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The Wyrms' Turn

Remember when

"Well, hey, I didn't spend all those years playing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® and not learn a little something about courage."

There it was, on national television. When *The X-Files* busts on your favorite game, you have to wonder just how far beyond "arrived" it's come.

It's OK, though. We gamers laughed the loudest. Sure, it would have been more flattering if the guy who'd said the line wasn't such a freak. But it was funny, and it made me realize that we're safe at last. Fantasy role-playing games, especially the AD&D® game, are obviously here to stay.

I had been getting a bit worried in the 80's. The cool kids had me nervous.

You know who they are—the ones with the desperate need to prove they liked something *before* it was cool, thus proving they they are hipper than thou. It's usually about bands. "They were great when they played clubs, but now they've sold out."

Of course, "sold out" usually means "became popular." (And by that token, no rpg has "sold out" more than the AD&D game.) The cool kids won't be seen at an REM concert, but they won't shut up about having "been there" when the band was doing the college circuit.

You see a similar thing among gamers, especially ex-gamer cool kids who won't be seen indulging in a role-playing game today but *really want you to know* that they were playing back before you ever heard of beholders.

"I started with the first edition hardcover."

"That's nothing. I started with the blue box basic set."

"Oh yeah? Well, back in my day, all we had were three little booklets — and no modules!"

There's nothing wrong with fond reminiscences, and there's nothing wrong with the accumulation of some of these anecdotes into such tall tales as rival any in-character tavern talk. The difference is in whether you still play the game or just want people to know that you did, once.

There's something satisfying about having "been there" at the beginning, even if all you were doing was playing a game that thousands of others were also playing (or listening to a band that ends up all over MTV a few years later). The phenomenon ranges from quarrels over who's been playing longer to meandering reminiscences best saved for years spent in an old gamer's home. But all this business is a good sign; it means we've got a history, and a pretty long one at that.

Remember when the first DRAGONLANCE® modules came out, and everybody quarreled about who would play Raistlin? Remember when *Unearthed Arcana* arrived and we all rolled up barbarians and cavaliers because they were so tough? (And we still cheated on the die rolls, despite the new method.) Remember the dice that came in the original basic set? The four-siders were like caltrops. Step on one, even wearing sneakers, and you were in a world of hurt.

Well, sure. Some of us remember that stuff. Some of us don't, or maybe have only heard about the "old days" in the wistful and tiresome musings of the old guard. *It's great* that you meet players who know everything there is to know about Drizt or Elminster but stare blankly when you talk about *White Plume Mountain* or the *Tomb of Horrors*. It means that the hobby is alive with new players, that we're not all aging veterans quibbling over which of the hardcovers was released first.

The best thing is that when it comes down to the game itself, it doesn't matter how long you've been playing. A veteran of 15 years and a newcomer to the game will both have the same reminiscence a few years from now: "Remember when we played *The Night Below*, and your paladin started the fight with that gigantic..."

Issue #231 Vol. XXI, No. 2

July 1996

Dragon

Publisher
TSR, Inc.

Associate Publisher
Brian Thomsen

Editor-in-Chief
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Associate editor
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Subscriptions
Janet L. Winters

U.S. advertising
Cindy Rick

U.K. correspondent/advertising
Carolyn Wildman

Printed in the USA

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3

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Karl Garrison

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how can you get any better?*

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Well, when you can't beat 'em...*

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The feral are ready to run rampant through the armies of your opponents.

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(DRAGONLANCE®: Tales of the Fifth Age)

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Dear **DRAGON** Magazine,

I have recently been reading all of my old **FORGOTTEN REALMS** books that I'd boxed up and put away. I was reading the second book in my favorite series, the Finder's Stone Trilogy, entitled *The Wyvern's Spur*, when I came across something interesting. One chapter contained a description of a card game that Gogi Wyvernspur and his friends were playing, called "Elemental Empires."

I was wondering whether TSR has had, or due to my letter, now has any ideas of developing this into a real game. In today's world of overpriced collectible card games, it would be a real pleasure to be able to play a fantasy-based card game without having to spend \$200 on packs and packs of cards. I'm sure that I, as well as many of my friends, would be interested in a one-deck system similar to this. Please tell me whether you are planning on doing this, so I can find a place to box up all my *Magic* cards!

Ian Robert Wells
Westford, MA

While there are currently no plans to produce "Elemental Empires," card games inspired by AD&D game settings aren't new. For some interesting "in-setting" card games, you might try using the Talis deck from the Tales of the Lance boxed set for the DRAGONLANCE setting or the Tarokka deck from the revised RAVENLOFT campaign boxed set. The Talis deck had at least a little influence in the design of the upcoming

DRAGONLANCE: **FIFTH AGE** game, which uses (non-collectible) cards rather than dice for creating characters and resolving actions. Also, back in issue #210, Bill Connors described a very nifty game for use with the Tarokka deck. Check 'em out.

Dear **DRAGON** Magazine,

I just read the annual "April Fools" issue, and I must admit that I laughed until I cried! It surpassed last year's by far. This issue was special to me because my campaign, which began in 1987, thrives on humor. Sure, you can't play the AD&D game without some seriousness, but the humor keeps us going.

For the first time, we're using a new group of characters, starting at first level. Giving the new PCs strange things to fight on their first adventure, like chia golems and flumphs, will give us something to remember. To add even more to the fire, we have a tendency to use a wide variety of races and classes, usually the most unique. If there's anything the average gamer/writer can do to get something submitted to *DRAGON Magazine* (with a twist of humor), let me know. I've got a lot of ideas. Keep up the good work!

Chris Dickinson
Mineral Ridge, OH

Getting any article into the magazine is just a matter of writing a good one and submitting it. (Well, there are a few other steps, starting with sending us a query, but those are covered by the writers, guidelines that anyone can receive for the price of a business-sized SASE.) We like humorous articles too, but we'll save most of them for April.

