarnation has only vague memories of his past and will be unlikely to recognize any of his compatriots. The spell can cross planar barriers, but it cannot penetrate barriers like *conceal lifeforce* or *amulets of life protection*.

A second use of this spell is to reveal to a person all of the memories of one of his reincarnations. The priest needs merely to touch the subject, and he knows all that his past life contained. Using the two uses of this spell in order can reacquaint old friends, at least in a superficial way. (Note that these spells allow a slain PC to rejoin the campaign with his memories intact, and perhaps his level and abilities. See the reincarnation table on page 126 of *Legends&Lore*.)

Penetrate cosmic ignorance

(Divination)

Sphere: Divination

Level: 7

Range: 0

Components: V, S

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 7

Area of Effect: 108/level radius

Saving Throw: Special

This dangerous spell is based on the age-old belief that the world is just illusion and that mortals may not comprehend it. *Penetrate cosmic ignorance* allows a partial piercing of that veil. When cast, the spell reveals the divine hands behind every creature and object present. The caster learns of characters' patron deities, consecrated spaces, holy relics, spell residue, and extra-planar creatures. It tells every character's level, every magic item's power, and every monster's special abilities, among many other revelations. Wherever the hands of deities manipulate life — and they do so everywhere — the priest will know it.

Using this spell requires the caster to make a saving throw vs. breath weapon, modified only by Wisdom bonuses. If the character fails, he is driven insane by the revelation; if ever cured, he forgets everything he saw. In addition, using this spell wipes all other spells from the caster's mind, and the character must rest a full night before learning new ones.

Call avatar

Sphere: All

Level: 7

Range: Unlimited

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 6 turns

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This risky spell allows the priest to summon an avatar of his deity. The spell opens up a *gate* to another plane, and, though the avatar is compelled to come through the rift, it is not compelled to stay more than an instant. Even if it chooses to hear the requests of the priests, the avatar may or may not grant them. The avatar may also make demands on the priest as well, and the priest would do well to heed them. The avatar may stay as long as it likes, often at great expense to the caster. The spell requires a relic of the deity in question; when the avatar leaves, it takes the relic with it. Casting this spell ages the caster five years.



Michael A. Selinker is a game designer who lives in Seattle, Washington. This is the second in a series of three articles he has written on bringing the Indian subcontinent into the AD&D® game.

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The Ultimate Dungeon Master Gaming Aid

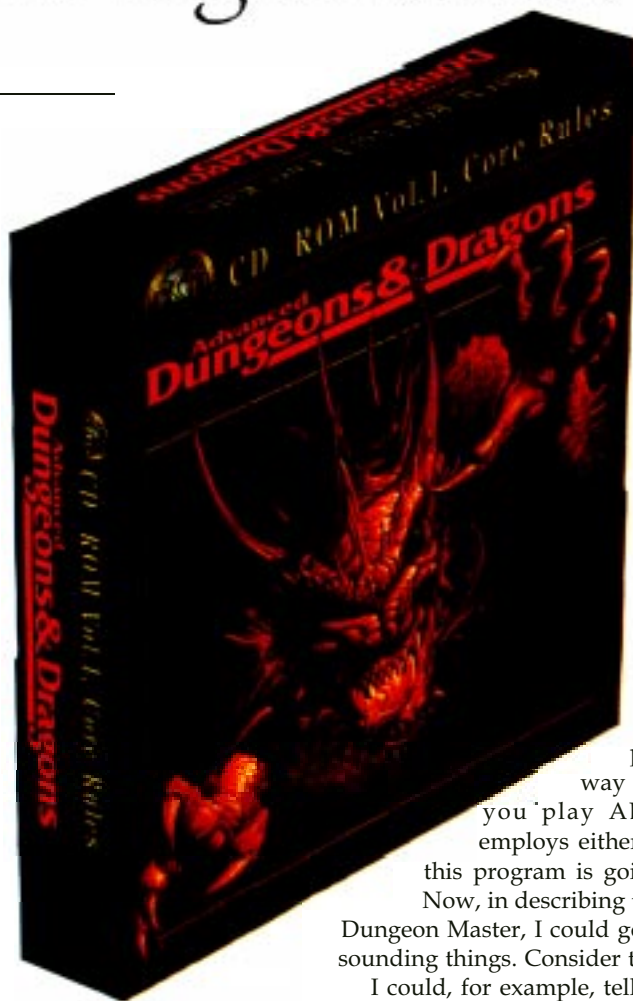
by William W. Connors

I remember a time, long ago, when I was not the cynical, jaded computer guy that I am now. I used to go over to the apartment of Larry Smith (not the one on the *DRAGON*® Magazine staff), a very good friend of mine, and spend hours attempting to delve deeper into the depths of the first Wizardry* game. If you aren't fully aware of the time scale involved here, let's just say that Larry was the proud owner of a brand new, top-of-the-line, cutting-edge Apple computer. The word "smokin'" comes to mind.

Larry and I were avid fans of role-playing games, both electronic and paper versions. We would spend far too many hours gaming, talking about gaming, and talking about talking about gaming. With that in mind, you can imagine our delight when we saw a new series of "Dungeon Master's Assistant" programs on the shelves of our local computer store. Of course, we bought them on sight and went home to see what wonders might be on those unassuming little discs.

We weren't disappointed. These programs allowed us to create characters, generate encounters, and dozens of other things. What more could modern science do for the gamer?

Of course, that was many years ago. Monochrome displays, primitive vector graphics, load times measured in minutes, and 300-baud modems were the rule. In fact, a lot of us used cassette recorders instead of magnetic discs, and even if you did have one of those 300-baud modems, you couldn't do much with it except call up other people with 300-baud modems and admire the fact that you were both, in a word, geeks.



Between then and now, a great many things have changed. Leeching fell out of favor in the medical community, the colonies declared their independence from Great Britain, someone invented the compact disc, and a second edition of the *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® game was written.

Have you figured out where this is headed yet? Good, then I can make an announcement that a lot of people have been wanting to hear (or read, actually) for many years: In August of 1996, at the GEN CON® game fair in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, TSR, Inc., and Evermore Entertainment, Inc., will be releasing a CD-ROM version of the AD&D® core rules. Encumbered with the rather staggering name of *AD&D CD-ROM Vol. I, Core Rules*, this product promises to revolutionize the way in which the AD&D game is played.

you play AD&D and own a computer that employs either Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, then this program is going to be a must-have.

Now, in describing this new tool for the eager player and Dungeon Master, I could go on and on with a list of impressive sounding things. Consider the following:

I could, for example, tell you that it includes all the material in the *Player's Handbook*, *DUNGEON MASTER*® Guide, *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™, *Tome of Magic*, and *Arms and Equipment* catalog. Every word of text, every table, every spell description, every monster — all rendered in an electronic format compatible with virtually every word processing program known to modern man.

I might even mention that all of this text could be easily cross referenced, sorted, and compiled. A user who wanted to do a search for every rule that affects a character's THACO would only need to type in a few simple command and — *ta-dah!* — there it would be.

But I know the readers of *DRAGON Magazine*. They don't want to hear about stuff like that. If they did, it would make sense for me to tell them other things as well.



For instance, I could point out that the CD-ROM includes a number of programs designed to automate the more time-consuming aspects of the game. From complete character generation to the creation of detailed treasure hordes, from the compilation of individual spell books to the design of customized magical items, it's all here.

By now, of course, a less sophisticated

audience would be demanding to know where they could buy a product like this. They'd be standing by their phones, credit cards in hand, eager to give their name and number to an operator who would drop a copy of this fine product into the mail as soon as they hung up. But you aren't the average consumer, are you?

I didn't think so.

A truly demanding audience, like the

Character generation is faster and easier than ever before. Every option that's available at every step of the process is laid out. Mistakes are a thing of the past.

one I'm writing this for, would want to know how this program would help them in the long run. They'd demand that it allow them to keep character records and such on file in an electronic format. Beyond that, they'd insist that, when they update one number on the sheet, all of the characteristics derived from it would be adjusted automatically. They'd insist on the program doing all the nit-picky things that no one really enjoys, like calculating encumbrance categories or movement rates, so that they would have more time for carving up monsters, saving princesses (or princes), and otherwise having fun.

Well, the nice folks at Evermore Entertainment have done all that. In addition, they've taken the time to create a visually stunning cinematic tour of a medieval village. They've combined electronic versions of TSR's best art with graphic images commission specially for this program. Down to the smallest detail, they've gone out of their way to make this program as visually appealing as it is useful.

Let's not forget that no amount of electronic wizardry will change the fact that AD&D is a pen-and-paper game. When you need a character sheet, you just press a button and your printer zaps out a nice-looking, easy-to-read-and-reference character sheet. Remember how nice a new one looks? Now you can have one at the start of every game session.

But, of course, that's what you'd expect, isn't it? So I'm not telling you anything you don't already

The mapping tool lets DMs create detailed dungeons, villages, cities, castles, and wilderness areas. It shows any view in 3-D, cutting guessing what characters can see from where they're standing.



One of many screens that help DMs create adventures is the treasure generator. The computer never forgets the tiniest copper coin.

know (or hadn't guessed), am I?

So what is it that you want from me? What do I have to tell you about this program to impress you? Do I have to tell you that it's been created with the aid of some of the most respected designers in the game industry? That people like Jim Ward, Tim Brown, Steve Winter, and Paul Jaquays have worked closely with Victor Penman, who helped create SSI's award winning AD&D gold box games (as well as the original *Dungeon Master's Assistant** programs I mentioned early on)?

No. I know gamers better than that. They're a caring and sensitive bunch. They want to know about emotional side of this project. They want to hear about the fact that this has been a labor of love for everyone involved. They want to know that we did it for them. That the first question we asked at the start of every step of this process was: how can we make this program better for all those gamers out there? They want to know that everyone involved in this project has come together in the spirit of democracy and freedom that liberated Eastern Europe and brought peace to the Middle East.

Well, I suppose that's mostly true, too.

The fact is, ever since the day I first started playing around with the original *Dungeon Master's Assistant* programs, I've thought they could be improved upon. Way back then, long before I wrote my first adventure or attended my first convention, I started working on a plan to see to it that the ultimate

Users get a fully-animated AD&D® adventure and village tour. Game veterans will enjoy the detailed medieval setting and encounters, while newcomers get to see first-hand how the action unfolds during a role-playing session.



AD&D computer tool would be produced. Sure, my scheme was subtle. I used devils methods that even the CIA frowns upon. But in the end, I got my way. People who never even met me were doing things that I had planned years ago. Even the folks at Evermore, who thought this whole thing was their idea, didn't suspect the truth. Gradually, one-by-one, the pieces of this complex puzzle fell into place.

Now, 15 or so years later, my diabolical plan is almost complete. Soon, I will have the computer program that I've always wanted.

William W. Connors is a game designer at TSR, inc. He is currently hard at work on the new DRAGONLANCE®: THE FIFTH AGE box set.

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





KLASNICK

Powers From the Past

by Andrew Turpin

illustrated by Robert Klasnich

Can PCs' actions affect their belongings?

Erin drew the sword from its scabbard. The flickering torchlight danced in the mirror-like surface, glinting as it fought back the shadows. No runes or decorative scroll-work marred its simple beauty, and its leather hilt was worn smooth by constant use. It was a plain blade made for an ugly purpose: killing.

"This feels strange, Tom. Is it magical?" she asked.

Tom moved the torch closer. "I didn't notice it at first, but now that you mention it there is a certain aura." The frame burned

brighter in the burnished steel, tendrils of smoke seemed to curl down into its depths, rather than upward to the ceiling.

"It reminds me of the story of Aranth Backstabber He drove his sword through his King's back, dooming his people as they fought for their lives during the Ogre Wars."

"You think this might be the sword?" Erin shivered.

"It might be. I wouldn't use it though. The blade was tainted by his evil; you yourself can feel something of that aura, and you are not trained for such things. Anyone who

actually wields it falls in to shadow, betraying those that they love, gradually spreading darkness wherever they go."

"What happened to Aranth?"

"No one knows for sure. . ." Tom paled as he looked from Erin to the sword.

Erin dropped it and quickly rubbed her hand against her cloak. Not such a nice sword after all.

Throughout the life of a character, he comes into contact with many wondrous magical items. The player's reaction

ranges from bored to dismissive when the Dungeon Master reveals the item's abilities. The only time an eyebrow is raised is when the item has earth-shattering powers. Game balance teeters on the brink while the player saves the world in a single combat round, but when asked what the item's history is, the PC probably says, "Er, dunno. It can splat an orc at a thousand yards though!"

The magical item is noted on the PC's record sheet, becoming merely a list of abilities and bonuses that add very little flavor to a hobby that thrives on the imagination. Any DM who has worked hard at breathing life into his campaign will feel his efforts wasted as the characters turn into lists of combat bonuses, personalities lost among the faint pencil marks. Perhaps, in some cases, it is not only the players who have lost the urge to forge a new legend in a world of heroic deeds; a DM who has lost interest is even more of a problem.

All items will have a history. How were they created? Why were they created?

Details such as these will bring a campaign to life, helping both DMs and players as they strive to create an enjoyable adventure that will be remembered many years down the road. Characters' possessions will be linked to them, carrying their legends into the future, creating a legacy for the ages. A character's sword will be held in awe for centuries after his death, his heroic nature part of its steel.

Perhaps it will "grant powers" to those who wield it in the future, powers that will enable others to live up to the legend. One need not have a magical sword to have a worthy blade; any weapon that the character uses in a dramatic fashion will be remembered.

These rules will enable you to create "magical" items based upon the actions characters take to keep their names alive in the ages to come, helping the players to create and maintain their legends, and helping the gaming group to enjoy their hobby.

Creating a legend

As the players role-play their characters' actions, they make many decisions. Every action becomes part of the character's history, threads that will be woven to form the pattern of a character's personality. Players define the boundaries of what their characters are willing to do. Every character has a different range of possible actions: some

strive for honor, helping those in danger and offering aid wherever it is needed, while others kill their associates for gain. The more dramatic an action, the more it will be talked about in the years to come, moving the character further along the road to becoming a legend.

With each action, there is a chance of a reward. The more dramatic an action, the more powerful the reward. A character who constantly trips his friends with his staff, sending the poor fellows plummeting to their death, might receive a negative reward. Perhaps his staff will strike out at his friends during combat, earning muttered curses from the other heroes. He will be eyed suspiciously wherever he goes, everyone afraid of what he might do when their backs are turned.

Rewards should be treated carefully. They should not be powerful enough to tip the balance completely in the character's favor, nor should it cause any player to feel he has been treated unfairly.

Each time a power is given, a list of interesting role-playing possibilities should be thought up and presented to the players. A power might not benefit the party, but it can still be interesting to use, causing mayhem in the midst of a melee, or just being an amusing trick that the players can use when things start to get a little serious.

Each time a character takes an action, he adds bit by bit to the ongoing legend of his life. Whether his possessions gain powers is based on how dramatic his actions are: the more dramatic the action the higher the chance that an item will be affected in some manner.

Action ratings

To assess the probability of an action giving some magical power as a reward, use the following list to gauge the worthiness. There are six ratings: normal, low, high, very high, exceptional, and unique.

Actions of a normal rating are not highly heroic or evil in nature. They are everyday actions that someone would do without any danger involved. A low rating means that something the character did was slightly out of the ordinary. For instance, dragging a friend out of a burning house would come under this rating. A high rating means that the character made a conscious choice to face danger. The character in the example above who had just dragged his friend out realizes that his younger brother is locked inside the house. He turns around

and rushes back into the flames in an attempt to save him. An action that would be given a very high rating is deliberately guiding the rest of your party to their deaths at the hands of a group of marauding orcs.

Exceptional means that you have done something that few people would even consider. Fighting single-handedly against overwhelming odds for the sake of strangers, for example.

The unique rating describes once-in-a-lifetime actions such as laying down your life for someone else, or perhaps regicide.

The table below lists each of these ratings and gives the corresponding percentage chance that the action receives a reward.

Whenever you feel a character has done something dramatic, you may make a roll, but only two successful rolls are allowed per level (or per year of game time if the character can no longer advance). The first of these rolls can be for either a good or evil action. The second must be for an action of an opposite moral stance. So, if the first roll was for an heroic action, the second can be only for an evil deed, or vice versa.

One other column is present in the table: spell points. This determines the maximum number of spell levels that can be rewarded for a certain action.

Any spell up to this level can be embedded into an item, it is up to the player and the DM to choose them. If the spell points value is high, you may allow more than one spell to be embedded, but the combined spell levels must be no greater than the original number of points.

Table: Action Ratings

Rating	% Chance	Spell Points
Normal	0	0
Low	5	1
High	10	3
Very High	15	5
Exceptional	20	7
Unique	25	9

For example, Tom runs into the powder room of the castle and grabs one of the powder kegs. From outside he can hear the guards shouting and charging towards the room. Quickly, he sprinkles a bit of pow-

der around some of the other kegs and throws his keg away. Kneeling, he strikes his flint and steel together, sending a spark leaping into the powder. He turns and charges through the open door just as the powder room explodes. The blast hurls Tom clear and buries the guards under a pile of old stone and burning wood. The DM decides that Tom's foolhardy action has a very high rating, which has a Spell Points value of five. He rolls dice to see whether a reward is due and manages to beat the 15% target. Tom's player and the DM decide that two spells will be embedded in that flint and steel: *deafness* and *gust of wind*. These were chosen as the combined effect would be similar to the result of the explosion. The two spells are embedded in the flint and steel and activate when the two are struck together.

Should a character be carrying a magical item when he "creates a legend," that item will act against any roll made to gain powers. To reflect this, subtract 20% from any roll made, so only actions of a unique nature will grant any powers. Even if a roll is made, only one spell point should be given. Think of how the people would tell the story of a character's actions when using this ruling. If a warrior armed with nothing but a magical mace faced a horde of screaming orcs, the action would not be deemed quite so heroic, even though the warrior's bravery would still be praised for many years to come; but if all he had to fight them off with was a rough wooden club. . .

Whenever a magical item is created using this method, the DM must decide how many times each power may be used a day.

An embedded spell can be cast once per day for each time it is embedded, but each duplication of the spell costs double the number of spell points. For example, powers are rewarded for an exceptional action, granting seven spell points. The character and DM decide to embed a 1st-level spell three times. The first time costs one point, the second two, and the third duplication four points for a grand total of seven. All of the spell points have been used up, enabling the spell to be cast three times per day. Using this method, only spells below fourth level may be cast multiple times per day, preventing the more powerful ones from unbalancing a campaign.

Certain powers function continuously and therefore don't need to be cast more than once. These effects are very special and will probably only be available



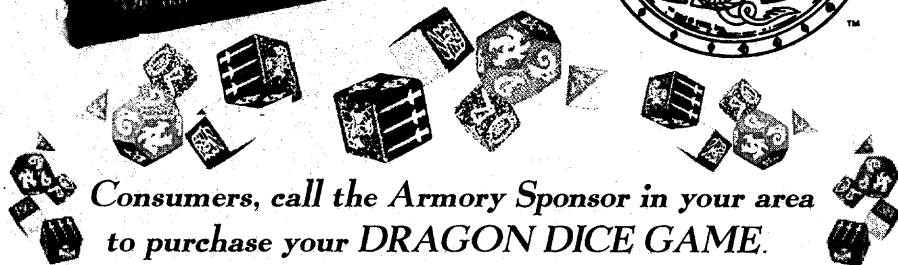
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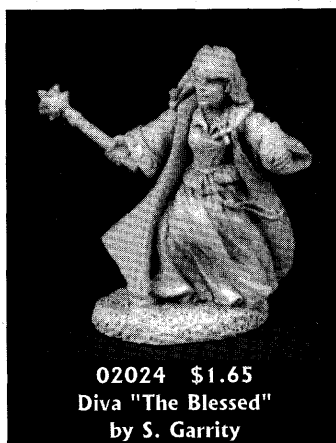
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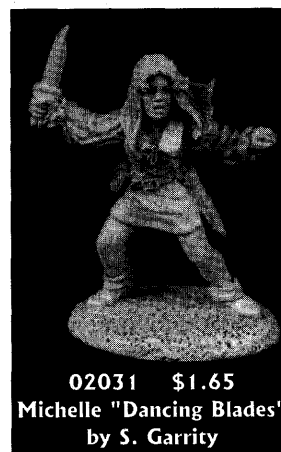
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through actions that are rated at exceptional or unique status.

If you wish you may also allow items that have combined powers to use them all simultaneously once a week for a grand effect. Going back to the flint and steel example, *gust of wind* and *deafness* can both be cast once per day. Once a week, though, they can be cast together, combining their effects to recreate the event from which they were formed.

Spell restrictions

Due to the immense power of some of the higher-level spells, some restrictions should be imposed.