Dear **DRAGON** Magazine,

I am very satisfied with the new format. Your magazine is very helpful to all DMs. Unfortunately, I rarely DM. With the people in my group, the ratio of DMs to players is about 3:12.

It would be great if you included more information for players every issue, like new spells, equipment, kits, and even new races. The fireworks spells article in issue #227 was good, but that was just about the only

resource for players in the entire magazine. My favorite class is the wild mage, and I would love to see more wild magic spells. Could you print an article on wild mages? If not, do you know where I could find more wild magic spells?

I loved the gangsters article in #228, and the artwork was great. Keep up the excellent work.

Sincerely,

Andy Hartwell
via e-mail

You've got it, Andy. While we'll still publish articles for the DM, we know that most of our readers are players (naturally). You'll see more and more articles with spells, magical items, weapons, character kits, proficiencies, and anything else a player could want in the coming months. We'll include something on wild mages as soon as we see a really good article for them.

As for the gangsters of the Underdark, our sources in the Waterdeep Watch tell us to keep an eye out for another group of them, maybe around, say, next April.

Dear **DRAGON** Magazine,

1. How many volumes will be in the *Wizard's Spell Compendium*?
2. When can players expect a set of Priest spells? How many volumes will make up its set of compendiums?
3. Does TSR have plans to publish updates to the **ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA** series with updates on the new magical items, artifacts, and relics published since the set was released?
4. Will TSR publish further *Arcane Age* products that deal with lost empires other than Netheril?
5. What happened to Dale Henson? I noticed he went from Slade (with a capital S) to slade (with a lower case s). I hope he didn't suffer some sort of game trauma.

Thanks,

Conrad Geist
Ft. Morgan, CO

Since the ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA tomes compiled by slade were so popular, you can bet we'll see a priests spells compendium.

DRAGON Magazine (ISSN 0279-6848) is published monthly by TSR, Inc., 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, United States of America. The postal address for all materials from the United States of America and Canada except subscription orders is: **DRAGON** Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A.; telephone (414) 248-3625; fax (414) 248-0389. The postal address for materials from Europe is: **DRAGON** Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom; telephone: (0223) 212517 (U.K.), 44-223-212517 (international); telex: 818761; fax (0223) 248066 (U.K.), 414-223-238066 (international).

Distribution: **DRAGON** Magazine is available from game and hobby shops throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and through a limited number of other overseas outlets. Distribution to the book trade in the United States is by Random House, Inc., and in Canada

by Random House of Canada, Ltd. Distribution to the book trade in the United Kingdom is by TSR Ltd. Send orders to: Random House, Inc., Order Entry Department, Westminster MD 21157, U.S.A.; telephone: (800) 733-3000. Newsstand distribution throughout the United Kingdom is by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE, United Kingdom; telephone: 0895-444055.

Subscription: Subscription rates via Periodical-class mail are as follows: \$42 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in the U.S.; \$49 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in Canada; £36 for 12 issues sent to an address within the United Kingdom; £49 for 12 issues sent to an address in Europe; \$65 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent by surface mail to any other address, or \$119 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent air mail to any other address. Payment in full must accompany all subscription orders. Methods of payment include checks or money orders

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Submissions: All material published in **DRAGON** Magazine becomes the exclusive property of the publisher, unless special arrangements to the contrary are made prior to publication. **DRAGON** Magazine welcomes unso-

The trick, as Skip Williams pointed out last month in "Sage Advice," is that there's no way of telling how many volumes either the wizard or priest series will be until the spells are compiled. Jon Pickens is hard at work on the Wizard's Spell Compendium even now, so we should have some idea soon. As for *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA* updates, all we can say right now is "maybe."

In addition to the Arcane Age boxed set written by slade with Jim Butler, we'll see three Arcane Age novels by Clayton Emery and an 64-page adventure entitled How the Mighty Are Fallen, also by slade. While the details are still, well, arcane, future Arcane Age projects are on the drawing board.

As for slade himself he's still recovering from the freak typographical accident that cost him his earlier names, the therapy is promising, and we visit him on Tuesdays and Saturdays to pick up his manuscripts.

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

When I read the "Game Wizards" section of DRAGON Magazine #226, I wept. Finally an engine that incorporates all known rules into a DM's playing aid! I've been trying to program the same concept through a course I'm taking, but I am continually cutting corners if I want to have any sort of a tangible product ready for a final grade. Such a sweet program I would gladly purchase, but the timing is off. Within two months I'll be shipping out to basic training for the Air Force, and then to Keesler Mississippi for Tech school, and I have no clue when I will ever see another breathing role-player, or if I'll even have access to a computer.

The nit-picker within me cannot help but ask questions: 1) what system does the software use — the **PLAYER'S OPTION™** rules or the 2nd Edition rules? 2) Do the character creation tables include non-human races and their modifiers, such as from the *Complete Book of Humanoids*? 3) What spells and kits are included in the core setup? 4) Will additional software allow for new rules expansions, new spells, items, monsters, proficiencies, kits, etc? 5) Is it net compatible? Could a DM run a gaming session over the phone lines with the options available? If not, then why not set up a huge net AD&D game, perhaps in the style of the *Ultima Underworld** games?

All other thoughts aside, I am overjoyed that someone actually took the time and effort to create such a terribly useful tool. A warm thanks to TSR and especially to the dataslaves at Evermore, who made this wonder possible.

Nicholas Drozda
Pittsburgh, PA

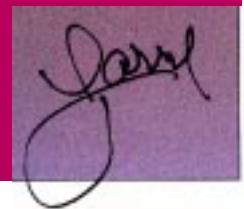
While the AD&D CD-ROM doesn't do quite everything you ask (that would require multiple full wishes), more AD&D computer products are on their way. We'll let you know more about them nearer to their release dates. In the meantime, check out the box below and the demo disk in this issue for the answer to your questions. And don't worry about finding fellow gamers in the military — there are plenty. Some may even let you use their computers.



On the Cover

Once again, we present a painting from an artist whose work has not appeared in this magazine before. While his name may be new to us, Don Ivan Punchatz has been knocking around the Texas illustration scene long enough to become an icon in his own right.

For our cover, Don wanted to present "an exotic mutation of the dragon family from the genus known by the ancient Chinese as *Ying-Lung*, or winged Dragon." His creation inhabits lairs close to underground thermal activity. And, in true Texas tradition, Don couldn't resist the chance to create a cobra-headed menace at the same time.



Your Free AD&D® CD-ROM Demo

If you don't have a CD-ROM drive and Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, this issue includes a free AD&D coaster.

If you *do* have Windows, check out the free demo of the AD&D Core Rules CD-ROM coming out in September. But first, read the accompanying article on page 50, along with the sleeve of the CD-ROM disk. Be sure to take a look at the README.TXT file to learn of any last-minute changes to the software.

To be sure you can sample all the features of the demo disk, try to play it as an audio CD first in your CD-ROM drive. If you hear sound, everything's fine. If you don't, you probably won't be able to use the Wizard function in the demo (it'll lock up your system and make you reboot), but the other features will still work.

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Periodical postage paid at Lake Geneva, Wis., U.S.A., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to DRAGON Magazine, TSR, Inc., 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. USPS 318-790, ISSN 0279-6848.



It takes a thief...

THE MASTER THIEF

by Karl Garrison

illustrated by Dan Burr

The thief is one of the most interesting and versatile classes in the AD&D® game, especially at low to mid-levels. With his great variety of skills and his rapid advancement, he usually has no problem keeping pace with other members of an adventuring party.

Higher levels present more of a challenge. High-level wizards can imitate many of the thief's skills by using certain spells. In addition, a thief's skills reach maximum values at specific levels.

The game gives rules for advancing characters to 20th level. This is about when the average thief character will max out his skills. Not all campaigns end at 20th level, however. *The FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures Sourcebook*, for example, gives rules allowing characters to advance to 30th level and provides expanded spell tables for wizards and priests. Warrior characters also should have plenty to do beyond 20th level. In addition to gaining three hit points with each level, they still gain one weapon and one nonweapon proficiency every three levels. Beyond 20th level, the only thing thieves receive is a reduced number of skill points every level; something they cannot use if their skills are maxed out.

Once a thief character's skills reach maximum values, nothing more may be done with his skill points. Other than a few hit points and proficiencies, there is very little difference between a 20th-level thief and a 30th-level thief.

This article suggests a more sensible method of determining a thief character's maximum skill scores, new uses for skill points, and creative uses for one often-overlooked ability of the thief class: using scrolls.

The thief in shining armor

Thief Player: Now that my character's skills are all at 95%, what happens to the extra points?

DM: They're lost, I guess.

Thief: What if he were to start wearing his suit of studded leather armor? That would lower his scores below 95, so he wouldn't lose any points, right?

DM: That makes sense.

Thief: Will you let me use that table in *The Complete Thief's Handbook* that gives the penalties to thief skills for every type of armor? He could then wear that suit of +4 splint mail that the party found. It would take several levels to bring his skills back up, but it would be worth it.

DM: [sighing deeply] What would he do when his skills were at 95% again?

Thief: He'd start wearing plate mail, I guess.

DM: Shoot me now, please.

The Player's Handbook states that "no skill may be raised above 95%, including all adjustments for Dexterity, race, and armor." The above example shows how some players could try to avoid this restriction. For most DMs, this is simply unacceptable. It is ridiculous to assume that even the most accomplished thief could be stealthy in bulky metal armor. Of course, the DM can simply disallow all nonstandard armors for thieves, but that would address only part of the problem. How about a thief with a Dexterity of 9? Does it make sense that he could eventually be as skilled as a nimble halfling thief with a Dexterity of 19?



I suggest that DMs require their thief players to keep track of two sets of scores: their base scores (the score without adjusting for Dexterity, race, or armor worn), and their actual scores (after adjustments). The rule on page 38 could be revised to read, "The thief's base scores may not exceed 95%, and a thief character may never have a greater than 95% chance of success when using a skill, regardless of his actual score." In this manner, a thief character's scores may max out above or below 95%, depending on the circumstances. In the former case, any situational penalties to an attempt at a skill would be subtracted from the character's actual score, which could very well be over 95% (see Example 2).

Example 1

Ragnar, a thief who likes to wear plate mail, has a base score of 95% for his Move Silently skill. His Dexterity of 18 gives him an additional +10%. However, wearing plate mail gives him a whopping -80%, making his actual score 25% ($95 + 10 = 105\%$; $105 - 80 = 25\%$). (See Table 38, on page 115 of *The Complete Thief's Handbook* for thief skill adjustments for all armor types.) Since his base score is maxed out, he may not increase his actual score beyond 25%.

Example 2

Dara, a halfling thief with a 19 Dexterity, has a base score of 95% for her Open Locks skill. She receives a +20% for her Dexterity and a +5% for her race, making her actual score 120. When attempting to open an ordinary lock, her chance of success would be 95%, since this is the maximum. However, if she were to try to pick a lock of masterful quality (-60% penalty), she would still have a 60% chance of success, since the penalty is subtracted from her actual score of 120% ($120 - 60 = 60\%$).

New thief skills

As previously stated, an average thief character's skills reach their maximum values sometime around 20th level. Even before this time, however, a thief player may wish to find other uses for his skill points. Certain skills may be virtually useless to different types of thieves, so a player may not wish to devote any points to them. What use does a wilderness-loving bandit have for his Open Locks skill? Why would a sim-

ple thug learn the Read Languages skill? An accomplished burglar may consider himself above Picking Pockets.

For these reasons, high-level thieves should be allowed, at the DM's option, to learn new skills. These skills may be invented by the player or the DM, or borrowed from another source, such as the **DARK SUN®** *Dragon Kings* sourcebook. This option should be available only to single-classed thieves of fairly high level (at least 14th).