As a starting point, you may wish to consider limiting spells that cause a large amount of damage, such as *fireball*, or spells that do not allow a saving throw, as is the case with most of the *power word* spells. One type of spell that should be considered very carefully is the *wish* spell.

All spell effects function at 12th-level magic, unless the power actually requires a higher level. In such cases, the power is used at the minimum level required to normally cast the equivalent spell.

Weapon combat bonuses

Magical weapons often give bonuses to rolls made during combat. These can range from being beneficial on some weapons to being penalties on those that have been cursed.

To imbue a weapon with a bonus, use the number of Spell Points as a guide. For every step above six, the item receives a +1 bonus (-1 for cursed items). For example, seven Spell Points yields a +2 weapon. This gives a maximum of a +3 bonus when using nine spell points. Evil items may not necessarily have a negative bonus. (They may, under certain circumstances, make it easier to hit, such as when attacking a friend, or when assassinating someone.)

For some reason, lost in the mists of time and past AD&D® rule books, swords are able to be enchanted with a higher bonus than +3. Perhaps they are easier to work with, the care that goes into their crafting enabling a mage to pour more magic in than any other item is capable of holding.

Whatever the reason, magical swords must be treated differently than any other weapon. To work out the bonus that a sword can receive, give a +1 bonus for every step above four, to a

maximum of a +5 bonus for a sword when using nine Spell Points.

Bonuses that weapons receive can also be combined with other effects to create more unique abilities. Just as with other combined powers, the total levels must be no greater than the original number of spell points.

Manifestation of item powers

The adventure continues once the item's powers have been decided upon. The characters move on down the road to becoming a full-fledged legends. The magical item awaits, gradually growing in power as the story of its creation spreads. To reflect this slow increase in power, the final spells embedded in the item should not be activated straight away. They take months or perhaps years to become fully active, their effect growing in power until they finally achieve the desired state.

This delay should have a minimum number of months equal to the number of spell points. The more powerful the spell, the longer the delay. Think up various abilities that are slightly less powerful than the desired result, and have them activate at various times throughout the manifestation period, gradually increasing their power as time goes by.

For example, Tom's flint and steel will eventually have *deafness* and *gust of wind* embedded in them. Five spell points were used in creation, so they take a minimum of five months for the two spells to become fully active. Over the next few months Tom and Erin witness strange things around their camp at night: they don't seem to be able to light any fires, and, when they do, the flames burn without a sound, no spits or crackles can be heard as the eager flames consume the wood.

Five months after causing that incredible explosion, Tom tries to light the campfire once again.

He strikes the flint and steel together and is blown off his feet as a powerful wind gusts through the woodland clearing. Erin returns a few moments later to find Tom dusting himself off.

"No luck with the fire," she says as Tom notices her.

"I can't hear!" he says, much too loudly.

If you wish, you can create a magic item without letting the players know the final effect. You can have fun watching them try to figure it out, using the clues

they get over the next few months of game time.

Using a legendary item

For an item's powers to be activated, the user must be aware of any legend associated with it. For the character who originally possessed the item, this is no problem; but as the years go by, and the story is forgotten, it prevents the item's powers from being used until the full history is discovered.

If a *detect magic* spell is cast on an item, it will radiate an aura equivalent to the highest-level power embedded. A bard's ability to learn the general use of a magical item can be used to find out the legend behind the item's creation. This only gives the story; specific details as to the nature of the item's powers still remain a mystery. Once the entire story is known though, anyone who uses the item can feel what the powers are and may use them freely.

Should a player keep a legendary item (thinking that it is normal), no effect is immediately visible. There is a manifestation period, similar to the one mentioned earlier, over which the item will exert its power to let the user know what it is. The character begins to have obscure dreams about past events that the item has seen. One dream keeps recurring, telling of the dramatic event that transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary. It is up to the player to decipher what these dreams mean. Only when he has singled out the repetitive dream as meaning something special will he begin to realize the item's power. You must then tell the player which of his items is magical and what its powers are.

Andrew Turpin lives in Wales.

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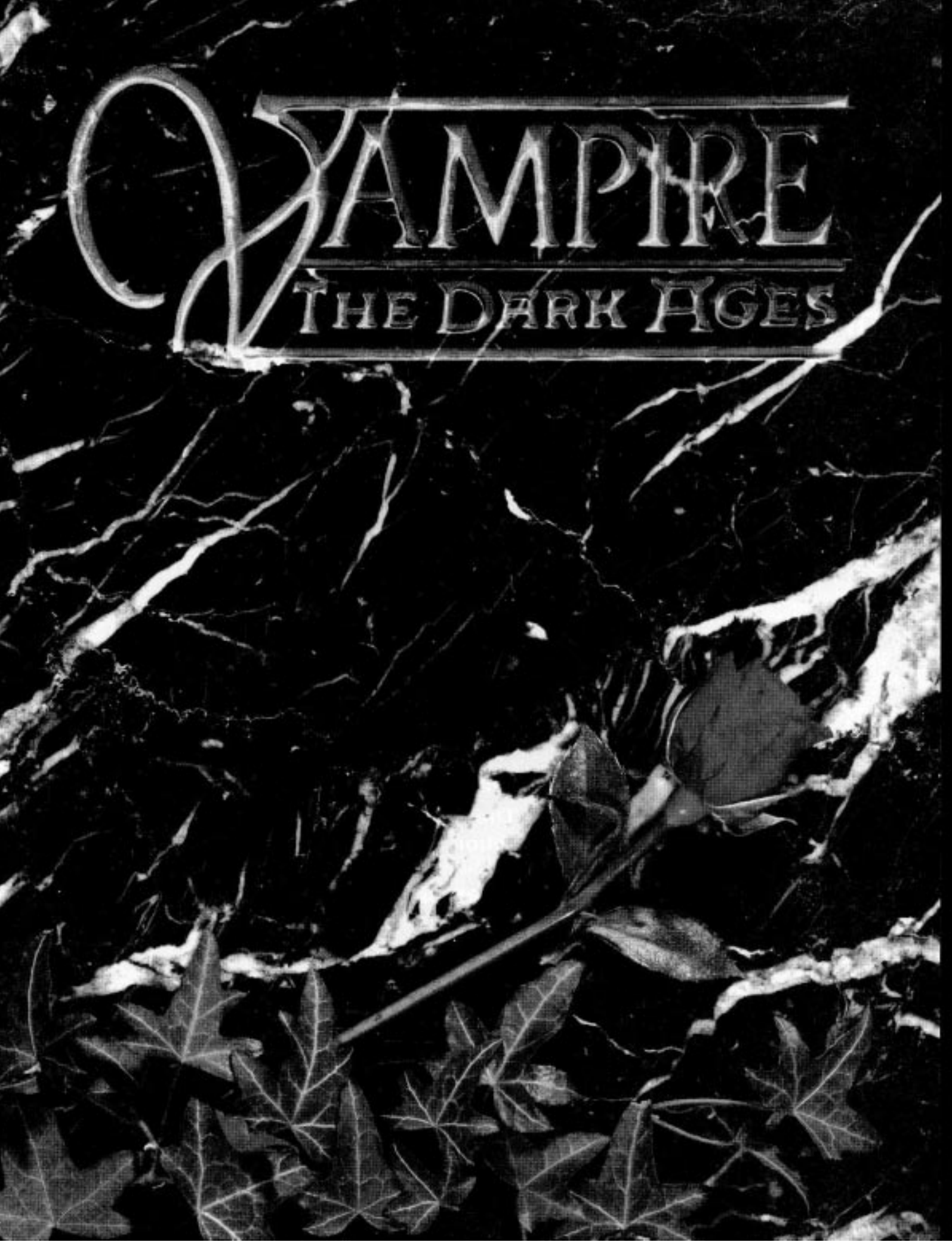
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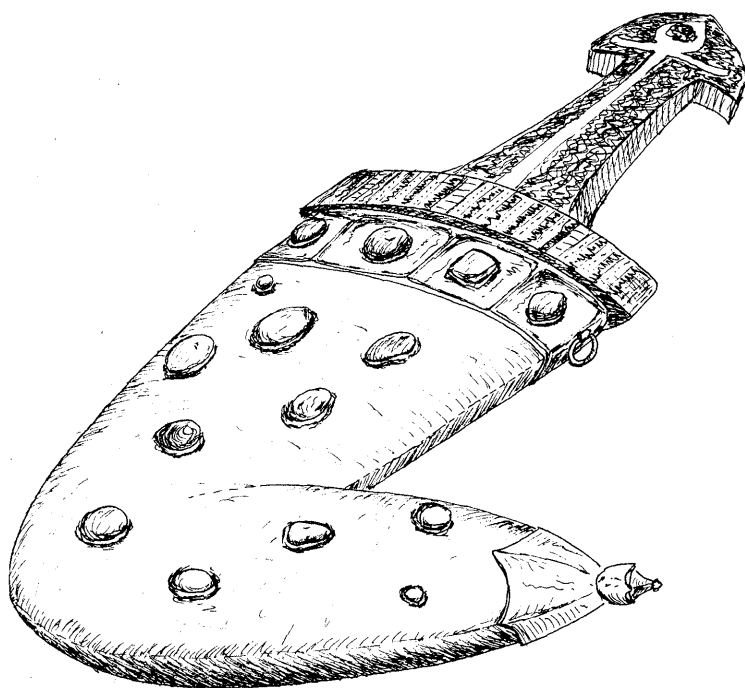
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Magical Scabbards and Sheaths



by David Howery

illustrated by Anthony J. Bryant

When King Arthur first received Excalibur, says one legend, Merlin asked the future king which was more valuable: the sword or its scabbard. Enraptured by Excalibur (who wouldn't be?), Arthur replied that the scabbard was beautifully made, but the sword was obviously the greater treasure. Merlin shook his head. The scabbard was also magical and would prevent wounds from bleeding. Excalibur could take the lives of Arthur's enemies, but the scabbard could save his.

Arthur's attitude is also found in the AD&D® game. There are dozens of magical swords available, but the *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*™ lists only two magical scabbards. A magical scabbard can make an ordinary sword more useful and a magical one truly fearsome.

Herein, the term "scabbard" may be taken to refer to sheaths from knife to great sword sizes. When a magical scabbard is found, the DM rolls on the table below (or the table on page 1336, vol. IV, of the *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*™ book) to find its size.

1	bastard sword
2	broad sword
3-4	dagger
5.	knife
6-8.	long sword
9.	scimitar
10-11	short sword
12.	two-handed sword

Bondbreaker

In many cities, weapons must be peacebonded. This means that a cord is tied around the sheathed sword's guard and the scabbard so it can't be drawn quickly in the heat of anger. The bondbreaker magically unravels the peacebond instantly upon command, allowing the sword to be drawn at normal speed. Paladins and other lawful characters naturally despise this scabbard, while thieves and other nefarious types pay much for one.

XP Value: 300.

GP Value: 1,500

Quickarm Scabbard

This scabbard has two main functions. One command word teleports the

sword that is sheathed in the scabbard into the wielder's hand from up to 20' away. The wielder therefore does not incur any initiative penalty for taking time to draw his weapon, and he does not even have to be wearing the sheathed sword. The second command word recalls or returns the sword, teleporting it back into the scabbard, with a range of 50'. This latter function is especially useful if the sword is accidentally dropped into a pit or river.

XP Value: 2000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Scabbard of Adjustment

This scabbard changes shape, shrinks, or enlarges to fit any sword, dagger, or knife, as needed.

XP Value: 250 **GP Value:** 1,000

Scabbard of Care

Any sword placed in this scabbard for one full turn is cleaned and oiled, regardless of blood, dirt, water, or anything else on the blade. If sheathed before the sword is destroyed, the scabbard removes even the acidic secretions of monsters like puddings, green slime, etc.; the scabbard itself is immune to such secretions.

XP Value: 300 **GP Value:** 1,500

Scabbard of Empowering

This scabbard gives magical bonuses to nonmagical swords (it has no affect on magical swords). For every full continuous week that the sword is left in the scabbard without being drawn, the sword gains a +1 bonus, to a maximum of +3. Once the sword is drawn, the bonus slowly fades, losing each +1 bonus per week. Resheathing the sword does not recharge the bonus nor prevent the bonus from fading, until the bonus has faded to 0. The sword can then be resheathed and recharged; again, the sword regains and loses +1 bonuses per week. Thus, the sword can be used over and over again in the magical scabbard.

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Scabbard of Forging

This scabbard repairs broken swords. If all the pieces of a broken sword are placed in the scabbard and left for one full day, the sword is repaired and sharpened, good as new. Note that magical swords are rendered nonmagical when broken; the scabbard can repair them but cannot restore their original magical bonuses.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Scabbard of Flame

Any nonmagical sword placed in this scabbard for one continual day without being drawn gains the powers of a *flametongue* sword (*ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*, IV:1369). These powers last for one hour, then vanish. The sword can be resheathed for another full day and regain the powers, again for one hour only. The sword can be used over and over in this scabbard. Magical swords are not affected by this scabbard.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 15,000

Scabbard of Protection

This scabbard provides a +1 bonus to its wearer's Armor Class. It can be used in combination with normal or magical armor and shields. At the DM's discretion, it might not be effective when worn with other magical items that improve AC.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Scabbard of Sharpening:

A nonmagical sword placed in this scabbard for one full day without being drawn is magically sharpened. When drawn, the sword is equal to a *sword of sharpness* (*ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*, IV; 1392). The bonus lasts for 24 hours. The sword can be used over and over in this scabbard, recharging for one full day, and gaining the bonuses for 24 hours each time. Magical swords are not affected by this scabbard.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 15,000

Scabbard of Weightlessness

This applies to the sword, not the wielder. A sword placed in this scabbard is effectively weightless and does not count against the character's carrying capacity.

XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 2,500

Scabbard of Wound Closure

Modeled after the wondrous scabbard for King Arthur's sword Excalibur, this functions exactly like a *periapt of wound closure* (*ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*, II:827).

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Scabbard-sword

This is a one-use magical item. If the wielder finds himself weaponless, the command word *polymorphs* the scabbard into a sword of the appropriate size (e.g., a scabbard sized for a long sword would become a long sword). The sword is well balanced and finely made, but it is nonmagical. The change is perma-

nent; even anti-magic and dispel magic spells do not affect the inert sword.

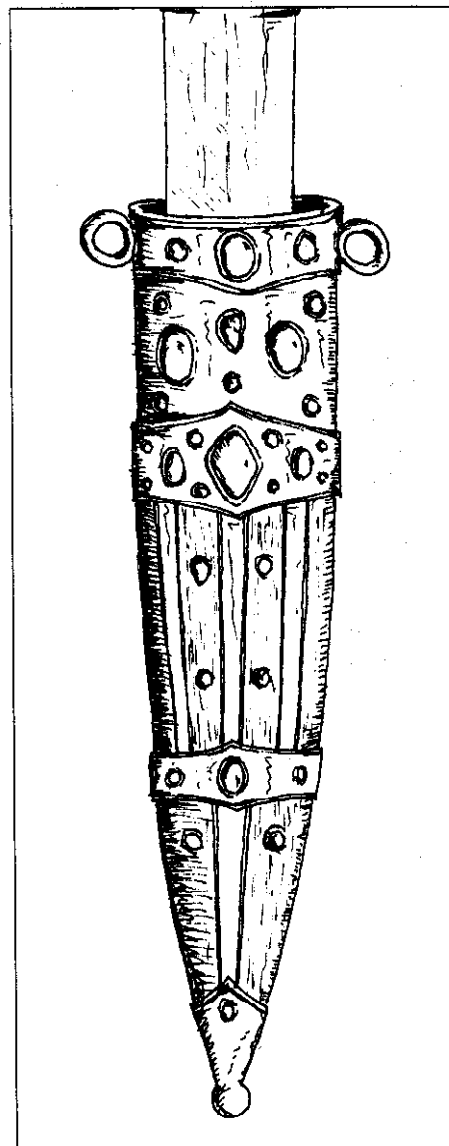
XP Value: 700 **GP Value:** 3,500

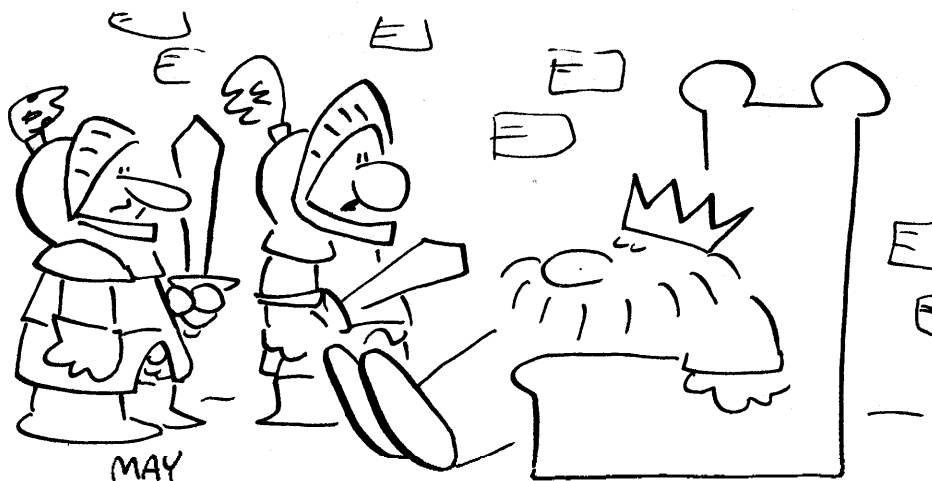
Not all magic is beneficial. Just to keep PCs on their toes, here are three cursed scabbards.

Cursed Scabbard of Binding

This appears to be a normal scabbard and is often found with a magical sword sheathed in it. The scabbard works normally at first. But when the character is in a combat situation and tries to draw the sword, the scabbard clings fast to the blade. The sword cannot be drawn regardless of the character's strength. Once activated, the scabbard never lets go of the sword, even when the combat is over.

Unlike other cursed items, the scabbard does not stick to the character; it sticks only to the sword. The scabbard and sword can be discarded. A *remove*





"Gee, he's sleeping so peacefully, I almost hate to overthrow him."

curse spell is required to negate the curse.

XP Value: 0

GP Value: 10,00

Cursed Scabbard of Cowardice

This seemingly mundane scabbard performs normally at first. When the

character who wears it is in combat and tries to draw the sword, the scabbard twists the hilt away from his hands. Since a scabbard can't move far, the character eventually gets his hand on the hilt and draws the sword; however, he automatically loses initiative that round, acting

after all others involved in the combat. This happens every round in which the character tries to draw the sword in battle. The scabbard cannot be discarded; it always reappears when the character is in combat, displacing any other sheath he wears. A *remove curse* spell is needed to be rid of the scabbard.

XP Value: 0

GP Value: 1,000

Cursed Scabbard of Tripping

This scabbard does not hinder the character in drawing the sword; however, when he is in combat, it tangles itself around his legs. The PC must make a Dexterity check every round of combat. Failure means he trips and falls, losing that round in getting back on his feet. The scabbard cannot be discarded. It always reappears at the character's belt during combat. A *remove curse* spell is needed to negate the curse of this item.

XP Value: 0

GP Value: 1,000



David Howery lives in Gading, Idaho. He estimates he's written something like 29 articles for DRAGON® Magazine and DUNGEON® Adventures over the past few years.

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THE 29TH ANNUAL



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THE 29TH ANNUAL



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South America Two is packed with over 30 O.C.C.s, the mysteries of the Nazca Lines, the return of ancient gods, the power of the Arkhons (an alien menace), the rebirth of the Inca Empire, mutants, transdimensional raiders and more. A *power-packed* sourcebook.

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- The Prometheus Treatment: Immortality for the Juicers or another Coalition lie?
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- Written by C.J. Carella with concepts by Kevin Siembieda.
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The **Rifts® Index: Volume One** (February) is a comprehensive reference that indicates which title and what page players or G.M.s can find specific characters, O.C.C.s, R.C.C.s, skills, psionics, magic spells, magic items, weapons, vehicles, equipment, places, Erin Tam, monsters, D-Bees, the Coalition States, adventures, etc.!

The **Rifts® Index** includes the following titles: **Rifts® RPG**, **Sourcebook One**, **Sourcebook 3: Mindwerks**, **Rifts Conversion Book One**, **Rifts Conversion Book 2: Pantheons of the Megaverse**, **Rifts® Mercenaries**, **Dimension Books 1 & 2**, and **World Books 1-6** (**Vampire Kingdoms**, **Atlantis**, **England**, **Africa**, **Triax & The NGR**, and **South America One**). Plus, adventures and other good stuff. 96-120 page book for \$12.95 — Available February, 1996!

Rifts GM Shields & Adventures: A pair of quick reference game shields plus a magazine-sized book of adventures and adventure ideas. Probably \$16.95 — Available Spring 1996.

Psyscape™ (May or June), a mysterious gathering place of psychics that has been a source of rumors and legends for centuries is revealed at last! After years of hiding, the secret community is finally coming into the open. What danger motivates them to act now? May or June. Probably 200+ pages for \$20.95

Rifts® World Book: Lone Star (Summer), the birthplace of the Dog Boys; scores of different mutant animals, sinister plots, blind faith, a lust for power and world information. By Kevin Siembieda. **Rifts® World Book: The New West** (Summer): Native American Indian myths, magic and gods, new technowizard items; shaman, spirit warriors, gunslinger and other O.C.C.s, plus Indian magic, places of magic, and world information. Written by Siembieda, Breaux, and Carella.

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Along those lines, *DRAGON*® Magazine is pleased to present our first small notebook gaming accessory: player character mini record sheets. These sheets don't hold all the information their full-sized cousins do, but they have most of it — and just about everything the DM will need to keep track of

the capabilities and equipment of the characters in the campaign.

They're comprehensive enough for players to use, and they have slots for the *PLAYER'S OPTION*™ information on subcharacteristics.

At 6 ¾" × 3 ¾", the pages are standard size for the smaller portable notebooks. You can pick one up at any stationery or office supply store. While you're there, you can get plain white, lined, or even graph filler paper as well.

All you have to do is cut out the sheets and punch out the pre-marked holes. You can photocopy these as often as you wish for personal use only. (We suggest you photocopy before cutting.) Or you could just buy extra copies of this issue.

Note that there are four different sheets for each basic character class. Players with multi- and dual-classed PCs should use whichever sheet seems more appropriate.

Specific kits fit under any of these subheadings. For example, a player playing a kshatria (an Indian paladin kit outlined in "Caste of Characters" in issue #225) would use the warrior character record sheet, and someone playing a ninja (from *The Complete Ninja's Handbook*) would use the rogue character record sheet.

For all intents and purposes, these sheets function in the same way as full-sized character record sheets, but they'll leave the DM much more room for dice, handbooks, and wicked schemes for their players.



PC Name:		Player:		Class & Kit:		LVL:		AL:		Race:	
S	Alt:	Dmg:	Wt:	Press:	Doors:	BB/	lift	gates:			
D	Sup:	Missile	att:	Def.	adj:						
C	HP	adj:	Sys.	shock:	Resur:	Poison	save:	Regen.	rate:		
I	Adit	lang:	Max.	% learn	spell	level:	Max.	Spell	immun:		
W	Mag	del:	Bonus	spell	level:	% spell	fail:	Spell	immun:		
Ch	Max #	Loyal.	adj:	React.	adj:						
Sir.	Arm	Heal.	Reas.	Intuit.	Lead.						
Misc.	Bal.	Fit.	Knowl.	Will.	Appear.						
HP:		THACO:		AC:		Armor worn: Shield: none, small, medium, large					
Save vs.:		Rod.		Petrification,		Breath		Magical			
Paralysis,		staff, wand		polymorph		weapon		spell			
poison, death											
Weapon information:		Weapon type		Type		Spd.		#		Att.	
										Range Dmg. Dmg.	
										adj. (S, M) (L)	

Warrior sheet (suitable for fighters, rangers, paladins, etc.)

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Wizard sheet (suitable for wizards, mages, illusionists, etc.)

PC Name:		Player:		Class & Kit:		LVL:		AL:		Race:	
S	Alt:	Dmg:	Wt:	Press:	Doors:	BB/	lift	gates:			
D	Sup:	Missile	att:	Def.	adj:						
C	HP	adj:	Sys.	shock:	Resur:	Poison	save:	Regen.	rate:		
I	Adit	lang:	Max.	% learn	spell	level:	Max.	Spell	immun:		
W	Mag	del:	Bonus	spell	level:	% spell	fail:	Spell	immun:		
Ch	Max #	Loyal.	adj:	React.	adj:						
Sir.	Arm	Heal.	Reas.	Intuit.	Lead.						
Misc.	Bal.	Fit.	Knowl.	Will.	Appear.						
HP:		THACO:		AC:		Armor worn: Shield: none, small, medium, large					
Save vs.:		Rod.		Petrification,		Breath		Magical			
Paralysis,		staff, wand		polymorph		weapon		spell			
poison, death											
Weapon information:		Weapon type		Type		Spd.		#		Att.	
										Range Dmg. Dmg.	
										adj. (S, M) (L)	

<p>Weapon profs.:</p> <p>NWPs:</p> <p>Racial and special abilities:</p> <p>Paladin/Ranger other specialist abilities:</p> <p>Equipment carried:</p> <p>Total wealth:</p> <p>Carried:</p> 	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Non-P penalty </td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Slot/LVL </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Int./Kno. bonus </td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Slot/LVL </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Encumbrance: </td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> Encumbrance: </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; 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Warrior sheet (suitable for fighters, rangers, paladins, etc.)

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Wizard spells (per level and spells):

1st	
2nd	
3rd	
4th	
5th	
6th	
7th	
8th	
9th	

Schools (primary/opposition):

Weapon profs.:

Non-P penalty	Slot/LVL
------------------	----------

NWPs:

Slot/LVL	Int./Kno. bonus
----------	--------------------

Racial and special abilities:

Equipment carried:

Encumbrance:	Moderate -1 att.
	Heavy -2 att., +1 AC
	Maximum -4 att., +3 AC

Total wealth:

Carried:

Encumbrance:

None (base mv.)	Walk	Jog (x2)	run (x3)	run (x4)	run (x5)
Light (2/3 move)					
Moderate (1/2 move)					
Heavy (1/3 move)					
Sev./Max (move = 1)					

Wizard sheet (suitable for wizards, mages, illusionists, etc.)

Wizard sheet (suitable for wizards, mages, illusionists, etc.)

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The ability for gamers to air their thoughts and concerns about the AD&D® game here in Forum is helpful and refreshing. There comes a time, however, when there is too much of a "good thing." There is just too much incessant complaining that pops up in every other issue about "game balance."

I have no problems with people airing their complaints; it's just that after a hundred issues or so, reading them gets a bit tedious. I would like to point out some solutions.

1) Take it up with your DM. Explain your views to him and give him suggestions as to how the problem could be corrected. The DM is supposed to be neutral, and should at least listen to the problem. If you are a DM yourself, change the rules. After all, the Dungeon Master® Guide points out from the start that all these rules are optional.

2) Look at the *Player's Handbook* supplements (e.g., *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*). For Daniel Arenson in issue #219, *The Complete Ranger's Handbook* offers many career-broadening solutions. (Don't forget the ranger's species enemy. A +4 attack bonus is pretty hefty!)

3) Try the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills Powers* book to add more to the game. You might trade a few special abilities for the advantage of weapon specialization.

I have found it useful to set up a few small adventures (*DUNGEON® Adventures* is a great source for these) with the express purpose of trying out new rules. The players make up new PCs for these one-shot adventures and everyone gets to try something new. This also adds something to the game play, as the players are more willing to risk the lives of their "one-shot" characters.

I would also like to address Leyshon Campbell's letter regarding the *haste* spell in the same issue. While I applaud your detailed analysis of the spell (and some really interesting side-effects), I have found that such an extreme emphasis on rules interpretation slows down the game too much. This is supposed to be heroic (or sometimes not) fantasy. I have found in my games that this "rules lawyering" causes general player dissatisfaction and extreme discontent, as some other player who knows it all debates the issue with the DM.

You are right in that no one really looks at all the side-effects of the magic in the game, but this is a game, after all, not a medical journal. Magic has this special way of going outside science and the laws of physics to do what it wants. After all, the human body is incapable of channeling the extreme amperage to make the lighting bolt as effective as it is, and the poor wizard's hands would simply wither away with the casting of burning hands.

This is not intended as a knock down; rather, it is just something to think of.

I've been experiencing an extreme problem in my games with certain people who could be classified as rules lawyers. I've tried every solution, from throwing out the rules at hand to getting just as picky as the lawyer. All I've managed to do is endanger and old friendship. The situation is rapidly spiraling downward as other players are complaining about the lawyer's domination of game play and extreme obsession with the rules. (He even insisted that if his character was wearing even a simple gold ring that his damage in bare-handed combat should equal killing damage.)

While the DM's word is supposed to be final, it gets rather hard to uphold that when pretty close to every judgment — from the awarding of experience points to the adjudication of a gambling match — is called into question. I would appre-

ciate hearing any possible solutions (outside ostracizing the individual).

Tim Nutting
Everett, WA

I'd like to comment about the letter in issue #221, where Hussain Adulhaqq complains that his DM has problems preventing the characters from breaking the law and acting in evil ways, which the players choose because it is easier.

What I'm wondering is, how do these people act in real life? I mean, would the players go about robbing stores and beating up people if they knew they could get away with it? Maybe I'm just a little over-sensitive now (a few days after my prime minister was assassinated), but killing innocent PCs for four years, as a method, makes me worry about these players.

If you really want to give the characters a taste of their own medicine, have a stronger party come at them at night, steal all their equipment, and try to kill them "because its cheaper than buying the stuff." See how they like it. (But this is not really the method I'd recommend.)

Eyal Teler
via e-mail

I would like to respond to several letters from issue #224.

My first response is to George Keefe, who was having DM troubles. I am a DM myself and I fail to see the point in what your DM is doing. Whenever I have new people join one of my campaigns, I try to do the opposite that he does. I agree that new characters shouldn't be given magical items, but I make sure that the new PCs are equal to the lowest character currently in my campaign. I also let the new players do as much as possible, although this sometimes leads to embarrassing situations requiring some work to get out of. If necessary, I try to make light of the situation, not make fun of the players.

I'm not sure why your DM is doing this, George, unless he just likes to humiliate newcomers, but he's definitely hurting his campaign by turning off the people he asked to join. All I can suggest is, tell him this and hope he uses a little sense.

My next response is to Linda Edwards, who had trouble finding a campaign that would accept her. I doubt very much if any DM would allow a 50th-level drow in his game. This is well beyond the suggested retiring time for characters, and the fact that your PC is one of the powerful, magically-inclined, and dangerous-

ly evil drow makes it even harder to handle. Starting off at 1st level again isn't the answer, though. Ask if you can make a new character that is the same level as the lowest level character already in that campaign. If that doesn't work, then maybe you are right in that part of it is that you're a girl. Although I would welcome a girl into one of my campaigns, there are some DMs who wouldn't.

It isn't that hard to start your own campaign. Quite a lot of people read fantasy or play fantasy video and computer games. Find them and talk to them or try to show them parts of the AD&D game that they might like. Inquire at your local hobby shop. Mine used to put up names of players seeking DMs and vice-versa. Good luck.

Ryan Leach
Tappen, B.C., Canada

I have been inspired to write by Karrie Hull's letter in issue #223, regarding sexism in gaming and the scarcity of women players. This is a theme that has kept recurring over at least the last four or five years, and seems to crop up both in the U.K. and America. I agree that it is an issue that needs addressing, but I am concerned about the image that we are portraying to new or potential gamers.

In the interests of balance, let me share my experiences with you.

I ply regularly in two weekly games. There are six of us in one group: three men and three women. In the other group, it is six men and me. All my fellow gamers are normal, well-adjusted human beings and when we meet up, we chat a bit, consume large quantities of chocolate cookies, and we get on with role-playing. In short, we have fun. There's no hassle, no pressure, and no sexism (unless, of course, someone is role-playing a character with unreasonable prejudices, in which sexism is no more likely than "classism" — as in "all fighters are idiots" — or elfism or dwarfism).

I'm not denying that there are some sad people out there with hopelessly outdated sexist attitudes. All I'm saying is, don't assume that you will automatically encounter them if you join a role-playing group.

If you do encounter the sexism of the sort Karrie described in her letter, don't act the meek little woman and suffer in silence; do something about it. If you object to a product's cover art, write to the company concerned and tell them why you object (and tell them that it has stopped you from buying the product). If

someone announces that he is going to chat up all the NPCs with a high Charisma score, tell him to re-read the Charisma section in the *Player's Handbook*. If a male player is trying to chat you up using his character to chat up your character, try role-playing your response. The possibilities are almost endless. If you're a virtuous priest, give him a lecture on the perils of the temptations of the flesh (preferably when he's a captive audience). If you're a mischievous thief, why not borrow something of his or planting something embarrassing in his backpack when he's not looking? Even a low-level mage could find a relatively harmless spell to cast to make someone look foolish.

Sexist DMs placing restrictions on your character for no good reason is a harder one. All I can say is, talk it through with your DM. Challenge him if you think a restriction is unreasonable; see if you can't reach a compromise.

Finally, a word to Karrie. If you want to be taken seriously, please don't start any more letters by telling us that you're 27 and attractive. I'm sure its very nice for you, and would very important if you want to be Miss America, but to be a good role-player and DM, who cares?

Eleanor Clarke
Birmingham, England

This is in response to all those letters about female gamers with their cries of "they wouldn't let me play because I'm a female!" Many of these gripes are well-

founded.

I've been playing for many years in this "male-dominated" game and only in the past two years have we had a female gamer in our circle. This is not because of active persecution, but because of the lack of female interest. Let's fact facts: generally, fantasy role-playing games attract males, especially those at a younger age. Also at younger ages, your best friends tend to be of the same sex. These were your close friends, the ones you usually played with.

I must ask for understanding from female gamers. I play in three role-playing games a week with my friends. In two of them, we have a female gamer, and we would always welcome anyone else who would like to play, sex notwithstanding. There is out third game, in which few are welcome and all are male. Why? It is very simple. It's the "guy's night out." In other words, male bonding. Call it what you will, it is nothing more than the guys getting together to have fun. Some guys on their nights out play poker, drink beer, and smoke cigars; some play pool; others go bowling. We happen to be role-playing gamers. It is just us males getting together once a week to talk, brag, and joke with the freedom of not having to watch what we say, or worrying about who may hear us.

William Valentine
185 Slater Park Ave.
Pawtucket, RI 02861



Frank Guntner

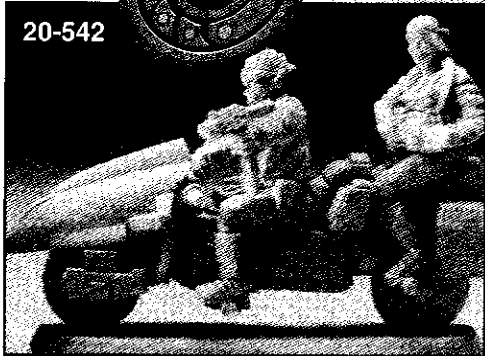
"Oh, great. The castle has an airbag!"



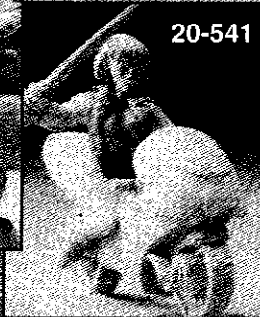
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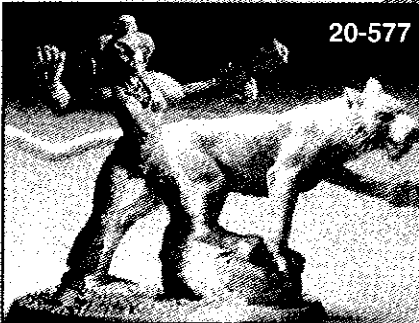


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- 20-541 Street Samurai (F) on Rapier Bike
- 20-542 Go-Gang Enforcers (M & F) on Scorpion Bike
- 20-543 Ork and Dwarf on Heavy Assault Trike
- 20-545 Roaches (Spirits)
- 20-577 Striper Assassin (Human and Weretiger form)
- 20-578 Lone Star Combat Mages (M & F)
- 20-579 Ellana, the Cat Shaman

20-577



20-578



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Theahtyn

ROGUE'S GALLERY

by Robert Martin

11th level fighter

STRENGTH:	15
DEXTERITY:	12
CONSTITUTION:	14
INTELLIGENCE:	10
WISDOM:	11
CHARISMA:	9
AC:	5
THACO:	10
MOVE:	9
HIT POINTS:	68
ALIGNMENT:	LG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	+1 to hit orcs, half-orcs, goblins, and hobgoblins.
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+ 3 vs. poison
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	+ 3 vs. magical attacks from wands, staves, spells, and rods.
SIZE:	4' 3"

Special Abilities/Bonuses: 60' infravision. "Natural" dwarven skills (detecting grades, slopes, etc.) are only 50% as effective as other dwarves. Attacks 3/2 rounds.

Weapon Proficiencies: Broadsword (master specialization), dagger, dagger (thrown), axe.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Armoring, blind fighting, hunting, rinding (land-based), singing, survival.

Physical Appearance: Theahtyn is an older dwarf; by human standards he is in his middle age. He is balding, with a pale gray beard which he always keeps neatly braided and tucked into his collar when he is in the field. What hair he has left he lets grow long. He has several scars from his youthful campaigning days, including a very noticeable one on his forehead.

Background: Theahtyn doesn't know how old he is for sure. He was orphaned when he was very young. His village was overrun by orcs, and the remaining villagers fled in the night. One of them was his mother, who managed to carry the infant 10 miles to a farmer's home before she died from arrow wounds. The farmer and his wife raised him as one of their own sons, but as they had too many mouths to feed already, when he was old enough he left to seek his fortune on the adventuring trail. He was alone for several years, and made quite a reputation for himself as a fearless warrior and dauntless foe of or-kind. In time, he'd gained enough wealth to go back home and buy a large homestead for his foster parents. In a few more years, men began to flock to him and treat him as a leader. The local duke called him friend. Theahtyn married the daughter of a penurious noble dwarf, settled down, and retired from campaigning. With the leave of the duke he built himself a small estate on the border. He lived well and in peace for 75 years

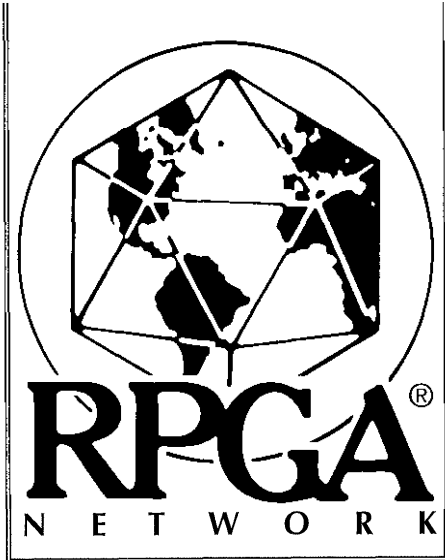


until disaster struck. He went to visit his foster family for a few days and returned to find his home a smoking ruin, with no sign of his wife, their two children, or any of his retainers. That was five years ago. He has wandered ever since, looking for clues as to what might have happened, and where his family could be, if indeed they are even alive.

Equipment: Theahtyn considers himself on a quest, and will wear nothing but armor until he has achieved his goal. He usually wears a coat over his mail, and a cloak if necessary to conceal the armor. If a town requires him to be unarmored and unarmed, he will immediately go elsewhere. Everything else — rations, tools, water — he carries in a large backpack.

Magical Items: Very few of his possessions survived. He has only the things he had with him when he went to visit his old home and the few he was able to acquire lately. *Sword of sharpness*, dagger +2, ring (*Draupnir* II), amulet of health.

Role-playing Notes: Much of the light has gone out of Theahtyn's existence. He was once a jolly, jovial man, but now he is taciturn. He has been called gloomy and obsessed, but to him nothing matters but finding his family. Theahtyn is not a typical dwarf; since he grew up in human surroundings, he shares many of their interests and tastes. He also has no hatred or ambivalence about elves, and the few halflings he knows he considers fine fellows all around. He has little interest in mines, caverns, gems, or gold; fellow dwarves find this odd. Another side effect of growing up in the company of humans is that, while he can speak dwarvish, he can speak few of the other languages most dwarves can (e.g., kobold, gnome, etc.), but he has learned orcish. His life above ground and with humans limits his ability to detect slopes or traps underground.



Network News

by Scott Douglas

Conventions generate a lot of interest for RPGA® Network members, and though not all game players attend these events, they can be a great deal of fun those who do. In 1995, the Network provided sanctioned tournaments to over 200 conventions in North and South America, Europe, and Australia.

This is how it works: a convention writes us, saying that they'd like to offer Network tournaments. The convention's gaming coordinator contacts us at least four months ahead of the convention date, six months if asking for first-run scenarios. There is a form to fill out and there are some fees to pay, but the process is relatively quick and painless.

The Networks tournament coordinator sends a complete mailing to the gaming coordinator about six to eight weeks before the event date. This mailing contains copies of the scenarios requested. Most Network scenarios include copies of pregenerated characters for the players' use as well. In addition, we include prizes, scoring forms to assist in determining winners, and RPGA Network membership forms for distribution at the convention.