Note: The *Dragon Kings* sourcebook describes six new skills available to Athasian thieves once they reach 21st level: Detect Magic, Detect Illusion, Forge Document, Bribe Official, Dig Tunnel, and Escape Bonds. A few of these may be appropriate to other campaign settings as well. Five of them appear in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book, as well as in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Option: High-Level Campaigns* book.

When designing new skills for the thief class, the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

- ❖ No skill should grant a thief character magical or superhuman powers. Although a Turn Invisible skill would no doubt benefit the character greatly, it is outside the scope of the thief class.

- ❖ The skill should somehow relate to the goals of the thief class. (It must relate to breaking and entering, theft, stealth, evasion, scouting, or information gathering.) If the thief character has a kit, the new skill may relate to the kit's goals.

- ❖ The level of difficulty of a new skill should be in proportion with the existing thief skills. A Run Silently skill, for example, would be too powerful and make the Move Silently skill useless.

Once the new skill's effects and limitations have been described, the DM must decide the base score for the skill, as well as racial, Dexterity, and armor worn adjustments. If the new skill is similar to an existing skill, that skill may be used as a guideline.

If the skill is taken from another source, such as the aforementioned *Dragon Kings* sourcebook, the DM must determine if any changes need to be made to the skill due to the setting or the DMs preference.

Example 3

Orion, thief and spy extraordinaire, wishes to learn more about languages so that he can learn the gist of a new language quickly when spying upon different types of creatures or while he is in

foreign lands. The new skill would be called Linguistics.

A thief character using Linguistics would have to have heard at least an hour of spoken conversation in the language in question before attempting this skill (either all at once, or in segments). Any time afterward, if the thief attempts to understand or engage in a conversation in that language, he must make a skill check.

Failure either means that the thief doesn't understand what is being said or that he does not know the correct words to respond. Each conversation in that language requires a separate skill check, since it likely contains different words.

Since Linguistics is similar to the Read Languages skill, the DM decides to use it as a model, giving it the same Dexterity, racial, and armor worn adjustments as read languages. However, since the thief class already has some knowledge of languages, the DM sets the base score for Linguistics at 15%, rather than 0%.

Example 4

The DM decides he likes the Escape Bonds skill from the *Dragon Kings* sourcebook, so he sets up a scenario for Zarkin, a PC gnomish thief, to learn the skill for himself.

The DM tells the player that the circus is in town and that one act in particular sounds interesting. The performer allows the audience to tie him up, then promises that he will be free in one hour. Sure enough, Zarkin (who somehow manages to wind up in jail every other adventure) decides to don a disguise and talk to the performer after the show, beseeching him to reveal his secrets. The performer refuses, however, saying that his principles do not allow him to teach his art to anyone, since it could be used for dishonest purposes. After Zarkin waves a large ruby (worth 5,000 gp) under his nose, the performer decides to relax his principles a bit.

The DM copies all of the relevant information about the skill from the **DARK SUN** *Dragon Kings* sourcebook, including description, base score, and adjustments due to Dexterity, race, and armor worn. Since there are no gnomes on Athas, the DM must decide the gnomish modifier for this skill. He decides that gnomes are small and nimble like halflings but that they do not possess their legendary knack for most thief skills. Halflings receive a +10% bonus to the escape bonds skill, so he makes the gnomish modifier +5%.

How it works

To learn a new skill, the thief character must be single-classed and at least 14th level. He must either find a tutor who already knows the skill or devise a way to teach it to himself (DM's discretion). He must spend 15 of his skill points to purchase the skill, after he gains a level. The score starts at its base value, plus Dexterity, racial, and armor worn adjustments. The thief may use his remaining skill points to add to the new skill, or he may spend them on any other skill.

The new skill is treated as any other thief skill, subject to the same rules and limitations (e.g., no more than 15 points may be devoted to the skill each level, etc.).

Other skills

Thieves must learn many skills to be successful. Many rogue nonweapon proficiencies are similar to thief skills, so DMs may wish to allow thief characters to purchase a one-slot nonweapon proficiency from the rogue group at the cost of 15 skill points, or a two-slot proficiency at the cost of 30 skill points. Such a character may not, however, acquire two separate one-slot nonweapon proficiencies, nor may he purchase a new proficiency at the same level he acquires a new thief skill.

As with buying new thief skills, this option should only be available to single-classed thief characters of at least 14th level.

A new look at an old thief skill: scroll use

At 10th level, the thief gains the ability to read wizard and priest scrolls. The only drawback to this ability is that thieves suffer a 25% chance of reversing the spell's effect in a detrimental way every time they do so.

A generous DM may allow thief characters to improve their proficiency with scrolls, reducing their chance of failure. This would cost 15 skill points, as well as require extensive training by a wizard (finding a suitable tutor could be an adventure in itself!). After the training is complete, his chance of failure would be reduced to 15%, just like a bard.

The thief is better off using scrolls that aid in escape, disguise, and diversion, rather than direct offense. A misread *teleport* scroll could simply take him where he hadn't intended, whereas a malfunction with a *meteor swarm* scroll

could end up blasting him and his companions, rather than his target.

In some cases, a thief character may not even know whether the scroll was read properly, since the effects may not be readily apparent. For example, if he casts *explosive runes* on a document, he would not know whether it worked unless he read the document himself (and triggered the explosion). The DM may allow a thief character with the Spellcraft proficiency to know when he's misread a scroll, if he makes a successful proficiency check.

Below is a brief list of wizard and priest spells that are of special interest to thief characters. It is far from complete, listing only a few of the possibilities.

Wizard spells

First level

Armor: Gives the thief protection, but he still gains the benefits of wearing no armor.

Change self: Great for a quick disguise.

Find familiar: The DM may wish to restrict this spell to wizards. If not, having an animal companion could be a great asset to the thief by scouting for him, or even helping him steal small items. (Page 112 of *The Complete Thief's Handbook* shows various uses a thief character may have for animal assistants.) In addition, the familiar bestows the thief with its sensory power, as described on page 134 of the *Player's Handbook*.