A good gaming coordinator makes sure that judges are well-prepared for the event. Care must be taken that judges get their scenarios early enough to give them thorough study; likewise, judges must be instructed in advance as to when and where they'll be needed.

At the convention site, the gaming coordinator is responsible for making sure players get marshalled out to tables, judges have additional character sheets and scoring packets, and results get turned back to the convention's gaming headquarters area. Those scoring packets are tabulated and double-checked. Lists are then compiled of the players advancing to semi-final and final rounds; those lists are usually posted soon after

tabulation. Winner lists are also posted, though some conventions prefer to give out awards at a ceremony at the end of the event.

The Network always provides prizes for sanctioned tournaments. Most often these come in the form of gift certificates to TSR's Mail Order Hobby Shop, but new or vintage products are given away on some occasions. Some conventions even provide trophies or plaques for top event winners.

After all of the excitement of the convention has passed, the gaming coordinator has one duty left to perform: to return the completed scoring packets and any unused prizes back to Network headquarters. We give them a final inspection

here, and then they're entered into the Networks points system so that judges and players can accumulate points to improve their Network rankings.

Playing and judging RPGA Network sanctioned tournaments at conventions can provide the most fun gaming experiences you might ever enjoy. It takes a bit of effort to plan and organize, but the reward of seeing friends have the gaming experience of their life can be well worth the investment.



Scott Douglas is the RPGA® Network Coordinator.

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

The RPGA® Network is the world's largest game club, with over 7,000 members in North America, and another 2,500 around the world. While originally created as a D&D® fan club, the Networks real mission is to encourage excellence in role-playing gaming by providing members opportunities to meet enthusiastic and experienced gamers like themselves. Network members often meet through gaming activities at conventions, but many form their own Network-sanctioned clubs, either in their communities or online. There are RPGA Network sanctioned clubs on GENIE, on America Online, and on the Internet.

Network members receive the *POLYHEDRON®* Newszine monthly; the newszine keeps members informed about goings-on in the Network, with monthly articles from members and from well-known authors such as Ed Greenwood and Roger Moore. Network members are also entitled to play in members-only tournament events. The Network sanctions member-written tournaments at local conventions, tournaments in Call of Cthulhu*, Shadowrun*, Star Wars*, the AD&D® game, and many other popular game systems.

Many members especially favor the Networks AD&D-based shared-world campaigns: the LIVING CITY™, the LIVING JUNGLE™, and the LIVING DEATH™. In addition, the Network also sanctions two other campaigns: Virtual Seattle, a Shadowrun-based setting, and Threads of Legend, a setting for the Earthdawn* game.

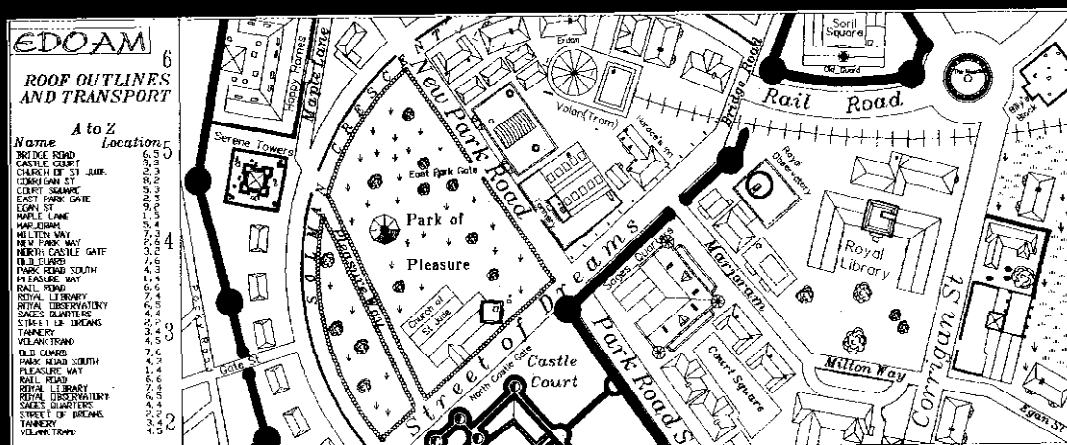
Scott Douglas is the RPGA Network Coordinator, making him the head Dungeon Master for the LIVING CITY, the world's largest shared-world campaign. For more information about the RPGA Network or any of the Living settings, write to Scott at: RPGA Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or e-mail him at rpgahq@aol.com.

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is a remarkable substance. It's dry, yet fluid, rippling under the desert winds like water in an ocean. During a

storm, its capable of blinding and cutting, yet, when melted to make glass, it's smooth. When it covers the ground from horizon to horizon, it symbolizes the emptiness of eternity, yet we use its grains to measure the passage of time. The following magical items all take their inspiration from the physical and metaphorical properties of sand and the desert.

Zakhara, the Land of Fate, is not surprisingly the source for these magical sands.

General Information

Magical sand is usually found in a sack or a jar. Unlike magical dusts, where a pinch is sufficient, a handful of magic sand is required to produce an effect. Thus the containers are relatively heavy.



Magical Sands of Zakhara

by Rudy Thauberger

illustrated by James Holloway

Each container contains 1d10+10 handfuls of sand, each weighing roughly half a pound. Magical sand is slightly more cohesive than regular dry sand and can be thrown up to 20' without losing its effectiveness. The area of effect is typically no more than 10' wide. All saving throws against magical sand attacks are made with adjustments for Dexterity. Saves are made vs. breath weapon,

unless otherwise stated. To compensate for their bulk, magical sands, unlike most potions or powders, can have a cumulative effect if more than one handful is used.

Crystal Sand

Crystal sand can be used to form crystalline objects in any shape the possessor desires. The object can weigh up to five pounds per handful of sand used, and can be a weapon, a key, a plate, a goblet, or anything else. The crystal is hard as steel, has AC 0, and is +2 on all saves. Weapons made of the crystal are +1 to hit and damage. All objects have 5 hp per handful of sand used to create them.

To make an object, the possessor must pour the sand on a flat surface in roughly the shape desired, then speak the name of the object (sword, ladder, cup, etc.). A three-dimensional object then forms out of the sand. The quality of workmanship reflects the creator's degree of skill. The object remains solid for one hour, after which it shatters, caus-



ing 1d6 hp damage to all creatures within a 10' radius (save for half).
XP Value: 1,000

Fire Sand

Fire sand is an extremely volatile substance, capable of creating sheets of flame when it strikes an object or is ignited. It can be used in two ways: as an area spell or to create a flaming wall. When thrown, it flies up to 20', spreading out to cover a 10' x 10' area. The force of impact ignites the sand, causing 3d6 hp damage to all creatures in the area of effect (save for half). If the sand is poured carefully in a line on the ground and then ignited, either by a flame or a sharp blow, a wall of fire results, inflicting 6d6 hp damage to any creatures attempting to move through it. The wall is 20' long per handful of sand and burns for 3d4 rounds.
XP Value: 2,000

Rasping Sand

This sand tears away at the surface of any object it touches, living or non-living. The effect of the sand lasts for 3 rounds. Non-living objects must save vs. spell every round with a cumulative -1 modifier each round after the first. If the object fails its save, the sand tears it apart. There is a limit to the size of the object that can be affected. This varies somewhat, depending on what the object is made of, but generally should be no more than 100 pounds per handful of sand used against it.

Living creatures suffer excruciating pain when struck by *rasping sand*, suffering 2d6 hp damage in the first round, 3d6 in the second and 4d6 in the third. A saving throw vs. paralysis must be successfully made each round or the creature is incapacitated by pain.

Rasping sand dissolves in water. If at least a gallon of water per handful of sand is thrown on it, it immediately ceases to cause damage. If a creature with a natural AC 5 or better, all damage is halved. Creatures with AC -1 or better suffer 1 hp damage per round. Characters wearing armor are similarly protected, although the armor itself falls victim to the sand and must make the appropriate saving throws.

This sand is so deadly that the possessor must use a specially treated glove to handle it, lest he fall victim to its malign power. The glove is made of the same substance as the bag that contains the sand and is usually found alongside it.
XP Value: 2,000

Sand Cage

When a handful of this magical sand is thrown at a target, it forms a sandy whirlwind in the shape of an inverted cone roughly 8' high and 4' wide at the top. The whirlwind flies at the nearest living creature and envelopes it. The creature must be no larger than man-sized and suffers 1d6 hp damage when enveloped. Once trapped, the victim is unable to attack or cast spells and suffers an additional 1 hp damage every round he remains inside the whirlwind. Because it consists of sand, the whirlwind severely reduces visibility and makes a loud hissing noise that drowns out all but the loudest sounds. The victim can still move, however, although the whirlwind moves along with him up to a movement rate of 24. The whirlwind itself can be attacked from outside.

The whirlwind is AC 2 and it can withstand 20 hp damage before falling apart. Only magical weapons or spells can affect it, however, and there is a 50% chance that the victim inside the cage is damaged as well. The victim of the *sand cage* can attempt to step out of the whirlwind for a moment, in order to attack it

from the outside. This requires a Dexterity check and a successful initiative roll. If the victim's initiative beats that of the whirlwind, an attack can be made. A price is paid for this tactic. Each time the victim enters or leaves the whirlwind, he suffers 1 d6 hp damage.

The whirlwind pursues its victim until he dies or the whirlwind ceases to exist. A *sand cage* lasts for 2d6 rounds. If subsequent handfuls of this sand are thrown on an existing whirlwind, all damage inflicted by it is increased (doubled, tripled, etc.) and the duration is increased by another 1 d6 rounds per handful.
XP Value: 2,000

Sand of Mirages

This sand creates an illusion that can be anything the possessor desires, so long as it is created outdoors under the light of the sun. The area of effect is a 50' cube for each handful used. The illusion lasts as long as the sun shines on it. No illusory creatures can be created with this sand. Physical contact with a living creature does not destroy the illusion but merely exposes its true nature.
XP Value: 1,000

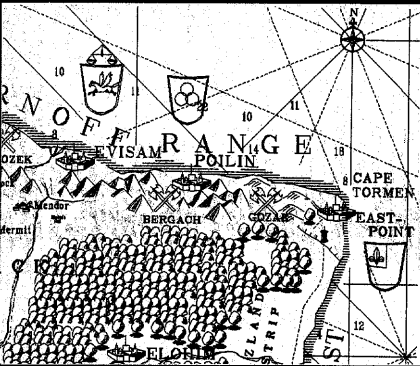
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NOT for the WEAK at HEART

Sand of Obscurement

When thrown into the air, *sand of obscurement* creates a small, highly localized sandstorm, blinding all within its area of effect. The storm lasts for 2d4 rounds and covers a 50' cube. All within the storm must make a saving throw or be blinded during the storm and for an additional 10 rounds afterward. This period can be reduced if the victim escapes the storm and spends 1 round rinsing his eyes with water. Vision is then restored immediately. Those who save still cannot see in the storm, but once they leave the area they suffer no blindness. The character who used the *sand of obscurement* is not immune to its effects, but as he knows what's coming, it is assumed he has closed his eyes, allowing him to save automatically. He is still blind inside the storm however. Additional handfuls of this sand thrown up during a storm increase the duration of the storm by 1d4 rounds each.

XP Value: 1,000

Sand of Restoration

When *sand of restoration* is sprinkled on the ruins of stone or brick buildings, the buildings are momentarily restored. Broken walls, cracked floors, and collapsed ceilings all appear as they once did, except now they are made of translucent, shimmering sand. Fifty cubic feet of building can be restored with each handful of sand. The restored building is sturdy for normal purposes, providing shelter from the elements, but if it sustains even 1hp of structural damage, it collapses. The restored structure remains in existence for 12 hours.

XP Value: 1,500

Sand of Sinking

Sand of sinking creates a 108 × 108 square of "quicksand" whenever it is thrown onto sand, earth, or stone. The effect lasts for 2d4 rounds. Victims standing on the affected area sink at a rate of 5' per round, to a maximum depth of 10'. When the effect of the sand wears off, the material solidifies, trapping anyone still caught inside it. The sand can also be used against stone walls and the like, creating a 10'-deep opening similar to a *passwall* spell. Because the "quicksand" flows down, out of the wall, the opening is permanent. Additional handfuls of this sand do not create deeper holes, but they can be used to broaden the area of effect.

XP Value: 2,000



Slow Sand

This form of magical sand makes time stand still. Up to three man-sized creatures may be affected, provided they are all within 10' of each other. Any who fail their saving throws become frozen in time, effectively *held*, for 5 rounds. They are not aware of the passage of time and aren't affected by anything that occurs while they are in stasis. Those who make their saving throws are merely *slowed* for 1 round. If a second handful of sand is thrown on an affected creature, either at the same time or after the first handful has taken effect, the duration increases to one hour. A second save is made at -4 with no Dexterity adjustments allowed.

XP Value: 1,500

Solid Sand

Solid sand can be scattered onto any soft surface—sand, soft earth, mud, quicksand, even snow — and it immediately hardens, forming a shell that can then be walked upon. The shell is solid and stable, allowing for good traction and balance. The area of effect is 500 square feet per handful. The shells lasts for 1d4 turns.

XP Value: 500

Thirsty Sand

Similar to *dust of dryness*, *thirsty sand* drains moisture, but from creatures, not bodies of water. Only one creature can fall victim to this sand, but he suffers 3d6 hp damage and must endure excruciat-

ing pain for 1d4 rounds, suffering -2 on attack and damage rolls, as well as a +2 penalty on Armor Class and initiative. A successful save halves the damage and

duration of the pain. Once the sand is finished draining moisture, it falls in wet clumps at its victim's feet. If additional handfuls of *thirsty sand* are thrown at a victim before he has had a chance to replenish the lost liquid, his saving throw is made with a cumulative -2 modifier. One gallon of water is necessary to replace the lost moisture and avoid this penalty. Water-based creatures suffer double damage from this sand.

XP Value: 1,000

Sand of Scintillation

When this sand is thrown into the air, it explodes in a burst of blinding, hypnotic light. All who see this flash of light must save vs. spells or be stunned for 2d4 rounds. The effect extends for 50' in all directions. If two or more handfuls are thrown up at once, the light is brighter and the area of effect extends by 50' for each additional handful. In addition, saving throws made inside the first 50' suffer a -2 penalty.

XP Value: 500

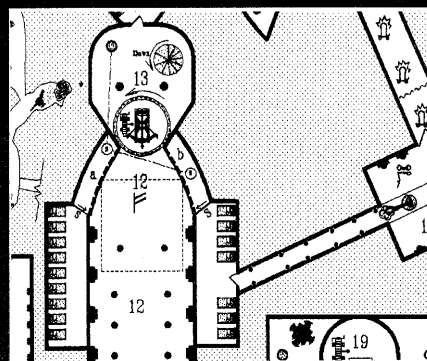
Rudy Thauberg lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has written for DRAGON® Magazine before.

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The Role of Books

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Book of Moons

Rosemary Edghill

Tor/Forge

\$20.95

A plot-description of *Book of Moons* doesn't do much to help classify it genre-wise. The publishers describe it as a mystery, but the label of "supernatural suspense" fits equally well, though the tone is mild enough to suggest contemporary fantasy rather than horror. Yet at the same time, "fantasy" seems an unlikely description for a novel whose modern-day witchcraft has a ring of authenticity that's rare in any branch of genre fiction.

Edghill's narrator, Bast, is a modern-day Wiccan with a job in a New York City graphic-design studio. As this second of her adventures opens, though, she's got a trickier problem: someone is stealing *Books of Shadows*. "Part logbook, part recipe book, part liturgy, and part magical diary," as Bast describes it, a witch's *Book of Shadows* is her most valuable and intimate possession. In theory, the missing books could be recreated without much difficulty, but in practice the implications of the thefts are worrisome. And meanwhile, another *Book of Shadows* is the object of much avid speculation: someone is hunting for the reputed grimoire of Mary, Queen of Scots.

What's distinctive about *Book of Moons* is that Edghill presents the Wiccan lore with dead-on insight that's both good-humored and thoughtful. Her witches are sincere in their beliefs, but

Bast, at least, cheerfully acknowledges modern neo-paganism's checkered history and the diverse, eccentric character of many of its adherents. These are characters for whom magic is as real as the World Trade Center and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and Edghill captures the contrast wisely and well. Bast, especially, is a remarkably pragmatic yet deeply spiritual heroine, and her grapples with Wiccan theology are a major part of the story Edghill is telling.

By contrast, the novel is only mildly startling as a puzzle story, as it's fairly evident early on who's behind the odd thefts and the murder that grows out of them. Yet this is less of a problem than one might expect in a mystery yarn. Though most readers will identify the criminal long before Bast does, Edghill — and perhaps Bast herself — seem almost to expect this. The result is a tale that's less a whodunit than one about what Bast learns as she learns it. There's still suspense, but of a different and more realistic character than is often found in the average mystery.

This, just possibly, makes *Book of Moons* singularly appropriate reading for devotees of role-playing. Regardless of whether one finds Bast's world of modern witchcraft adaptable to a game campaign, this is a story in which the journey is as important as the ending, and that's certainly one of the major attractions of the RPG hobby.

Enchanted Forests

Katharine Kerr 8

Martin H. Greenberg, editors

DAW

\$5.50

Go into a forest expecting magic, and you may find anything from a talking wolf to a gingerbread house to the King of the Dragons. Or you may find any of the numerous magical folk populating *Enchanted Forests*, the latest in DAW's seemingly endless stream of theme anthologies. This time, however, the theme brings together a more than usually diverse assortment of tales.

As with her previous anthology, *Weird Tales from Shakespeare*, lead editor Kerr

subdivides her stories into groups of related pieces. The riskiest element of this strategy is that most of the anthology's comic pieces are deliberately stacked at the the front of the book — but it's a risk that pays off. All three of these light-toned tales are sophisticated and successful. Kevin Andrew Murphy's inversion of the Grimm and Andersen fairy tale archetypes displays the most wicked sense of wit, while Ken St. Andre skillfully relates a jovial bit of Arthuriana, and Katherine Lawrence offers a pleasantly subversive tale in which novice PI Kit Marlowe uses lessons from two worlds to solve her first case.

The mood then switches from amusing to haunting. Lawrence Watt-Evans' "Out of the Woods" is the transition piece, a story in which a faerie wood proves to be other than as originally advertised. Then we shift to viewing the wood from the inside out, nowhere more eerily or intimately than in Connie Hirsch's "Viridescence." Best of the other tales in this section is Brook and Julia West's account of a scientific expedition which proves unexpectedly harrowing; the Wests neatly balance a pulp-monster-movie premise with the smooth plausibility of more modern, realistic chills.

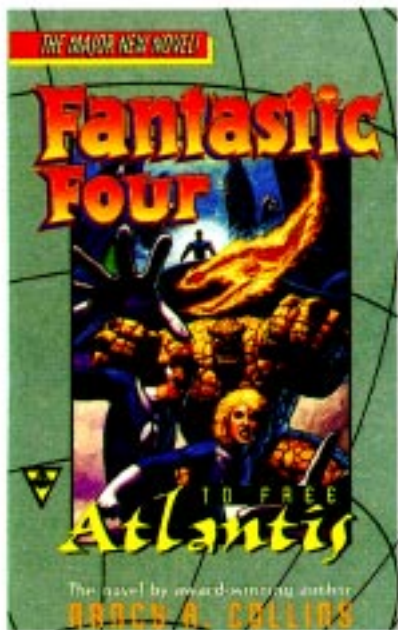
Beyond this point, the subthemes begin to fade into each other, some more clearly defined than others, but nearly all of the stories attempt a sophistication well beyond the average sword-and-sorcery or coming-of-age yarn. Among the most memorable contributions are Michelle Sagara's "Ghostwood," about two siblings' devotion to each other at nearly any cost, Susan Schwartz's memory-driven tale of a childhood summer camp adventure featuring more than one sort of monster, and a uniquely clever addition to Rudyard Kipling's "Just So Stories" from Karawynn Long.

One story element does cross between Kerr's subsections, that of the tree-spirit or dryad, usually as romantic object. Some half a dozen stories address this idea and relationship with varying degrees of originality. The two strongest come from Dave Smeds and Kate Daniel, the first featuring strong characters in a sword-and-sorcery setting and the second com-

binning the original Greek myth with a uniquely American milieu.

Most of the other entries are at least intriguing if not challenging in some way. The chief exception to this is Lawrence Schimel's "Ties of Love," a vignette whose punchline is out of touch with its setup. And the oddest of several very odd tales is easily Gregory Feeley's "In Fear of Little Neil," which draws two well-known literary worlds together with decidedly disturbing results.

All in all, though, *Enchanted Forests* is easily one of the least predictable and most varied theme anthologies DAW has presented in recent years, and chief editor Kerr (with the acknowledged assistance of Jo Clayton) has assembled a volume that's a great deal more ambitious than the title might suggest.