If one of the familiar's sensory powers is good hearing, then the thief gains a bonus to his Detect Noise skill. This bonus can be anywhere between +5% and +30%, depending on the nature of the familiar. If the thief already has a bonus to this skill due to his race, then the higher of the two bonuses should be used. (Do not add them.)

Identify: If the thief does not have access to a guild wizard, he can use this spell to identify magical treasures himself. If he were to take the item to some other wizard, the wizard could recognize the item as "hot" and report the thief!

Phantasmal force: Great all-purpose spell for diversions, concealment, etc. He may not use the spell when fleeing, however, since the illusion requires concentration to maintain.

Sleep: Excellent for quietly taking care of guards and the like. Even if this spell misfires, the thief won't be put to sleep — he is too high level.

Second level

Darkness, 15' radius: Although this may seem like a great way to hide, a huge circle of absolute blackness is more likely to attract attention than to divert it.

Deeppockets: Excellent way to grab a large amount of loot without becoming encumbered or attracting notice by leaving with bulging pockets.

Fool's gold: Not much needs to be said about this spell, except that the thief had better spend the fake money while wearing a good disguise!

Improved phantasmal force: See *phantasmal force*. This spell lasts two rounds after the thief ceases concentration, possibly giving him a head start if he flees.

Invisibility: This spell, along with the thief's Move Silently skill, allows him to travel unnoticed nearly anywhere.

Rope trick: Presto, instant hiding place!

Web: This is great for slowing pursuers, but if the spell malfunctions, the thief could find himself in a sticky situation.

Third level

Spectral force: See *phantasmal force*. This spell lasts three rounds after the thief ceases concentration, possibly giving him time to get away.

Wraithform: As described in the *Player's Handbook*, the caster moves without a sound through the tiniest cracks in walls and doors. Due to his wispy, insubstantial nature, the DM may also grant the thief a +25% bonus to his Hide in Shadows skill while in *wraithform*. This spell is ideal for spying, but not for theft or surprise attacks, since he is completely insubstantial.

Fourth level

Dimension door: Great for escaping in a hurry. A malfunction may mean that the thief arrives where he hadn't intended, but at least he's somewhere else!

Improved invisibility: See *invisibility*. Since this spell does not end after an attack has been made, the thief can backstab an opponent and still escape invisibly.

Fifth level

Advanced illusion: See *phantasmal force*. This spell lasts several rounds and does not require concentration, allowing the thief to take other actions.

Cloudkill: This is one of the few offensive spells that may be used safely by thieves, since a malfunction would not

slay the thief, even if he were caught in the middle. (He is too high level.)

Shadow door: This allows the thief to escape with a dramatic flair.

Teleport: See *dimension door*. This spell allows a wider range of destinations, but is considerably more risky.

Sixth level

Contingency: If the thief has another wizard (not priest) scroll handy, he can attempt to link it to a *contingency* spell, just as a wizard could. Note that he would have to avoid malfunction of both the *contingency* scroll and the scroll to be linked to the *contingency*.

Death spell: Like *sleep* and *cloudkill*, the thief needn't worry about being affected if the scroll malfunctions, since he is too high level.

Enchant an item: Making magic items is a special ability of wizards and should not be possible for thieves, even if they have an *enchant an item* scroll.

Mislead: Another great spell for quick escapes.

Tenser's transformation: Since thieves generally have more hit points than wizards, this spell can be very effective when used by a thief character. He still may attack only with a dagger or staff, however, even if he is proficient with better weapons.

Seventh level

Duo-dimension: When viewed from the front, a thief using this spell is completely invisible, even to a *detect invisibility* spell. This makes the spell handy in special situations, such as sneaking into a tower occupied by a paranoid wizard. It also allows him to fit through narrow cracks.

Limited wish: This spell has nearly endless possibilities for a thief character. He should be careful of what he wishes, since the opposite could come true if the scroll malfunctions.

Teleport without error: See *dimension door*. This spell allows for a nearly endless range of destinations.

Ninth level

Foresight: A handy spell to use when breaking into a heavily trapped or warded area.

Wish: See *limited wish*.

Priest spells

First level

Cure light wounds: The thief would be ill-advised to use healing scrolls, since a malfunction would wound the recipient

instead of healing him. Conversely, if the thief used a *cause light wounds* scroll on a enemy, and it malfunctioned, the enemy might be healed. (The latter would not be a problem if the opponent were not injured, however.)

Detect snares and pits: This spell allows the thief to detect large pits, snares, and deadfalls that he normally would not be able to find. (Find/Remove Traps allows the detection of only small traps and alarms.)

Entangle: Another way for the thief to slow pursuers.

Invisibility to animals: Getting by guard animals is a breeze with this spell.

Pass without trace: Nearly perfect for thieves, since the recipient of this spell cannot be tracked by any conventional means, including dogs and rangers.

Second level

Barkskin: As with *armor*, this spell allows the thief to be protected but still gain the bonuses to his thief skills as if he were wearing no armor.

Silence, 75' radius: Provides a blanket of silence around an area if the thief must perform a noisy action, like springing a trap or backstabbing a guard.

Third level

Meld into stone: This spell provides an excellent hiding place for the thief, but only for a short duration.

Water breathing: With this spell, the thief could hide underwater or even plunder realms below the waves.

Fourth level

Cure serious wounds:
See *cure light wounds*.

Free action: This gives the thief freedom of movement, even when impeded by *web* spells and the like, making him more difficult to capture.

Plant door: Like *meld into stone*, this spell provides a temporary hiding place for the thief, with a longer duration than the former spell.

Tongues: Great for spies, since the spell grants perfect fluency in any language, along with the proper accent. The only drawback is the spell's brief duration.

Fifth Level

Cure critical wounds: See *cure light wounds*.

Raise dead: If an adventuring party has only one priest capable of casting *raise dead*, and he dies, then a thief character might try to revive him with a *raise dead* scroll. This could be risky, however, since a malfunction could have a very nasty side-effect, such as the complete destruction of the corpse.