The Fantastic Four: To Free Atlantis

Nancy A. Collins
Boulevard/Byron Preiss \$5.99

By comic-book standards, the Fantastic Four are latecomers to the world of tie-in fiction, lagging well behind Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, and even Iron Man. Then again, the super-intelligent Reed Richards may have suspected what *To Free Atlantis* demonstrates — namely, that it's more difficult to novelize a super-team's adventures than it is to chronicle the exploits of a solo hero in prose form.

Part of the problem is evident from the book's title alone. While the Fantastic

Four get top billing, Nancy Collins' novel is really centered on Namor, the Sub-Mariner, effectively leaving the Four to act as guest stars in their own book. The plot revolves around a bid by a palace rival to stage a coup and take over the undersea kingdom of Atlantis, and only when they encounter and rescue a dying Namor do the FF enter the picture. Likewise, while legendary archvillain Dr. Doom gets back-cover billing as the primary antagonist, he, too, is a background figure who scarcely appears onstage.

It also doesn't help that the novel is a good deal shorter than it looks. Counting Namor, Doom, and her Atlantean characters as well as the FF, Collins is working with nearly a dozen significant players and a double-stranded plot, so space for viewpoint scenes and character development is limited at best. Not surprisingly, Collins chooses instead to concentrate on her action-driven structure, and she generally succeeds in the attempt. But while Collins hasn't padded her prose, the book's designers have padded its page count with relatively large type, unusually wide margins, and a space-eat

ing design for page headings.

What readers end up getting is a story that's very much a comic book tale mutated into straight text. Characterizations, including those of the FF, tend toward one-note status, while the story-line runs to visually-oriented action sequences. Collins also commits the classic comic-book device of entirely changing the story's agenda in the final chapters, pulling new McGuffins out of her hat and revealing that all that's gone before was a smokescreen for the real plan. Unfortunately, as often happens with the comics, there's no apparent foundation for the shift, and what sometimes works in graphic form is far less successful in plain prose.

Yet if *To Free Atlantis* isn't notable for its story or characters, Collins has at least managed to pull a surprisingly large quantity of Marvel-Universe detail into her narrative. Purely as an introduction to the world in which these characters live, the novel is fairly effective and remarkably compact. But as the debut book-length adventure of one of comicdom's longest-lived hero-teams, the novel leaves a great deal to be desired.

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Star Trek Concordance

Bjo Trimble
Citadel Press

\$19.95

The Art of Star Trek

Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens

Pocket Books

\$50.00

Whatever else the *Star Trek* franchise may have become, it's generated a very large and complicated universe over the last three decades. Just how large and complex it is can be gathered via even a quick glance at these two recent additions to the avid *Trek* fan's reference shelf.

The *Star Trek Concordance* is actually something of a legend. Originally compiled and circulated by Bjo Trimble as a fan project, it eventually saw professional publication in an edition now long out of print. This new, updated volume brings the *Concordance* back into the marketplace, and while its focus is squarely on the "original series" characters, the feature films and relevant references from current *Trek* shows are included.

The original-series focus gives the volume a useful and distinctive slant as com-

pared to the assorted "official" technical manuals and encyclopedias, whose authors' chief familiarity is with the more recent television and movie projects. While there is no shortage of episode guides to the classic shows, Trimble adds to this material by several orders of magnitude. The least of these are the most complete indexes of actors and technical personnel yet seen for these productions. Also notable is the *Concordance's* comprehensive treatment of the animated episodes, which Trimble cogently defends as entirely canonical despite reluctance in some quarters to acknowledge them as such.

The main body of the volume, though, is its encyclopedic lexicon of creatures, characters, and other terms used in the series. In this, Trimble presents a unique and mind-bogglingly detailed body of information, comprising more than all but the most die-hard fans will ever need to know about the *Star Trek* universe. Included separately are catalogs of Starfleet vessels and of the stars and star systems which figure in the series. And perhaps most striking, the book is generously illustrated with detailed sketches

and drawings by a host of talented artists.

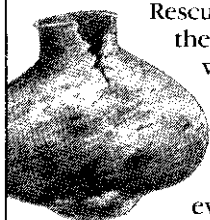
There are, as with any large reference work, a few nits to be picked. The most notable is a design problem — many lexicon references point to the separate "cosmos" or "vessel" subsections, but no typographic convention notes this fact, so that unwary readers may find themselves looking fruitlessly for lexicon entries for "cosmos" and "vessel". Secondly, while the *Star Trek* material is painstakingly well-supported, notes pertaining to real-world history and mythology are occasionally questionable (Isis, for example, is referred to as the Egyptian goddess of nature, which is decidedly misleading).

But while the art in the *Concordance* is notable for its variety, that in *The Art of Star Trek* is notable for other reasons. This is a huge, full-color coffee table book; where the *Concordance* provides a thorough written guide to the original-series *Trek* universe, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens have assembled a spectacular and equally thorough visual record of the entire run of *Trek* history, from the earliest days all the way for-

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ward to the present *Voyager* series.

While there are plenty of vivid full-page space panoramas, this is as much of a reference volume as Trimble's; there are also design-sketches for a variety of models, costumes, and props as well as photographs of the materials themselves. And the various starships are represented in detail, inside and out, though here the emphasis is on the more recent ships rather than the first U.S.S. *Enterprise*. Captions and supporting text give clear descriptions and amplify considerably on the production process; readers will learn a good deal about the mechanics of costume and prop design from studying the relevant sections.

But valuable as the volume is as a craftsmanship text, its primary appeal is — as it should be — as an art book. Again, its far from merely a collection of outer-space shots; there are a number of impressive background matte paintings, and the volume closes with a full-page rendering of Data's amusing, Picasso-like portrait of his cat. There is a great deal to look at and admire in the compilation, and it's presented in a high-quality package.

By themselves, both the *Concordance* and *The Art of Star Trek* are valuable additions to a *Trek* fan's reference collection, all the more so if one is a devotee of the now out-of-print *Star Trek* RPGs. But taken together, the two volumes are even more striking, one giving a pictorial record while the other provides a window into the internal logic of the *Trek* universe. Though not inexpensive, this pairing is very possibly indispensable to the serious student of the Federation and its most notable citizens.

Recurring roles

Over on the fictional side of *Star Trek* publishing, the most notable recent entry is *The Captain's Daughter* (Pocket, \$5.99). Peter David gives us a "Captain Sulu" adventure that also provides a history for Demora Sulu, the daughter seen in the most recent feature film. As usual, David is both a witty and touching storyteller who is among the very top rank of writers in the *Trek* fold.

In a darker vein, *Batman: The Ultimate Evil* (Warner, \$19.95) is as disturbing as the brown half-paper jacket suggests. With its strong and mature subject matter, this is emphatically not a book for the squeamish or the very young, and it wears its politics vividly on its sleeve. But Andrew Vachss' tale is

nonetheless entirely in Bat-character, and those who can handle a tale of all-too-real evil should find it compelling.

Elizabeth Scarborough's *The Godmother's Apprentice* (Ace, \$19.95), by contrast, retreats for the most part from the social-commentary agenda of its predecessor to tell a sometimes silly, sometimes chilling tale in which godmother-trainee Snohomish Quantrill must cope with an absent-minded tutor, a pilgrimage of cats, and the general sense of bewilderment that can result whenever an American tourist visits Ireland. More structurally sound than the prior book, this is lively reading.

Finally, a trip to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® world finds two new titles from Mark Anthony among the highlights. *Curse of the Shadowmage* (TSR, \$5.99) is a sequel to his previous book about Caledan Caldorien and a worthy tale in itself, featuring a solidly traditional but very well-executed quest involving a magical artifact and Caledan's very possible doom. *Escape from Undermountain* (TSR, \$5.99) moves across Faerûn to the legendary dungeons beneath Waterdeep, introducing a new set of protagonists in a lively

tale of dungeon-delving replete with devious traps, insidious creatures, and the deepest foray yet into Undermountain's depths. Anthony is a good hand with Toril's magic, and some of the devices in this novel are well worth an investigation.



John C. Bunnell is a writer and reviewer who lives in Portland, Oregon.

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This month, the Sage visits the newly revised DARK SUN® setting and considers some optional rules and spells, including yet another look at the dreaded stonewall spell.

The Way of the Psionicist book in the revised DARK SUN boxed set (and the psionics section in the PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills 8 Powers book) says that characters with chaotic alignments cannot become psionicists. This is incorrect, at least on Athas. The Will and the Way reference lists several chaotic psionicists. Are chaotic psionicists no longer allowed on Athas?

Chaotic psionicists have never been allowed on Athas (or anywhere else for that matter; see *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, page 10); at least not as player characters. Pages 37 and 38 of the Rules Book from the original DARK SUN boxed set contain several Athas-specific changes to the psionics rules, but refer readers back to the CPH for anything not covered there. Changes to the alignment requirement for psionicists are not included in the Rules Book. The chaotic psionicists from *The Will and the Way* are anomalies; exactly how they managed to become psionicists and retain their chaotic alignments is unrevealed.

The Age of Heroes book in the revised DARK SUN boxed set gives individual experience awards based on character race, but there are no entries for the new PC races of aarakocra and pterrans. Is this an omission? Or are there no bonuses for these two races?

Here are individual experience awards for the two races:

Aarakocra:

Demonstrate deep and abiding respect for nature: 20 xp/day
Abuse nature: -50 xp

Pterrann:

Pursue life path: 20 xp/day
Revere Earth Mother: 30 xp/day
Provide specific, meaningful service to Earth Mother: 50 xp

Page 26 of the Age of Heroes book says defilers destroy the environment when they cast their spells, which is how defilers were originally handled. Page 67, however, says defilers cause destruction when they memorize their spells. Which is correct? If the latter is true, how should DMs of ongoing campaigns explain the change?

The text on page 67 is correct. Note that in addition to causing damage when memorizing spells, defilers also must make Intelligence checks to see how successful they are (see Table XVII on page 28) in acquiring the spells. Defiling is no longer a sure thing.

How you should implement the new defiling rules into an established campaign is a problem you must solve on your own. The simplest way is to ignore them and stick with the old rules. For most campaigns, you can just announce that reality has changed and that things will be different from now on. To add a little mystery, you might want to explain that no one, not even the PCs, remembers any other kind of defiling. If you're feeling a bit cruel, you might rule that the PCs remember the old way of doing things, but no one else does.

If you favor a more dramatic approach, you can introduce some spectacular or cataclysmic event (the appearance of a hitherto unknown comet would do nicely) that causes the change. In either case, you might introduce the change gradually. For example, perhaps defilers only have to make Intelligence checks when memorizing spells after

sunrise, and the defiling effect of memorization might be minimal, a radius of inches. Over the next few weeks or months, gradually increase both the radius of the defiling effect and decrease the number of hours in a day that the effect can be avoided. You might even want to design a series of adventures that would allow your PCs to prevent the change — if they want to.

Can the undead trolls, kobolds, ogres, orcs, lizard men, pixies, gnomes, and goblins that roam the Dead Land, Small Home and the City of a Thousand Dead be raised, resurrected, or reincarnated? Since these races actually continue to exist on Athas, why wouldn't a reincarnate spell be able to reincarnate a character as one of these "dead" races?

According to my colleague Bill Slavicsek, the creatures you're asking about have been dead since the Cleaning Wars 3,500 years ago. That puts them well beyond the reach of any *raise dead*, *resurrection*, or *reincarnate* spell.

Generally speaking, a *reincarnate* spell transforms a recipient into some creature that is more or less characteristic of the world where it is cast. Trolls, kobolds, ogres, orcs, lizard men, pixies, gnomes, and goblins are not typical of Athas, even though there are sizable populations of undead specimens on the planet. Even if there were hidden populations of living trolls, kobolds, ogres, orcs, lizard men, pixies, gnomes, and goblins (and by all accounts there are not), they still would not be representative enough to appear on the creature list for *reincarnate* spells.

What are the thief ability adjustments for Athasian races that can't become thieves but can become rangers or convict gladiators?

Here are the adjustments:

Race	Hide in Shadows	Move Silently	All Others ¹
Half-Giant	-	-10%	-10%
Thri-kreen	+5%	+5%	-15% ²

1. For convict gladiators only

2. Thri-kreen never gain the ability to climb walls.

If someone punches a person who is protected by a stonewall spell, does the attacker suffer damage? Does the recipient of a stonewall spell look different in any way? The Player's Handbook seems to suggest that a charge of a stonewall is

lost even if an attacker rolls a miss when fighting, is this so? If this is so, what is the reasoning behind it?

A *stoneskin* spell never damages an attacker. The spell description does not specify any change in appearance for the recipient of a *stoneskin* spell, but that doesn't mean the DM can't specify one.

A spell loses one "charge" each time the recipient is subjected to an attack, that's just the way the spell works. Note that an attack roll usually isn't necessary, just mark off a charge from the spell. The only time you need to make a roll is when the attack can damage the recipient in spite of the *stoneskin* spell. Note also that an attack that bypasses the spell and damages the *stoneskin* recipient still negates a charge.

If a clay golem hits a character, will a successful *dispel magic* allow a priest of less than 17th level to heal the character?

No.

Table 29 in the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Skills & Powers* book shows adjustments to thieving abilities for high Dexterity scores, but they are different from the adjustments shown on Tables 4 and 5. What are the correct adjustments?

Tables 4 and 5 are only for use with the new rules for subabilities in Chapter Two. If you're not using subabilities, skip Table 29 and use either table 28 from *The Player's Handbook* or Table XXI from the *Age of Heroes* book in the revised

DARK SUN boxed set. If you are using subabilities, I recommend the adjustments on the tables below.

Balance

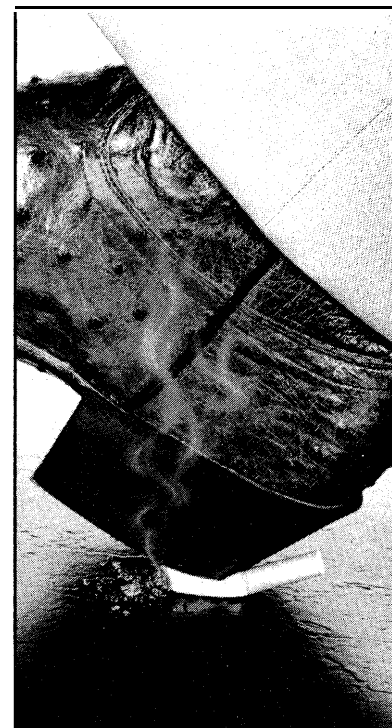
Subability Score	Move Silently	Hide in Shadows	Climb Walls
3	-30%	-30%	-30%
4	-30%	-25%	-25%
5	-30%	-20%	-20%
6	-25%	-20%	-20%
7	-25%	-15%	-15%
8	-20%	-15%	-15%
9	-20%	-10%	-10%
10	-15%	-5%	-5%
11	-10%	—	—
12	-5	—	—
13-16	—	—	—
17	+5	+5%	+5%
18	+10%	+10%	+10%
19	+15%	+15%	+15%
20	+20%	+17%	+20%
21	+25%	+20%	+22%
22	+30%	+22%	+25
23	+33%	+24%	+27%
24	+35%	+27%	+30%
25	+35%	+30%	+33%

Skip Williams is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc. If you have any questions on TSR products for the Sage, you can write to him at 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or you can e-mail him at tsrsage@aol.com. We regret that personal replies are not possible.



Aim

Subability Score	Pick Pockets	Open Locks	Find/Remove Traps	Escape Bonds	Forge Documents	Tunneling
3	-30%	-30%	-30%	-30%	-30%	-30%
4	-25%	-25%	-25%	-25%	-25%	-25%
5	-25%	-20%	-20%	-25%	-25%	-20%
6	-20%	-20%	-20%	-20%	-20%	-15%
7	-20%	-15%	-15%	-20%	-20%	-15%
a	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-15%	-10%
9	-15%	-10%	-10%	-15%	-15%	-10%
10	-10%	-5%	-10%	-10%	-10%	-5%
11	-5%	—	-5%	-5%	-5%	—
12-15	—	—	—	—	—	—
16	—	+5%	—	—	+5%	—
17	+5%	+10%	—	+5%	+7%	—
18	+10%	+15%	+5%	+10%	+10%	+5%
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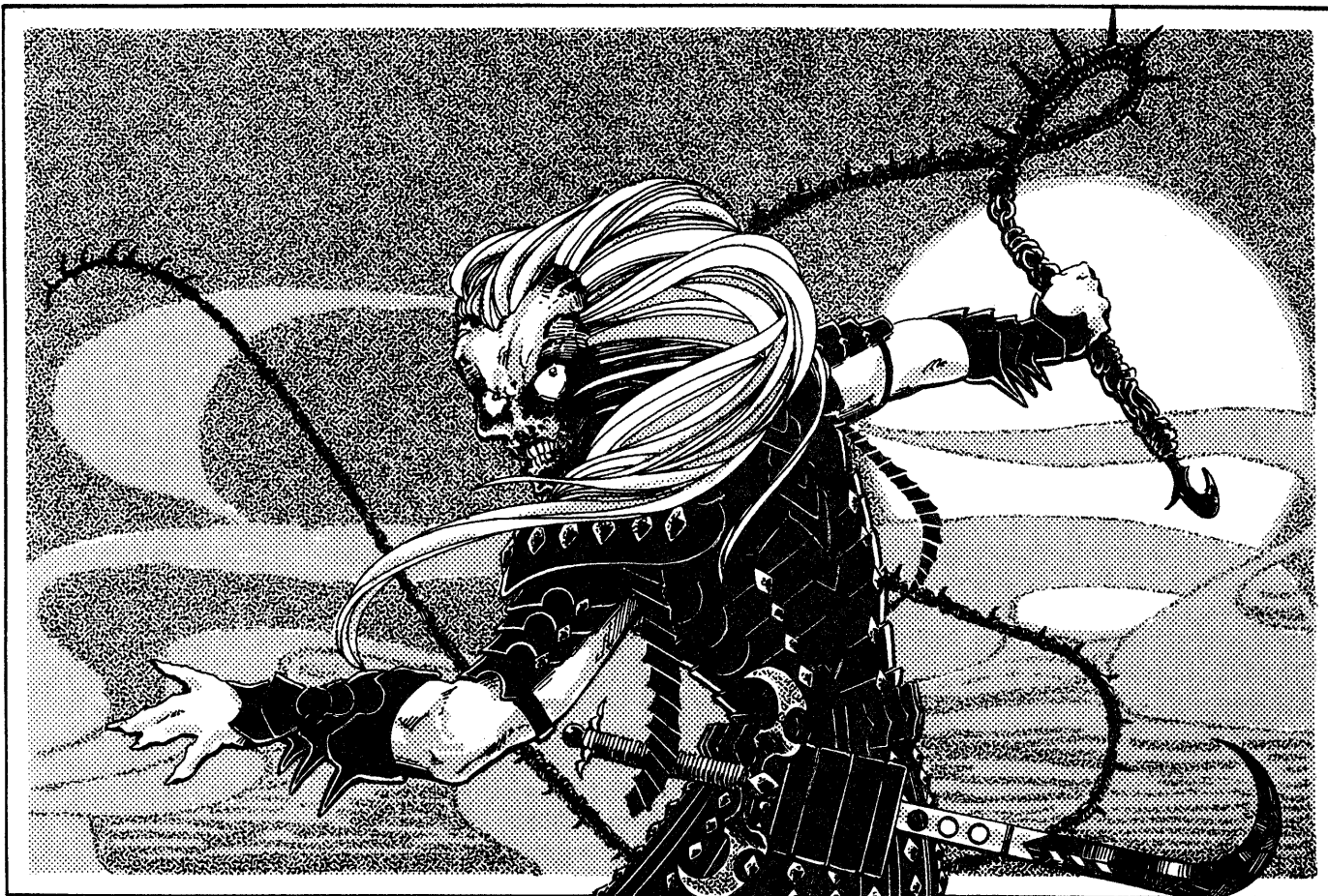
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It takes the player into the strange and wondrous **Nightlands**, a twisted mirror image of our reality and home of the **Nightlords**! Discover the true power behind the Ba'al, more minions of the **Nightlords**, the inhabitants of the **Lands of Night**, lost artifacts, new **Nightspawn** talents and morphus, plus campaign and adventure ideas.

Written by C.J. Carella. Art by Post, Martin and others. Anticipated to be 160 pages, with a \$16.95 cover price, but page count and price may change.

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T rue confession: when I'm playing a character in a fantasy game, I opt for a no-frills, plain vanilla human. Understand, I like gnomes and lizard men as much as the next guy. But I have a hard time getting a handle on their personalities; when I play a lizard man, he comes off as Arnold Schwarzenegger with scaly skin. If you're having similar problems — or if you'd just like to spice up your games with some offbeat guest stars — here's some help.

Giantcraft

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
game supplement

128-page softcover book

TSR, Inc. \$15

Design: Ray Winninger with Troy Denning
and Jeff Grubb

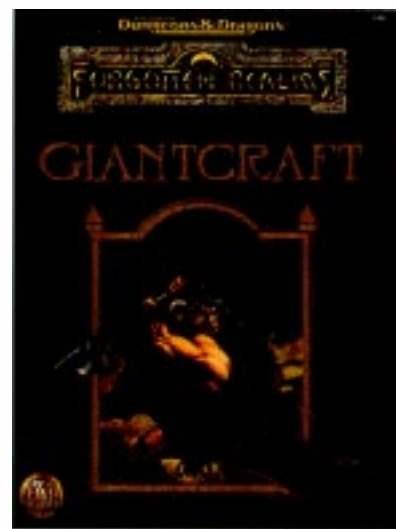
Editing: Karen S. Boomgarden

Illustrations: Matt Cavotta and Daniel
Frazier

Cover: Jeff Easley

Ever since Jack clambered up his first beanstalk, giants have been a mainstay of fantasy fiction. Not so in the AD&D® game. Sure, they occasionally pop up as villains, and no *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* volume would be complete without a gigantic something-or-other. But to find a book that gives the big guys their due, you have to go all the way back to 1978 and the G1-G3 adventure series

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



(*Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*, *Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl*, and *Hall of the Fire Giant King*, repackaged in 1986's *Queen of the Spiders* anthology and worth searching out). Now, at long last, comes *Giantcraft*, a compendium of background notes, campaign tips, and new rules for characters of the gargantuan persuasion. There's a lot of thoughtfully presented material here, and most of it makes the grade; but at the risk of sounding like an ingrate, there's also less than meets the eye.

First, the good stuff. The book opens with the history of the Faerun giants, which traces their origin from an adulterous relationship between the demigoddess Othea and a minor sea god named Ulutui. Their union produced four sons who would establish the giant-kin dynasties. Othea's husband responded by killing Ulutui and casting his body into the Cold Sea, where radiation from his magical amulet caused the waters to freeze and create the Great Glacier. It's a enchanting story, well-told, made all the more compelling by the unusual arctic locale.

From there, the book clears up some myths (think all giants are evil? Nahh... they're just misunderstood), then proceeds to a clutter-free discussion of character creation. Along with the requisite ability scores and saving throws, we're offered lucid, sensible rules for adjudicating strength checks, determining clan heritage, and casting runes, a form of magic that employs symbols and inscriptions instead of spoken incantations. A helpful role-playing section advises the DM to stand on a chair when portraying a giant, which serves the dual purpose of intimidating the players and making them giggle.

The book also takes a detailed look at the Ice Spire mountain range, which serves as a base for giant-centered campaigns. Located west of the Great Desert of Anauroch and south of the Endless Ice Sea, the frigid mountains are home to a volatile mix of humans, giants, and monsters. It's a fascinating setting, bursting with adventure possibilities. The barbarians of Harsvale stage ceremonial hunts involving reindeer sleds and human prey. Cloud giants place bets on whether they can coerce a particular woman to fall in love with a particular man. A clan of hill giants stage competitive eat-offs, vying for the title of Master Eater; fellow clansmen look to the Master Eater for political leadership, as well as "gastronomical inspiration."

Unfortunately, many strong concepts are underdeveloped. We're told that giants have unique concepts of good and evil, called *maat* and *maug*. But aside from a few behavioral examples — honoring family members is *maat*, killing another giant is *maug* — the definitions are fuzzy; in essence, *maat* is just a funny word for good. Archetypes are no sooner introduced than they're jerked away; the Patron (a stone giant storyteller), the Glutton (a leader of the hill giants), and the Weirdner (a frost giant rune caster) receive only a paragraph each of description, and they deserve full-blown character kits. Elsewhere, the designers take unnecessary detours. A discussion of an ogre settlement eats up several pages of the Ice Spires section. The appendix is devoted to creatures like shadowhounds and krotter yak, whose connection to giant-kin is dubious. The wind chill table, frostbite rules, and other meteorological miscellany — much of it recycled from the FR14 *Great Glacier* supplement — seems superfluous; do giants really worry that much about frostbite?

Evaluation: In fairness, *Giantcraft* doesn't pretend to be the last word in giants, as it concentrates on the mythos introduced in Troy Denning's *Twilight Giants* novel trilogy. If you're looking for giants other than those from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, you'll have to keep looking. There's not much here for the DRAGONLANCE®, AL-QADIM®, or RED STEEL® campaigns; for that matter, there's not much generic material, either. And the designers' penchant for hopping from topic to topic weakens the book's impact; instead of a cohesive whole, it reads like a collection of magazine articles. Within its narrow focus, *Giantcraft* delivers the goods. But as an all-inclusive

guide to AD&D's tallest inhabitants, it falls a bit, er, short.

GURPS Fantasy Folk

GURPS® game supplement

144-page softcover book

Steve Jackson Games \$19

Design: Chris W. McCubbin and Sean Punch, with Loyd Blankenship and Steve Jackson

Editing: Lillian Butler

Illustrations: Shea Ryan and Dan Smith

Cover: Ken Kelley

Giants also lurk between the covers of Second Edition *GURPS Fantasy Folk*, as do elves, centaurs, leprechauns, and 20 other nonhuman races. It's undeniably ambitious; the races can be used as either PCs or NPCs, making it the GURPS equivalent of TSR's *Complete Book of Humanoids* or *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* book. Alas, it promises more than it delivers. *Fantasy Folk* claims to treat nonhuman races as "unique cultures made up of individuals, not as sketchily-defined monsters." But that's not quite true.

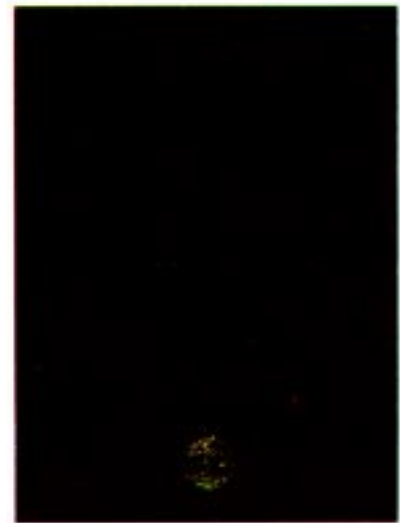
Part of the problem is the rigid format, which allows only four or five pages for each race. Consequently, major races like elves and halflings receive the same amount of space as minor leaguers like gargoyles and fauns. That in itself isn't necessarily bad — the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* format is just as tight — but the writing feels cramped, too, suffering from an abundance of generalities and a shortage of specifics. The elves entry tells us that elves "behave with elegance and style" but offers no examples of the alleged behavior. We're informed that the elves once waged a great war against the dwarves, but we learn nothing about where the war occurred, what was at stake, or how it was resolved. Giants "have few customs and little culture." Oh really? Not according to *Giantcraft*. Ogres love to fight, centaurs are nomadic hunters, halflings prefer country life, and if you think maybe you've heard this before, well, if you've been role-playing for any length of time, you probably have.

The oddball races fare better than the conventional ones. *Fantasy Folk* permits players to assume the roles of exalted horses (stallions and mares with enhanced senses), bales (blood-drinking madmen), and great eagles (magical birds). Informative sidebars provide interesting adventure hooks and astute role-playing advice. But the superficial descriptions provide only enough infor-

mation to get the characters off the ground; there's not enough material to sustain them through a long campaign. I'd be up for a GURPS Great Eagles to explain exactly how these weirdos live and work.

Fantasy Folk would be just another competent but unremarkable supplement were it not for its race generation rules, one of the most elegant systems for creating original characters I've ever seen. Introduced in *GURPS Aliens*, the system allows players to build characters from an allotment of points, spent on advantages, disadvantages, and skills. Racial modifiers determine attribute scores; the higher the modifier, the better the attribute. By expending the required number of points, players can buy spines, extra limbs, and spells. The resulting characters are not only functional and reasonably balanced, but a lot of fun to play; I whipped up a two-headed goat man that I'm itching to unleash in the Mad Lands (the official GURPS fantasy setting, described in the *GURPS FantasyII* supplement).

Evaluation: If you're a GURPS fanatic too lazy to cook up your own statistics for dwarves and kobolds, *Fantasy Folk* might be worth the investment. If you own the first edition, you can probably skip the upgrade; the new edition fiddles with the point costs and rewrites a few abilities, but adds nothing essential. If you're not a GURPS player, there's little of interest here. Still, even if you decide to pass, I'd sneak a peek at the chapter on race generation — it's pretty terrific.



The Complete Ninja's Handbook
ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
game supplement
128-page softcover book



TSR, Inc. \$18

Design: Aaron Allston

Editing: Barbara G. Young

Illustrations: Jim Holloway, Clyde Caldwell,

Fred Fields, and Les Dorscheid

Aaron Allston wrote the book on martial arts — literally. His *Ninja Hero* — a supplement for the Hero System* game, published in 1990 — remains the definitive guide to Oriental role-playing. *The Complete Ninja's Handbook* is no *Ninja Hero*, but its close, a masterful set of directions for transforming run-of-the-mill PCs into exotic spies and assassins.

Drawing on ideas from *Ninja Hero*, *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*, and TSR's late, lamented *Oriental Adventures* game, Allston recasts ninja characters as part of the rogue class. Ninja share the same experience levels, hit dice, and proficiency slots as rogues, along with their weapon options and talent for backstabbing. They're burdened, however, with more stringent ability requirements (13 in Dexterity, 10 in Intelligence) and reduced thieving skills (a base score of 0% in Pick Pockets, Open Locks, and Find/Remove Traps). To compensate, ninja have access to a form of nonverbal communication called "clan signing," as well as a host of new proficiencies, like Water Walking, Escape, and Giant Kite Flying. Players can customize their ninja by selecting from the dozen-plus character kits; among the choices: Pathfinder (a skilled tracker and woodsman), Shadow Warrior (a weapons expert), and Intruder (an oriental James Bond). The extensive equipment section describes a warehouse full of merchandise, including samurai swords, eggshell grenades, and, of course, giant kites.

The Complete Ninja's Handbook is more than just a bunch of numbers and gizmos. Allston gives his ninja three dimensions by emphasizing their familiar ties and obsession with secrecy. Every ninja belongs to a clan, which not only determines his alignment, but designates his status, role, and resources. Further, clans impose taboos (no marriage outside the clan, no unauthorized expenditures) and edicts (destroy a rival clan, promote the worship of a particular god), forcing players to sharpen their PCs' personalities and work toward clear goals. Most clans insist that their members conceal their true identities, even from their comrades. To that end, Allston provides clever suggestions for maintaining secrecy within the campaign, ranging from false character sheets to "paranoia notes," where the DM passes written

messages to the ninja players containing information the other players don't need to know. And throughout the book, Allston scores with imaginative flourishes: a ninja wizard who uses finger-wiggles as spell components, a magical dust that causes floors to squeak, a metallic smoking pipe that doubles as a club.

The book describes two martial arts systems, one for beginners, one for advanced students. In the basic system, a character with the martial arts skill makes a normal attack roll, then, if the attack succeeds, makes a second roll on the Martial Arts Results (MAR) Table. The MAR Table indicates a maneuver and the amount of inflicted damage. For instance, a roll of 13 indicates a Vitals Punch, good for two points of damage. If the character expends a proficiency slot to specialize in martial arts, he receives a +1 bonus to his attack and damage rolls, as well as to his rolls on the MAR Table (the higher the MAR roll, the deadlier the maneuver).

The advanced system encourages players to select fighting styles, such as tae kwon do or karate. A style consists of a principal attack form (hands, feet, legs), a set of weapon options (fencing blades, clubs, chain weapons), and a list of special maneuvers (Circle Kick, Stunning Touch, Arrow Parry). When employing his style in a combat encounter, the player makes an attack roll and consults the description of the maneuver he's attempting to execute. The Circle Kick description, for example, requires the character to spin in a complete circle and land a kick on the targets upper body; if successful, the maneuver adds 1-2 hp damage to the character's normal martial arts damage. Most maneuvers penalize the attacker for failure; if he blows a Circle Kick, he loses his balance, which lowers his Armor Class by two points and deprives him of his attack in the next round. The system is complicated and costly — complete mastery of a style requires the character to expend his entire allotment of proficiency slots — but the maneuvers make it worth the effort. My favorite: Steel Cloth, which enables a ninja to eviscerate an opponent with a handkerchief.

Evaluation: Problems? Nothing major. The spell list doesn't amount to much, comprising a set of so-so effects like lesser distraction (the victim hears a faint noise or sees something indistinct) and detect the living (the opposite of detect undead). The kits could've used more development; the Pathfinder and Shadow Warrior fill less than half a page each.

Basic combat consists of a few modifiers, and few damage bonuses, and that's about it — call it Martial Arts Lite. (Those wanting more detail should refer to *The Ultimate Martial Artists*, the sequel to *Ninja Hero*, reviewed in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #221. *The Ultimate Martial Artist* includes conversion notes for "level-based" systems — in other words, AD&D.) That said, *The Complete Ninja's Handbook* stands a first-rate resource, another notch in the belt for one of the industry's top designers. With his effortless affinity for all things oriental, Aaron Allston is role-playing's answer to Bruce Lee.

Faeries

Ars Magica* game supplement
144-page softcover book

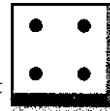
Wizards of the Coast \$17

Design: John Snead and Sarah Link

Editing: Bob Kruger

Illustrations: Amy Weber, Anson Madocks,
Bryon Wackwitz, Chris Rush, Doug
Shuler, Eric David Anderson, Jeff
Menges, John T. Snyder, John Ueland,
Julie Baroh, Mark Tedin, Rosemary
Roach, and Susan Van Camp

Cover: David O. Miller and Maria Cabardo



Campaign in the doldrums? Maybe you need a few faeries. I'm not talking about the human mosquitoes that flitter around Disneyland. I'm talking about the immortal, godlike spell-casters of medieval European legend, brought vividly to life in this off-the-wall sourcebook. This, by the way, is the second version of *Faeries*, though it doesn't say so on the front cover. White Wolf published the first one a few years back, before Wizards of the Coast acquired the rights to Ars Magica. If you own Version One, dump it; Version two improves on the original in every way.

That's not to say *Faeries* is for everyone, since the format is as eccentric as the subject matter. Half the book consists of a series of first-person anecdotes, with titles like "A Troubadour's Tale" and "A Guide to Our Order by Rebecca, Chief Librarian of Harco." Some anecdotes fill a column or two, others consume several pages. Throughout, the reader is referred to footnotes and sidebars explaining various faerie facts. For example, in the troubadour's tale of a house beset by the sounds of breaking glass, a footnote reveals that such sounds indicate the strengthening of a faerie aura. In Redcap Arcadia's story of a mystical realm called Arcadia, she recounts an encounter with a stubborn faerie who demanded a flask

of beer; a footnote explains that faeries often bargain for beer in exchange for information. You might find this tedious, especially if all you want are hard facts to use in a role-playing adventure. I found it charming, a welcome respite from the humdrum approach employed in most RPG supplements. Yes, as a reference book, *Faeries* makes a good doorstop. And yes, the writing could've been stronger, evidenced by awkward passages like, "I live by my wits and grow wild, and one man's land is a place I never stay in long." But overall, it's a successful experiment, carried off with insight and humor.

The rules section, comprising the second half of the book, is less successful. I liked the bestiary, a Who's Who of faeries from around the world (the hunchback koutsodaimonas lives in Greece; the padfoot, who resembles a green dog, hails from Germany). And the role-playing chapter does a good job of delineating the pros and cons of faerie characters. But too many ideas are sabotaged by a lack of development. The rules for interdimensional travel involve a confused tangle of aura ratings, power realms, and ability rolls. The character creation chapter explains that faeries have an aversion to iron ("Coming into contact with [iron] is like coming into contact with a decaying dead animal"). But how does this aversion operate in a campaign? Does a faerie flee when he sees an iron door? Or does he just hold his nose? Faeries, it says here, can speak with animals. Fine. But which animals? Insects? Earthworms? And can the animals speak back?

Evaluation: If you're not an Ars Magica player, don't let that scare you away. Ars Magica is barely mentioned in the first half of the book. As for the second half, anyone with a calculator and a couple of nights to kill ought to be able to translate the statistics to the system of his choice. I'm not crazy about fiction in role-playing supplements; most game designers are about as good at writing fiction as rock musicians are at composing symphonies. But here, it's engaging and cute. And if you flinched at the word "cute," consider spending your money elsewhere.

Short and sweet

The Evil Eye, by Steve Kurtz. TSR, Inc., \$10.

As he demonstrated in *The Complete Book of Necromancers*, Steve Kurtz knows his way around a corpse. This set of

exquisitely creepy scenarios for the RAVENLOFT® setting pits a group of mid-level adventurers against the mysterious Vistani and their ghostly allies. Kurtz's stylish writing yanks the players from shudder to shudder at a rippling pace. Want to get hooked? Try this: "And when the handsome gentlemen disrobed, she thought it hardly unusual to see a pair of black, bat-like wings unfolding into a canopy of darkness. Gabrielle welcomed the incubus into her embrace." Yikes!

Star Wars Miniatures Battles Starter Set* game, by Stephen Crane and Paul Murphy. West End Games, \$35.

Striker II* game, by Frank Chadwick with David Nilsen. GDW, Inc., \$20.

Lets be honest. — miniature simulations are a lot of work. First, you have to master a set of complicated rules; these are, after all, war games, and war game designers are notorious for their obsession with detail. Then, you have to round up all the figures, and they don't come cheap; an army of miniatures can set you back a hundred dollars, easy, and that's not counting the brushes and paint. Those with the time and the money, however, will find these two products to be excellent examples of an underappreciated genre. Both address tactical ground combat in the distant future, and both derive from popular RPGs.

The Star Wars Miniatures Battles Starter Set boxes the revised rules manual (originally published in 1993) with a dozen metal miniatures and a handful of six-sided dice. As in the Star Wars* role-playing game, the **Starter Set** focuses on skirmishes between the Rebels and the Imperial thugs. Employing clear explanations and plenty of examples, the book shows how to design soldiers, execute maneuvers, and recruit womp rats and krayt dragons to augment the troops. Combat involves skill tests and opposed rolls, concepts imported from the Star Wars RPG. It's fast, tense, and, for a miniatures game, surprisingly easy to learn.

Striker II, spawned from the Traveller: The New Era* role-playing game (by way of the Command Decision* game, another military simulation), is more demanding but much richer. Players issue orders to their subordinates by laying down command chits (included with the book); orders include Cautious Advance, Disengage, and Regroup. Units move and fire in accordance to their orders, with outcomes determined by die-rolls and difficulty modifiers. What makes the

game so absorbing is the mind-boggling number of options; players can attempt orbital bombardments, tinker with psionics, even deploy veterinarians to look after a battalion's animals. Veteran Traveller fans will appreciate the attention to continuity; the Zhodani units, for instance, are drawn from back issues of the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* and *Travellers' Digest*. Not for beginners, **Striker II** is science-fiction warfare at its sophisticated best.

Crossroads* game, by Jason Andrew and Tina Andrew. Xanadu Games, \$15.

This far-reaching fantasy RPG simulates a cosmic struggle for the essence of humanity. (And you thought you had your hands full clearing orcs out of dungeons.) Players take the roles of Sentinels (good guys sworn to protect innocent mortals) or Defilers (bad guys representing humanity's vilest tendencies). To create your good guy or vile guy, you distribute 40 character points among eight attributes (including Strength, Dexterity, and Perception), then assign another 40 points to a list of skills (Leadership, Anthropology, Military Tactics). To resolve an action, the referee determines a difficulty level, the player rolls a few dice, and the result is compared to the relevant skill or attribute score. Typical adventures involve confrontations with Dream Lords and Death Knights. Characters engage in metaphysical battles as well as physical ones; the referee awards Power Points to any PC who fulfills his Psyche (essentially, his life's goal) and penalizes a bungler by fiddling with his Essence (similar, sort of, to alignment in AD&D). There's a lot going on here, much of it baffling; I had a hard time figuring out how to satisfy my Essence, and I wouldn't recognize my Psyche if it walked up and shook hands. More background notes would've helped, too. Still, this a game with a brain, and one worth revisiting — I mean, if I don't straighten out the cosmos, who will?

Information: Xanadu Games, PO Box 28065, Spokane, WA 99218.

Sorcerer's Crib Sheet, by Sanford Berenberg and Bill Olmesdahl with Greg Farshtey. West End Games, \$15.