Sixth level

Heal: See *cure light wounds*. A thief who is close to death might consider using this scroll, since a malfunction would not kill him, but rather leave him with between one and four hit points.

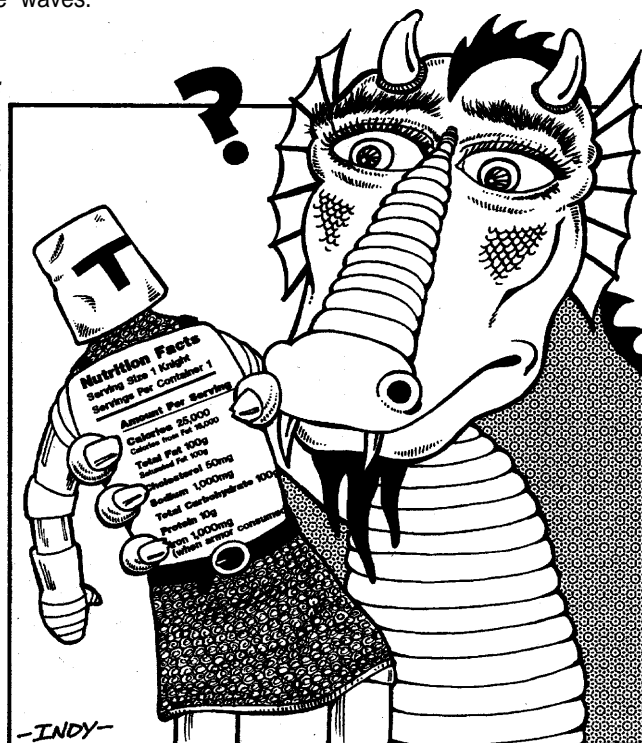
Word of recall: This is possibly the greatest escape spell a thief can use. The thief reads a scroll beforehand and needs only to utter a single word to activate the spell, returning him to a safe place.

Seventh Level

Resurrection: See *raise dead*.



Karl Garrison has cleverly concealed his identity from the DRAGON® Magazine staff, proving his expertise in the field of which he has written.



By Bill Cavalier



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Duke Arrigo ripped the painting that hid his safe off the wall and hurled it across his study. How could the agreement be gone? Everyone who had put his seal to it was ruined, especially him.

He snatched the gold writing case off his desk, pressed the recessed stud in the unicorn carving on the back wall, and ducked into his final secret, the escape passage down to the docks. If he could reach a ship, he'd be safe to try for the throne again another time. His cousin the king couldn't rule forever.

But who had discovered their plot? They were so close. Oh, they'd had a setback or two, lands suddenly enmeshed in the law courts, a man killed in a street brawl, but he expected problems and reassured his backers. But someone must have talked if the final agreement disappeared barely half a day since he'd carried it home.

Reaching the door at last, Arrigo yanked it open, desperate to put the city behind him. But in front of him waited a full squad of soldiers, with one of his maids standing off to one side — in a royal uniform?

"You!" Suddenly he understood the betrayal.

He'd hired one of the king's spies to clean his house.

Tired of the same old thieves in their dark leather, cutting purses in the marketplace, or bashing marks in midnight alleys? Looking for a way to spice up your campaign? Perhaps it's time to recruit some rogues for honest, open work with the local government by turning the thieves' guild into an intelligence service.

This type of guild could be a campaign rarity, allowing DMs to introduce the idea on a small scale. In this case, the involved government should be neutral, both politically and in terms of alignment, and smaller or somehow weaker than its neighbors. Without using every talent available to it, how else could such a state survive?

Alternately, using thieves for espionage and covert operations could be the campaign norm, allowing DMs another way to introduce political intrigue to their campaigns. Adventures can be shaped from Cold War headlines, as well as from books and movies ranging from the latest techno-thriller to the Great Game between 19th-century Russia and England, the setting of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*.

Why would PCs turn away from the thrill of ransacking a royal treasury or prying fist-sized jewels from temple statues for what amounts to a regular day job? Although they won't grow rich on government pay, the respectability, steady salary and chance of a pension (assuming they live long enough to collect) may prove tempting. Patriotism, the chance to serve king and country, is another potential lure. Why let paladins monopolize the righteousness in a party?

What's more, for people with the quick reflexes and minds that thieving requires, any other choice of profession could

by Renee Stern

illustrated by James Holloway

be, to put it bluntly, a dead end. A government that uses those same talents for espionage will not take kindly to freelancers who could easily join its enemies.

When magic isn't enough

In a world of spells and powers, why would anyone use rogues rather than magic? Surely the mystic arts are more reliable than any human (or elven, gnomish, etc.) resource.

But there are times when only a *fireball* will serve and times when only spies will do. Spells that duplicate or outperform a thief's skills aren't common, though they may be devised with the proper research; in any case, paying a rogue to eavesdrop on an ambassador or to find and copy a secret treaty will be cheaper than hiring a mage.

What's more, spells can be blocked or detected. Metal sheeting or warding spells make *clairaudience* and *clairvoyance* useless; *ESP* requires the caster to be on the scene rather than safe at home; an *invisible* agent might not reach his target without leaving tracks, odors, or mysteriously opening and closing doors.

One of the more foolproof magical items that intelligence services can employ is the *crystal ball*, or a similar scrying device, to view the desired scene from any distance. But it, too, comes with drawbacks. Hearing what is being said, or even viewing the desired subject, isn't guaranteed. No one can watch every area of interest every minute, further reducing the chance of obtaining useful information. And if the subjects of scrying become aware of scrutiny, a *dispel magic* spell will put the *crystal ball* out of commission for an entire day.

The perfect spy

The best characteristics for a spy vary depending on the mission. A sympathetic listener may coax confidences even out of people he's just met, while the studious type, uncomfortable around people, may be a whiz at cryptography.