Here's a grimoire with attitude, a collection of spells for the Bloodshadows* game that's both goofy and grim. Thug from beyond transforms a human skull into a cadaverous bodyguard. Wingding causes the victim to experience one emotional extreme after another: first despair,

then boredom, then lust. To activate create cult elder, the caster must dissolve a vampire's brain in an herbal soup, then add a severed head. A few spells are old hat (increase strength, poison), some are just plain dumb (writing pen, neon sign). But the keepers outnumber the duds by a considerable margin.

Cybertechnology, by Tom Dowd, with Carl Sargent, Diane Piron-Gelman, and Michael Mulvihill. FASA Corporation, \$15. Hardware/Software, by Elaine Hinman-Sweeney and Brian Sean Perry, with Shaun Horner, Randal W. Horobik, Mike Roberts, and Stephen Smoogen. West End Games, \$18.

Hardcore Shadowrun* game players, **Cybertechnology** is right up your alley: its a catalog of high-tech gadgetry for turning human bodies into killing machines. You can buy dart guns for your eyeballs, artificial fingertips containing poison needles, and cranial bombs that shower passers-by with skull fragments. Between shopping sprees, you can amuse yourself with the adventures of Meat Boy — if you have to ask, this isn't the book for you. Hardware/

Software, a collection of cyberware for the Shatterzone* game, covers much of the same ground. But with its emphasis on the mundane — robots, cloned limbs, skill chips — it seems tame compared to **Cybertechnology**. Nevertheless, **Cybertechnology** wastes a lot of space on lame commentary, like this observation from Colonel Cobra: "So anybody with all this stuff is pretty much a walking tank." **Cybertechnology** may be the better read, but Hardware/Software is the better value.

Thief's Challenge II: Beacon Point, by Terry Amthor. TSR, Inc., \$7.

The enjoyable One-on-One series — AD&D® adventures for a single player character and a single Dungeon Master — continues with this brisk, easy-to-run thief scenario. The action takes place on the pirate-infested island of Beacon Point, where the PC must navigate treacherous terrain, investigate an enchanted lighthouse, and elude the clutches of a giant crab. The encounters are well-staged, the villains are familiar but fun. Though the cover claims the adventure is suited for a thief of level

4-6, that's wishful thinking. I'd say 6-8 is more like it. A low-level thief will have to be very smart or very lucky to survive the showdown with the fish monsters.

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DUNGEON MASTER® Screen & Master Index, by Jim Butler. TSR, Inc., \$10.

To coax consumers into buying regulation game screens instead of making their own, publishers have taken to bundling their screens with all sort of doo-dads: adventures, character sheets, posters, book covers, even window stickers. The doo-dad accompanying the latest TSR screen is a pretty good one: a 32-page index to AD&D's seven core rule books. Looking for a list of altar requirements? Check page 100 of *The Book of Artifacts*. How do you compute a monster's knock-down chance? Page 32 of *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Combat & Tactics* has the answer. As for the six-panel screen, it contains the expected combat charts and morale modifiers, along with some unusual stuff like critical hit tables (from *Combat & Tactics*) and a diagram of the outer planes. Unless you're a collector or a numbers junkie, you can probably struggle along without this. But if you've got 10 bucks to spare... oh, what the heck.



A former medical student, rock musician, and newspaper editor (in that order), Rick Swan is the author of *The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games* (St. Martin's Press). You can write to him at 2620 30th Street Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose an SASE if you'd like a reply.

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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, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. 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 canceled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).



Cremecon 2

Feb. 2-4, WI

Manchester East Hotel & Suites, Glendale. Guests: Sue Weinlein, Lawrence Wyatt-Evans, C.H. Burnett, and Richard Russell. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, an art show, a masquerade ball, and workshops. Registration: \$30 on site, single-day rates available. Cremecon 2, P.O. Box 37986, Milwaukee, WI 53237, or e-mail: cremecon@aol.com.

Winter War XXIII

Feb. 2-4 IL

Chancellor Hotel, Champaign. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, an auction, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$6 preregistered, \$8 on site. Donald McKinney, 986 Pomona Drive, Champaign, IL 61821.

Clubcon V

Feb. 3-4 OH

Richfield Holiday Inn-Holidome, Richfield. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, workshops, and films. Registration: \$14.95. The Club, P.O. Box 3575, Kent, OH 44240.

Magnum Opus Con-10A

Feb. 15-18 CA

Adam's Mark Hotel, Charlotte. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, panels, an auction, etc. MOC-10A P.O. Box

6585, Athens GA 30604, or e-mail: moc@ix.netcom.com.

Prezcon

Feb. 15-18 VA

Best Western Mount Vernon Hotel, Charlottesville. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$20 on site. Justin Thompson, P.O. Box 4661, Charlottesville, VA 22905.

War '96

Feb. 15-18 NC

Adam's Mark Hotel, Charlotte. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and prizes. Registration: \$25 for the Con and \$50 per game entered. National Association for Professional Gamers, P.O. Box 6585, Athens, GA 30604, or e-mail: moc@ix.netcom.com.

Dundracon XX

Feb. 16-19 CA

San Ramon Marriott Hotel, San Ramon. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$35 on site. Dundracon, 1145 Talbot St., Albany, CA 94706.

Orcon 19

Feb. 16-19 CA

LA Airport Wyndham Hotel, Los Angeles. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a flea market, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$30 on site.

Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 91502.

Total Confusion X '96

Feb. 22-25 MA

Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel, Marlboro. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$12/day on site. Total Confusion, P.O. Box 604, North Oxford, MA 01537.

Jaxcon '96

Feb. 23-25 FL

Ramada Inn Conference Center, Jacksonville. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, dealers, a painting contest, and a flea market. Registration: \$22/weekend, daily rates available. Jaxcon, P.O. Box 14218, Jacksonville, FL 32238, or email: jaxcon@aol.com.

Bashcon '96

Feb. 23-25 OH

University of Toledo Student Union, Toledo. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an art show, films, and workshops. Registration: \$6 on site or \$2.50/day. UT-BASH, 2801 West Bancroft St., Toledo, OH 43606.

Hurricon

Feb. 23-25 FL

Ramada Inn, Panama City Beach. Guests: Clive Barker, Philip Jose Farmer, Brian LeBlanc. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures

- ❖ Australian convention
- * Canadian convention
- ✳ European convention

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games. Other activities: tournaments, charity auction to benefit the Red Cross Hurricane Relief Fund. Registration: \$35, Hurricon, 328 N. Eglin Pkwy., Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32547

Johncon '6
Mar. 1-3 MD

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: seminars, dealers, an art show, and auction. Registration: \$30 preregistered, \$40 on site. John Hopkins University, JonCon, c/o Office of Student Activities, 122 Merryman Hill, 3400 Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

Con of the North
Mar. 8-10 MN

Landmark Center, St. Paul. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$15. Con of the North, P.O. Box 18096, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

Katsucon Two
Mar. 8-10 VA

Holiday Inn Executive Center, Virginia Beach. Devoted to *anime* and *manga*. Special guests: Steve Bennett, John Ott, Bruce Lewis, Tim Eldred, Michael Ling, and Richard Kim. Registration: \$35 preregistered, \$40 on site. Katsu Productions, P.O. Box 11582, Blacksburg, VA 24060, or e-mail: katsucon@vtserf.cc.vt.edu.

CCC Game Auction
Mar. 9 CT

Comfort Inn of Darien, Darien. CGC, P.O. Box 403, Fairfield, CT 06430.

Nova 21
Mar. 16-17 MI

Oakland Center on the Oakland University Campus, Rochester. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, anime, and dealers. Registration: \$8 preregistered, \$10 on site. Order of Leibowitz, Oakland University, 49 Oakland Center, Rochester, MI 48309, or e-mail: jjputman@oakland.edu.

Contamination
Mar. 22-24 *

Raddison Hotel, London Ontario. Events: role-playing,

card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and interactive gaming. Registration: \$14 Can. Western Gaming Society, Room 340, UCC University of Western Ontario, London Ontario, Canada, N6A 3K7, or e-mail: gaming@mustang.uwo.ca.

Coastcon XIX
Mar. 22-24 MS

Mississippi Gulf Coast Coliseum & Convention Center, West Beach Blvd., Biloxi. Guests: Elizabeth Moon, Tim Beach, Michael Stackpole, and Tom Dupre. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, dealers, costume contest, art show, auction, and talent show. Registration: \$25 before 3/1/96, \$30 thereafter. Coastcon XIX, P.O. Box 1423, Biloxi, MS 39533, or e-mail: coastcon@aol.com.

Coscon '96
Mar. 22-24 PA

Days Inn Conference Center, Butler. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$15 before 3/1/96, \$20 thereafter. Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003.

Neovention XV
Mar. 22-24 OH

Gardner Student Center at the University of Akron, Akron. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$6/day. University Gaming Society, Gardner Student Center #6, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325.

Midsouthcon 15
Mar. 22-24 TN

Brownstone Hotel, Memphis. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: guests, dealers, and an art show and auction. Registration: \$25 before 3/1/96, \$25 thereafter. Midsouthcon, P.O. Box 11446, Memphis, TN 38111.

Technicon 13
Mar. 22-24 VA

Best Western Red Lion Inn, Blacksburg. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a dance, an art show and auction, deal-

ers, and films. Registration: \$20. Technicon 13, c/o VTSFFC, P.O. Box 256, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

Egyptian Campaign '96
Mar. 29-31 IL

Southern Illinois University's Student Center, Carbondale. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction and a painting contest. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 on site. Egyptian Campaign, c/o Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd. Floor Student Center, Carbondale, IL 62901, or e-mail: ECGamCon96@.

Norman Conquest VI II
Mar. 29-31 OK

Dale Hall, The University of Oklahoma Campus, Norman. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$9. Norman Conquest VIII, 215-A OMU P.O. Box 304, 900 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019.

Spring Offensive VI
Mar. 29-31 IL

Illinois Central College, Peoria. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. The Game Room, 1293 Peoria St., Washington, IL 61571.

East Coast Hobby Show '96
Mar. 30-Apr. 1 PE

Ft. Washington Expo Center, Philadelphia. East Coast Hobby Show, 4400 N. Federal Highway, Suite 210, Boca Raton, FL 33431.

Conquest '96
Apr. 5-8 ❖

Melbourne University High School, Melbourne. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: demos and dealers. Conquest, 40 Glenlyon Rd., Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia, or e-

mail: puche@ariel.ucs.unimelb.edu.au.

Oeontacon
Apr. 12-14 NY

Morris Complex on the SUNY, College at Oneonta, Oneonta. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a masquerade ball and a dinner. Registration: \$11/week-end, or \$5/day. Kelly Loucks, 47 East St., Apt. #2, Oneonta, NY 13820.

Madison Games Con
Apr. 20-21 WI

Downtown Arts and Activities Center, Madison. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction and a RPGA® Network tournament. Registration: \$8. Pegasus Games, 341 State St., Madison, WI 53703.

O-Con '96
Apr. 21-23 NY

Morris Convention Center, Oneonta. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: workshops, demos, contests, and dealers. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 on site. Buran Doyon, 5 Valleyview St., Oneonta, NY 13820, or e-mail: doyoir96@snyoneva.cc.oneor-rta.edu.

Noah Con '96
Apr. 27-28 OH

Aqua Marine Resort, Avon Lake. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, demos, a miniatures painting contest, and an auction. Registration: \$3/day. Matrix Games & Diversions, 5384 East Lake Road, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054.



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By Rex May

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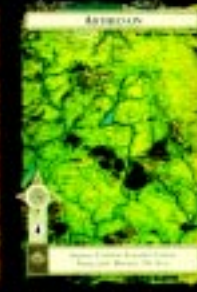
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AT LAST JEN HAS DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF

Libram X

STORY
DAVE GROSS

ART
BOB LESSL

I WAS AFRAID
TO WRITE
ANYTHING, IN
THE LIBRAM,
BUT I HAD
TO TRY. I
THOUGHT I'D
WRITE, "JEN
SUDDENLY
REALIZES
WHAT TO DO."

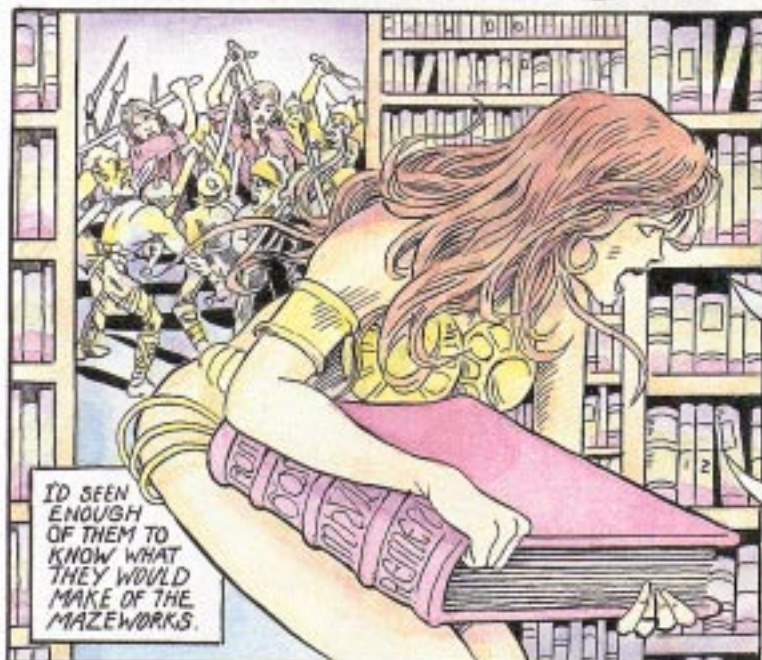
THAT
SHOULD
DO IT.

THE PEN
WOULDN'T
TOUCH
THE PAPER.
I COULDN'T
WRITE MY
OWN NAME
ON THE PAGE.
THAT TRICK
WOULDN'T
WORK.

IT WAS AS
IF THE PEN
KNEW I
WASN'T A
PART OF THE
MAZEWORKS
ANYMORE.

WHAT IF
THE MAGIC
WEREN'T IN
THE LIBRAM
AFTER ALL?

MAYBE
THIS WAS
MY WAY
OUT.







EVEN MONTHS LATER, I THINK ABOUT THE LIBRAM EVERY DAY.

ARE YOU SURE WE CAN'T.P



DID IT JUST RECORD OUR STORIES? OR DID IT SOMEHOW DETERMINE THEM?

I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW!



IT DOESN'T MATTER. THE LAWBOYS CAN ONLY READ ABOUT THE PAST NOW THAT THE QUILL IS GONE. THEY CAN'T CHANGE ANYTHING.



KNOCK KNOCK

THINGS DIDN'T GET ANY SIMPLER AFTER THE LIBRAM. IN SOME WAYS THEY'RE A LOT WORSE!

JUST A MINUTE!



HI THERE

YOU'RE EARLY

BUT AT LEAST WE'RE ALL FREE...



SORRY HOPE I DIDN'T INTERRUPT ANYTHING... IMPORTANT



OH, NO. JUST A LITTLE WRITING

TO MAKE OUR OWN STORIES.

Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn
Story suggested by Hal McKinney

OKAY, THE **GIBBERING-ORC LORD** DROPS THE BAG HE WAS HOLDING AND CLUTCHES HIS CHEST IN PAIN AS BOB'S BOLT LODGES IN HIS CHEST!

HA! SCORE ANOTHER ONE FOR MY **CROSSBOW OF SLAYING!!** I'M GOING TO RECOVER MY **+8 BOLT OF DEVASTATION** FROM THE BODY

HEY BOB, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, RETRIEVE MY EAR. BOY, I HATE THOSE **HACKMASTER** CRITICAL HIT TABLES.

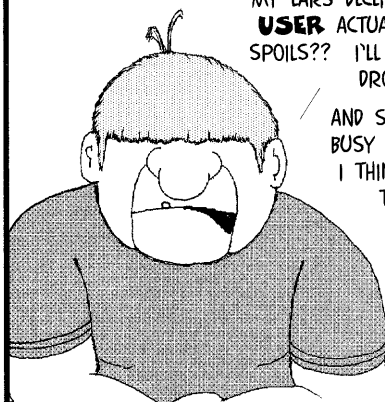
I'M GOING TO CHECK OUT THE ROOM HE JUST CAME OUT OF. HE SEEMED PRETTY INTENT ON KEEPING US OUT OF THERE.

???



WELL, WELL, WELL. THIS IS A FIRST! DO MY EARS DECEIVE ME? THE **MAGIC-USER** ACTUALLY GETS TO CLAIM THE SPOILS?? I'LL BE TAKING THAT BAG HE DROPPED **BA!!**

AND SINCE EVERYONE ELSE IS BUSY DOING OTHER ACTIONS, I THINK YOU SHOULD ROLL TO SEE IF THEY EVEN NOTICE ME PICKING IT UP. I'LL TRY TO HIDE THE BAG IN THE FOLDS



YOU SUCCEED IN TAKING THE BAG. NOBODY NOTICES YOUR ACTION.

WE RISK OUR BUTTS UP FRONT WHILE YOU STAND BACK SAFELY IN THE REAR AND LOB, FIRE-BALLS.

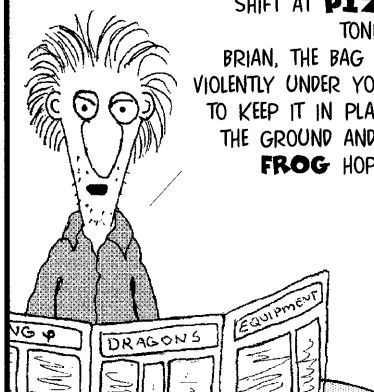
YOU SNEAKY SPELL-JOCKEY!! IT WAS **MY** KILL AND YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO POCKET THE GOODS.

YOUR COMMENTS HAVE BEEN NOTED AND I WILL CONSIDER THEM THE NEXT TIME YOU WANT A FEW SWIGS FROM MY **NEVER EMPTY FLASK OF HEALING!** BY THE WAY, HOW'S THAT EAR, **DAVE?**



LET'S MOVE ON GUYS, I GOT THE LATE SHIFT AT **PIZZA-GO-GO** TONIGHT.

BRIAN, THE BAG BEGINS TO SHAKE VIOLENTLY UNDER YOUR ROBES. YOU TRY TO KEEP IT IN PLACE BUT IT FALLS TO THE GROUND AND A LARGE **BULL FROG** HOPS OUT OF IT.

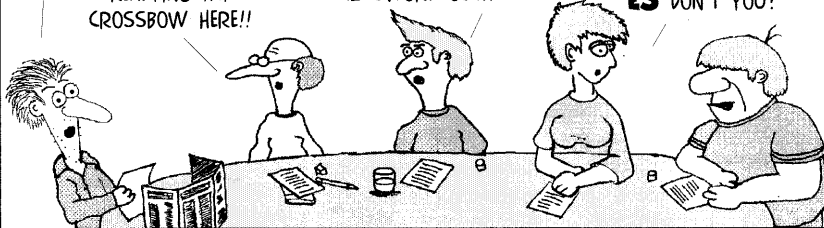


THE FROG LOOKS UP AT YOU BRIAN AND IN A BEAUTIFUL FEMININE VOICE SAYS, "KIND SIR! I AM THE PRINCESS KRISTINA, CURSED FOR MY FATHER'S CRIMES BY AN EVIL MAGE. IN MY HUMAN FORM, MY BEAUTY WAS UNMATCHED. IF YOU HELP ME BREAK THE CURSE, I CAN ONLY REWARD YOU WITH MY UNDYING LOVE AND DEVOTION. PLEASE HELP ME!!

HUH? WHA...? READYING MY CROSSBOW HERE!!

AND I HAVE MY **HACKMASTER** +12 SWORD OUT!!

SAY, YOU HAVE A **RING OF BREAKING CURSES** DON'T YOU?



I'LL PUT THE FROG BACK IN THE BAG AND PLACE IT IN MY BACK PACK. UNTIL WE GET BACK TO TOWN, I'LL BE LOOKING FOR BUGS AND STUFF TO FEED IT.



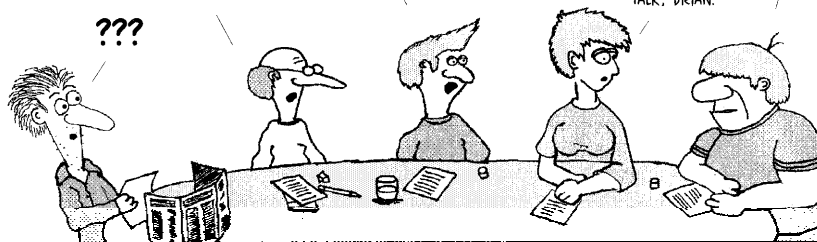
WHOA DUDE!! YOU CAN'T HAUL HER AROUND IN YOUR BACK PACK! THIS IS A CLASS BABE!! THAT **FLADIMIR** DUDE GAVE UP HIS CASTLE FOR ONE DATE WITH HER, REMEMBER??

YEAH, LET ME CARRY HER. MY CHARISMA IS HIGHER THAN YOURS, ANYWAY. LET **ME** BREAK THE CURSE.

BREAK THE CURSE?? ARE YOU MAD? A **TALK-ING FROG** IS WORTH FAR MORE THAN SOME GIRL.

WE NEED TO TALK, BRIAN.

???









* PROVIDED BY FLOYD'S FORMER TEACHER, MELZAK (NOW UNDEAD)





"FOR CENTURIES, I HAVE SEEN A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD WIELDED BY OUR KIND. THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND CONTROL IS DRIVEN BY PASSIONS OF LOVE AND DESIRE, BUT WE ARE CONSUMED BY GREED AND ENVY. ONE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER. THE WAR OF AGES IS ESPECIALLY BRUTAL IN EUROPE. THE BIRCHEN OF THE CAMARILLA, THERE ARE OTHER CLANS, SOCIETIES OUTSIDE OUR AUGUST COVENANT, WHO PLOT AND SCHEME AGAINST US AS WELL. THE RAVINGS, THE GIOVANNI—THEY ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE EUROPEAN BATTLE AS THE OTHERS. DESIRES AND LOVES FUEL OUR INSANE LUST. A LUST FOR PATHETIC TITLES OF STATUS. YES, THE VAMPIRES OF THE OLD WORLD ARE TRULY THE DARK SOVEREIGNS OF OUR KIND."
—WILHELM WALDBURG, PRINCE OF BERLIN

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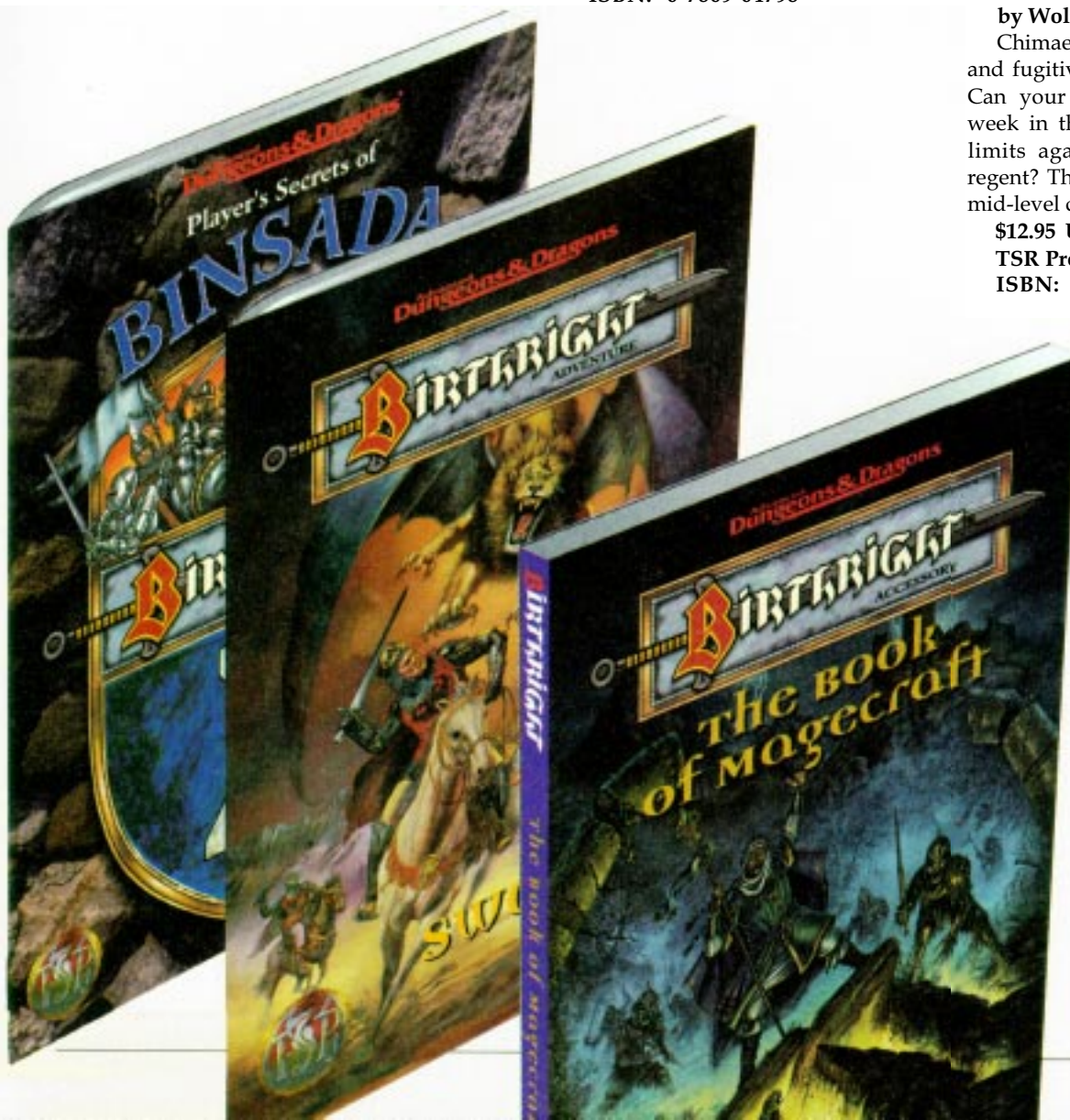
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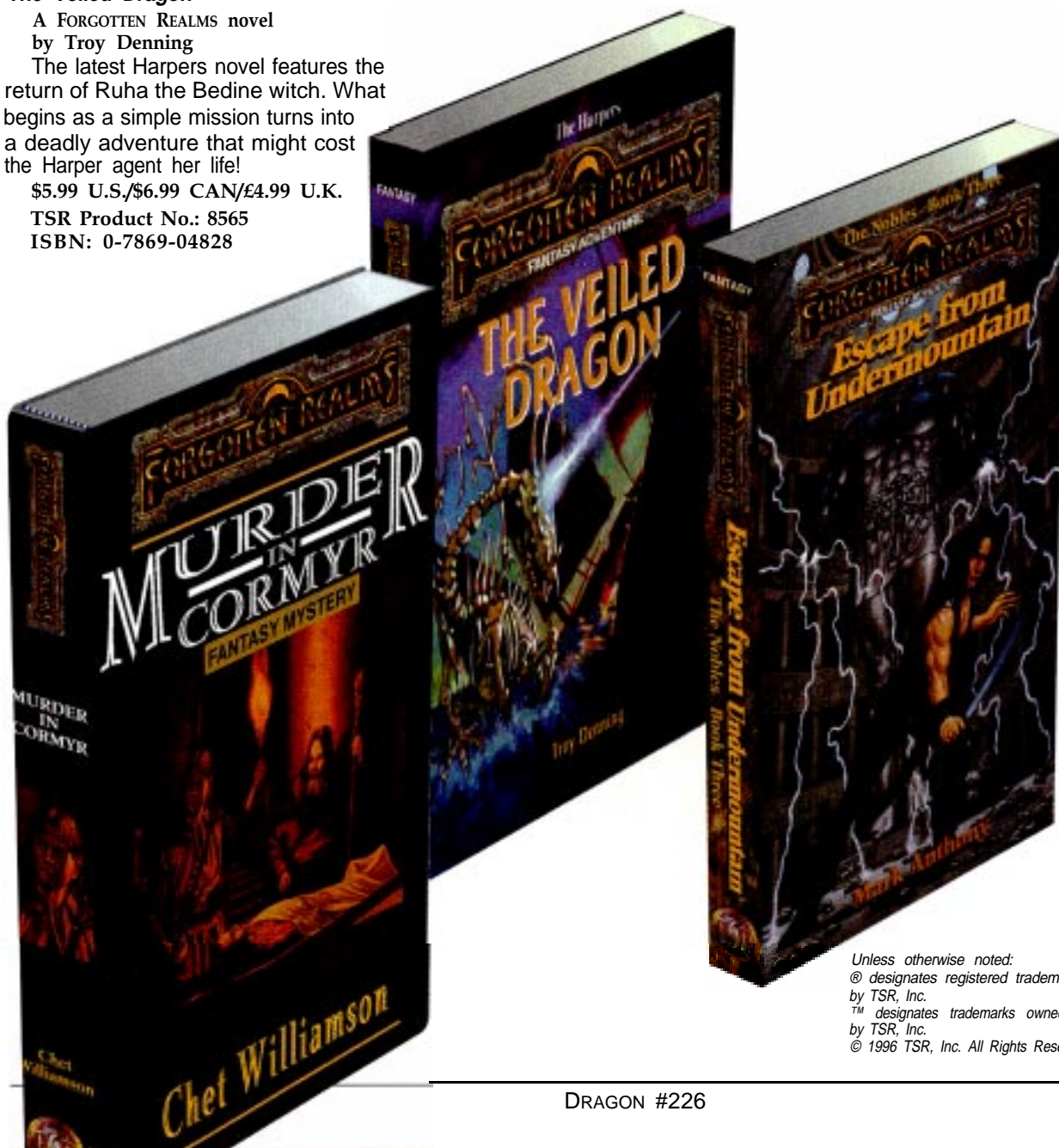
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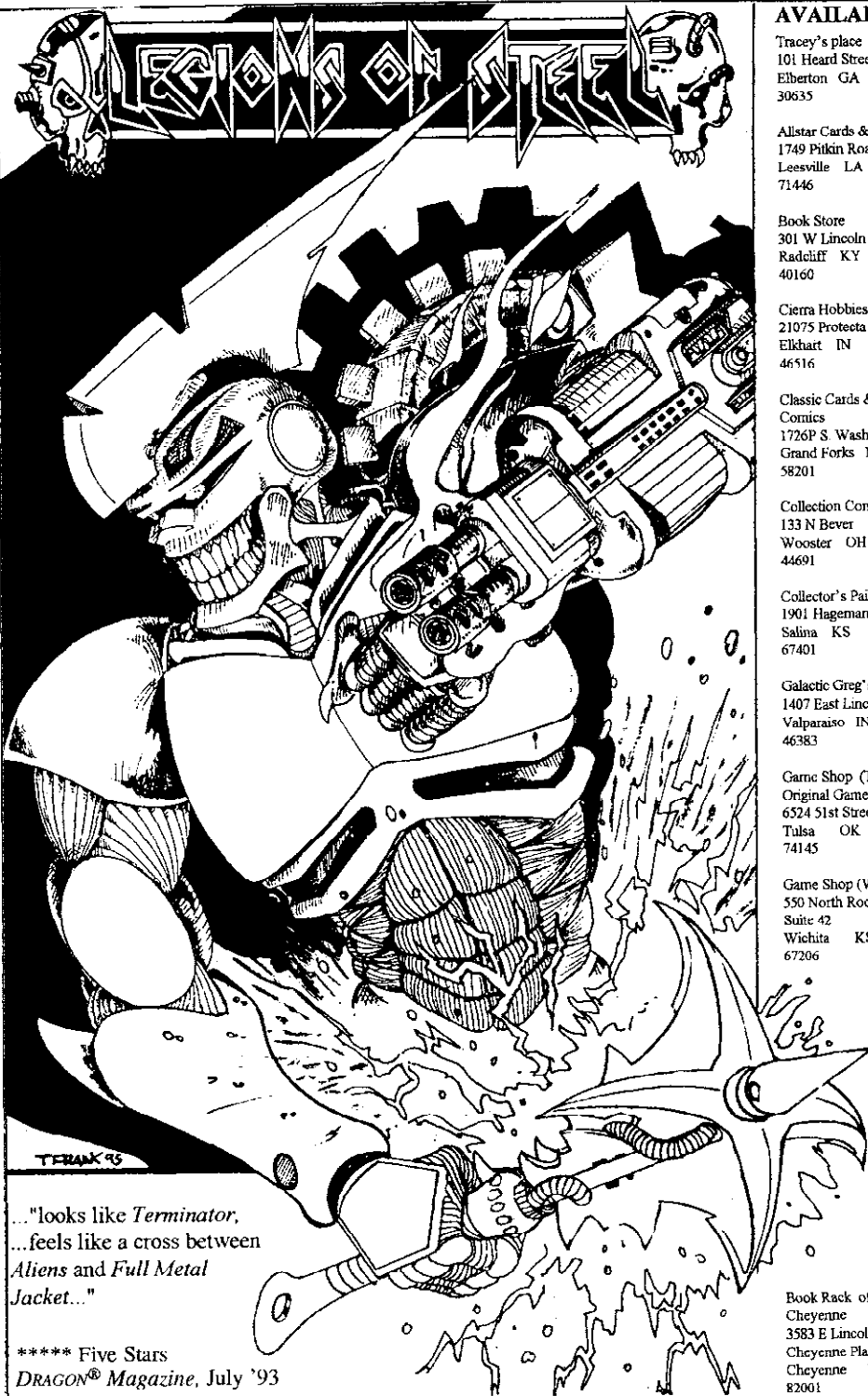
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Clack

Continued on page 7

Zeb Cook returns to the Outer Planes

Interplay Productions (Irvine, CA) has hired David "Zeb" Cook, creator of the PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting for TSR's AD&D® game, as senior designer for the company's licensed line of PLANESCAPE computer games. Interplay, publisher of *Descent*, *Stonekeep*, *Castles*, and many other computer games, has created an internal division of over 50 people to produce games based on TSR's PLANESCAPE and FORGOTTEN REALMS® settings, as well as a computer version of the DRAGON DICE™ game.

Zeb is reputed to be "older than dirt". In his many years as a staff designer at TSR, Cook wrote scores of products and several novels, and was the mastermind for the AD&D 2nd Edition project. The PLANESCAPE box was almost his last work before he left the company in early 1995 to work at Magnetic Software (Washington, D.C.).

FASA licensee goes AWOL

FASA Corporation (Chicago) has posted a reminder that AWOL Productions, Missouri administrator of the KA-GE and *MechForce North America* fan clubs, no longer has rights to the clubs. FASA pulled the license in March after numerous complaints from subscribers. Some older FASA products contain ads for AWOL Productions, and checks sent to the company since March have been cashed. However, no services have been provided, and the company has apparently abandoned its post office box, leaving an outstanding debt.

FASA's Louis Prosperi advises, "If you find that your check has been cashed and you have not received services, please contact the Missouri Consumer Protection office at (314) 751-3321. Leave your name and number, and they will send you a complaint form. The more complaints they receive, the sooner they'll take action."

FASA is now handling *MechForce North America*, the Battletech® game organization. For an application, write to MechForce NA, 1100 West Cermak Suite B305, Chicago, IL 60608 (or e-mail: fasamna@aol.com).

FASA has licensed *Sword of the Knight* Publications, publisher of the increasingly fine *Earthdawn Journal*, to produce a

Shadowrun* game magazine called *Shadowland*. For subscription information write to *Shadowland Magazine*, 2820 Sunset Lane #116, Henderson, KY 42420 (e-mail: swrdknght@aol.com).

Notes from around the field

GDW (Chicago) has ceased publication of *Challenge* magazine. The publisher of the Traveller* and Twilight: 2000* RPGs has closed its offices, reduced its full-time staff to three, and is concentrating on its core product lines.

The In Nomine* RPG, announced by Steve Jackson Games (Austin, TX) over two years ago but never published, is being wholly rewritten to reflect a new focus. SJG managing editor Scott Haring makes an analogy to the film business: "It's like a producer saying, 'I want to remake *Gone With the Wind*, but let's set it in France, and make Scarlett O'Hara the adventurous rogue, and they're all dogs.' This isn't quite 'and they're all dogs,' just a refocusing of existing concepts." No publication date has been set.

Gaming company e-mail addresses

Here are Internet addresses for some gaming companies. This list continues in future columns. An international list of role-playing company addresses is maintained on the World Wide Web at www.cgs.washington.edu/~surge/gaming/companies.

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The Current Clack

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Shakeout at Wizards of the Coast

On Dec. 5, 1995, Wizards of the Coast (Seattle, WA), publisher of the Magic: The Gathering* trading card game, abruptly laid off 30 employees and cancelled most of its product lines.

The company continues to support the Magic*, Vampire*, and Netrunner* trading card game lines and *The Duelist* magazine. WotC will keep selling the Great Dalmuti* and Roborally* games, reprinting them if demand warrants, but will not produce new expansions. WotC cancelled all other lines, including the Ars Magica* role-playing game (10 days before its fourth edition was to go to the printer), the Everway*, Primal Order*, and SLA Industries* games, the projected Magic RPG, and the entire book publishing division. WotC retains its events division (in charge of tournaments and conventions) and Customer Service department.

Employees laid off received three days' notice and a month's severance pay. About half a dozen of those laid off were expected to take new positions within WotC, working on the surviving product lines. Before the layoffs, the five-year-old company employed about 275 people.

Some cancelled game lines may be sold or spun off into smaller companies. Dave Allsop, designer of the SLA Industries game, was laid off from WotC's United Kingdom division; he will continue SLA under the reborn Nightfall Game, SLA's previous publisher (which WotC purchased in 1994). Atlas Games (Northfield, MN) expressed interest in acquiring the Ars Magica game. Atlas's first products were licensed supplements for ArM when it was published by White Wolf Game Studio (Atlanta, GA).

Record earnings

The cancellations were announced in a press release that began with a report of record sales and profits for 1995. "By concentrating on its Deckmaster* games, related competitive events, international expansion and new opportunities in electronic and computer-based gaming in 1996, the company expects to continue to grow and maintain its position of leadership in the industry."

"To do this effectively," said WotC founder and president Peter Adkison, "we need to focus our energy and resources in the Deckmaster line and new product areas." In a follow-up letter posted on the Internet, he said, "Our sales are at an all-time high. [The Magic game] is doing better than ever. Sales and profits this year have doubled over last year, and we are expecting further growth in the future. . . . Unfortunately, not all of our current lines of business are as promising.

"I have come to the conclusion that if anyone is going to do something great and innovative with RPCs, it'll probably be someone else. I bow from the field. . . . I do not look at this as a disservice to RPGs. I think we were doing a disservice to RPGs by not giving them adequate support. We simply do not seem to be able to do a great job in the RPG business. We have never admitted this before, but we have lost money on every single RPG product we've published."

As for book publishing, "While we've built an excellent team for publishing books, we think we can better support our game lines by working with major book publishing companies that focus on this business and understand it better than we do."

Adkison said WotC will probably resume publishing table games such as the Roborally game in the future.

Reasons and reactions

The layoff appears to be part of a straightforward restructuring of the fast-growing company. "There wasn't a whiff

of desperation about this move," says Wolfgang Baur, former *DRAGON® Magazine* editor and leader of the cancelled Magic RPG project. "It was more like, 'We're going to do what works, and stop doing what doesn't work.'"

According to sources within the company, the decision to cancel was made less than 24 hours before the announcement.

WotC has made many unprofitable expenditures: the purchase of Nightfall Games, which published three products in a year; a "Theatre Alchemy" group that produced promotional videotapes; the Magic game World Championship in August, when WotC flew competitors from 19 countries to Seattle and covered the proceedings on closed-circuit TV; having 150 workers at the 1995 GENCON® Game Fair in Milwaukee; a \$2 million remodeling of a new office building, huge company parties, and so on. Four days before the layoffs, WotC announced a "Pro Tour" series of five professional Magic game tournaments, beginning in February in New York City. The 256-player Seniors tournament offers cash prizes totalling \$30,000, and a 128-player Juniors match offers scholarships of equal value. WotC is flying in the top eight finishers from the World Championships for the tournament.

WotC employees expressed shock at the sudden layoffs. The reaction of Janna Silverstein, head of the book department, was typical: "I'm deeply disappointed, slightly bewildered, and trying to figure out what to do next." Ars Magica line developer Wade Racine said, "I was told they were going to support my line, and they did for a time. Then it all came crashing down on Black Wednesday."

On the Friday following the announcement, employees gathered in the landscaped courtyard of WotC's new building to hold a formal wake, complete with bagpipe, candles, and expressions of grief.

Continued on page 119

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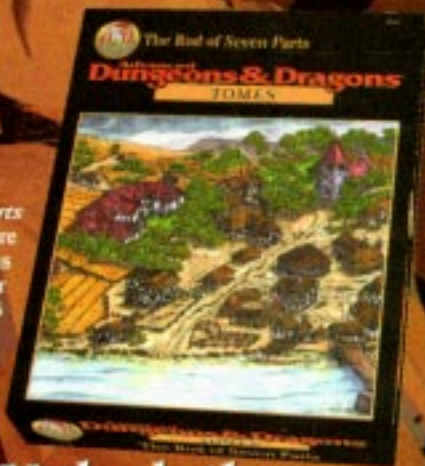
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