Specialized agents concentrate on skills that directly apply to their fields. Thus, the undercover operative working for Duke Arrigo knows a great deal about the running of a noble household, removing stains, picking locks, moving silently, and hiding in shadows (the better to eavesdrop on her employer's secret meetings), but next to nothing about code-breaking or poisons.

On the other hand, general-purpose spies are also needed to cover un-

expected or open-ended missions, where their guild supervisors can't foresee how they will eventually reach their goal. These agents must be well-rounded, with a basic grounding in each of their class' skills and an ability to think quickly and improvise.

While Dexterity is the prime requisite for thieves, would-be spies should consider putting their high scores in traits like Intelligence, Strength, or Charisma. It depends on the role they plan to have in their country's service.

Now that they are working for the government, rogues need not be confined to a few alignment choices, although chaotic types will rarely prosper in a bureaucracy. (Perhaps the guildmasters should instead bear the title of director.) Because they are working within bounds set by the state, PCs may even find themselves playing what in essence are lawful good thieves; however, because espionage and covert operations may delve into moral "gray" areas, neutral or neutral good alignments are more appropriate.

Getting organized

How visible the intelligence guild is and how closely it is tied to the government depends on the campaign and its political and cultural setup. A state that relies primarily on espionage and covert operations to keep its independence may prefer to advertise that fact heavily to give its neighbors some inkling of what unfriendly moves might bring. Likewise, oppressive rulers will want their citizens to fear shadows listening at every door as a way to keep their grip on power.

On the other hand, delicate balances of power may require a country's intelligence service to work from the shadows much as the thieves' guilds of old, although they would still draw pay, however secretly, from the government. With no spies on the record as working for him directly, a king can still present an honest face in his dealings with his neighbors. "Plausible deniability" is one of the watchphrases in the murky world of espionage.

In either case, these guilds draw on all of their country's resources to train and equip agents. Special compounds will be built to immerse budding spies in all the skills they will need as well as to offer refresher courses for more experienced employees. Picture a cross between a police academy and CIA training school, with obstacle courses in

the form of buildings to be infiltrated, classroom work with locks to be picked, and walls of varying difficulty to be scaled under every possible weather condition.

Trainers from the army or palace guard cover fighting techniques, and sages teach languages and all variety of other specialized knowledge a mission might require. Ambassadors or well-traveled merchants serve as instructors in court etiquette and foreign customs to help agents blend in wherever they are sent.

With all these resources, the intelligence guild is much more likely to have useful magic items in its storerooms than the thieves' guild. *Rings of invisibility*, *crystal balls*, and the like may not guarantee a successful mission, but they will help.

And what spy agency would be complete without the counterpart to James Bond's Q, with a workshop to produce items part magical, part ingenious tinkering? This equipment might duplicate the standard thief's kit but look innocuous to help hold together an agent's cover, or it might be as flamboyant as any of 007's combination pen-homing signal-lasers. DMs and PCs can let their creativity loose here, as long as they remember game balance.

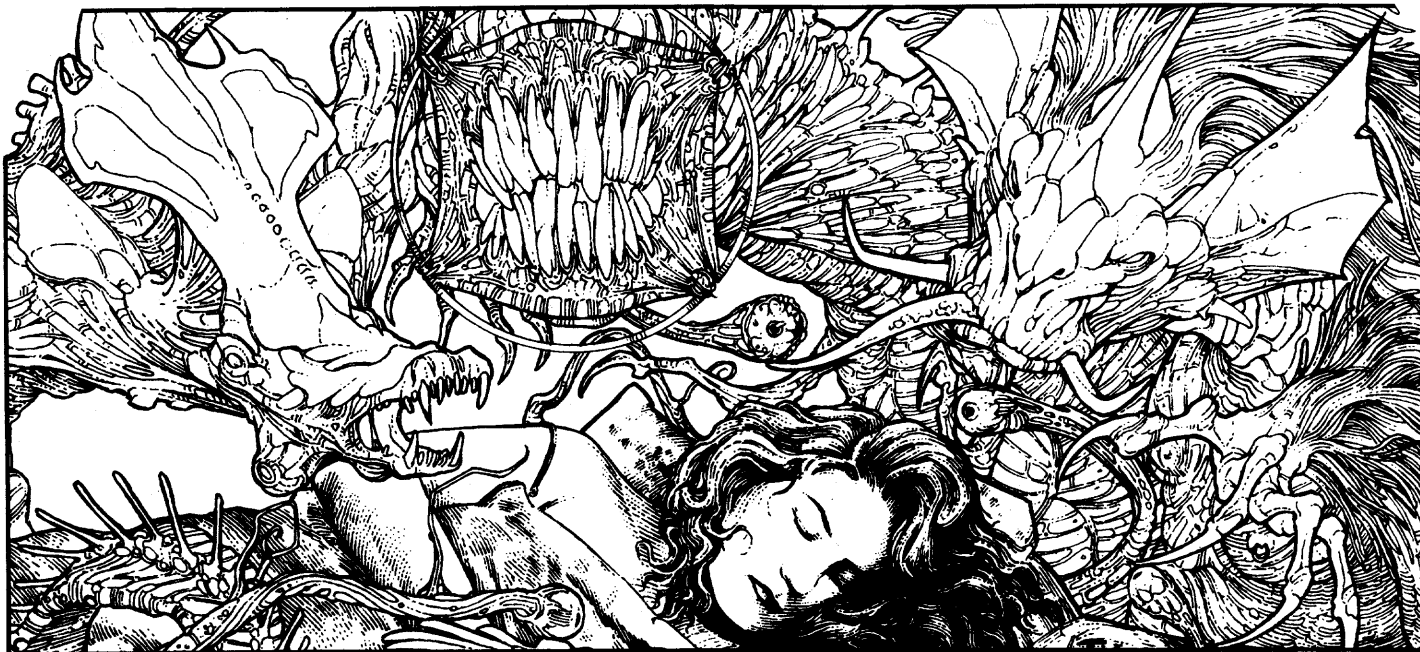
Beyond the law

As mentioned above, any state that turns thieves into spies will work hard to keep out freelancers. PCs visiting from foreign lands, as well as natives who don't feel the call of duty as strongly as guildmasters would like, will have to practice their trade even more circumspectly than normal to avoid the hunt for "rogue" rogues.

A special bureau may be set up with the double task of ferreting out the ordinary brand of thieves in addition to foreign spies. Perhaps your PCs would like to take a shot at a career in the fantasy equivalent of the FBI.

For renegade thieves, part of the thrill might come from trying to plan and pull off heists while eluding the governments grasp, a task much harder now that the "cops" have the same skills and better equipment. Even worse, with the state monopolizing the trade, where will freelancers obtain their toolkits and training?

If the few thieves who manage to remain free discover foreign spies in town, how will they react? Perhaps they will inform on them, out of patriotism or self-interest, but they might also go over to the enemy.



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When rogues are caught, punishment is likely to be more severe than simple thieves have come to expect. When facing talents that could too easily be turned against it, the state can't afford to take chances.

Enemy spies and double agents should expect harsh measures. Although American courts can execute spies only during wartime, real-life agents in other countries may not fare so well. In any event, the *teleport* spells and other magic available to a fantasy world make lifetime imprisonment impractical. Exile to another plane may be a workable alternative for merciful DMs.

Should you choose to accept...

Now that you have set up your intelligence service, recruited your spies, and trained them, what do you do with them now? By applying situations from both fiction and real life to their own campaign worlds, DMs should find a nearly endless supply of adventures.

At its most basic, espionage is simply information-gathering. Some agents may be servants or tradesmen earning extra cash by reporting what they see and hear; others may collect intelligence by striking up conversations with specific people and by making or buying maps and acquiring reports on trade, defensive measures, or troop movements.

In more delicate or dangerous situations a thief's special talents come into play, allowing him to sneak and hide wherever needed to overhear conversations. In some cases the desired information may be kept behind locked doors.

At least as much energy goes into safeguarding your own intelligence. Cryptography covers breaking enemy ciphers as well as writing what you hope is unbreakable code for your own messages. This would be a new skill, similar to a thief's ability to read languages, and it could be played out either as a simple percentage chance or by detailing the code involved. In any event, remember that higher-level spies are better at both breaking and writing code. (See the Cryptography sidebar.)

To handle a code-breaking situation, compare the ability of the agent who devised the code with that of the agent who is trying to crack it. Add or subtract the difference between the two numbers to the code-breaker's score; that becomes his percentage chance to decipher the message. Under this system, cryptographers with more experience

and intelligence write more complicated codes and crack them more easily than do novices or less intelligent spies.

Attempts to read a coded message require at least four hours of concentration, with an additional 5% chance for success for every eight-hour day spent at the task. Bear in mind that no modifier may raise the percentage to succeed above 90%. Of course, should an agent discover the particular key a cryptographer has used (perhaps the subject of a mission in itself), all messages using that key may be read automatically. On the other hand, code-breakers must know the language the message is written in or success is impossible.

The four-hour minimum may be overlooked when the code-breaker's ability is at least 60 points higher than the code-writer's. In these cases, waiving the time requirement doesn't change the chance of success or failure, and again, deciphering the message is never possible, no matter how skilled the cryptographer, without knowing the message language.

For example, undercover operative Kayla Morant has extracted a coded message from Duke Arrigo's mail. The cipher's writer has an adjusted ability score of 40%, while Kayla's score is 25%. Subtracting 15% (40% - 25%) from her score leaves her with a 10% chance of cracking the code, a percentage she can better by 5% for every additional day she works on the cipher.

In another situation, Kayla faces a more skilled cryptographer's work. His ability score is 55%, leaving her with a -5% chance of reading the message (55% - 25% = 30%; 25% - 30% = -5%). However, by spending two more days at her task, she now has a 5% chance of success (2 days x 5% = 10%; -5% + 10% = 5%).

Also falling under the category of safeguards is much of the counterintelligence work. These missions involve "mole-hunting," the search for double agents in the ranks; finding and plugging leaks in sensitive departments, including the households and staffs of important nobles; and identifying foreign spies and renegade thieves. The guild may consider trying to "turn" discovered agents rather than executing or imprisoning them.

Similarly, PCs may be ordered on undercover missions to recruit new agents in a neighboring country. Feeling out just who is safe to approach but also in a position to gather useful information can be tricky and dangerous. Trying

Table: Cryptography

Intelligence	Modifier
3 - 4	- 15 %
5 - 6	- 10 %
7 - 8	- 5 %
9 - 14	0 %
15 - 16	+ 5 %
17	+ 10 %
18	+ 15 %
Base	0 %
Maximum	90 %

to escape being denounced as an enemy spy can rival the thrills of any dungeon-delving.

Political or economic decisions are only as good as the information behind them, so spreading false intelligence becomes a vital mission. Enemy agents, once known, can be invaluable for funneling data; this has the double benefit of controlling the damage they do to your operations and allowing you to control what their government knows and thus how it will react.

Another way to contaminate another nation's information flow — a more exciting but also more dangerous one — is to go in and switch or alter documents. Forgery is a vital skill when copying by hand is the only option.

At times the intelligence guild may need to discredit someone: a noble with dangerous friends and ideas, or a merchant on the verge of blowing an agent's cover. In these cases the only option may be to plant evidence that incriminates the target in some crime, calling on all the shady talents for breaking and entering.

If the evidence is believable and the target potentially useful, the covert operation may not end with a simple frame. Let the agent be the one to "discover" the evidence she planted and use it to enlist the merchants or noble's help. Blackmail is an ugly word for a common enough ploy in the real world of espionage.

Information doesn't cover just the spoken or written word. Highly coveted objects for our own intelligence agencies are samples of weapons and other technology, and fantasy spies should target the equivalents. Newly developed magic is the most obvious in this category, to be smuggled back home to the state's research wizards, but don't overlook innovations in other fields. A new grain that feeds more people or better

Continued on page 38



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The Spying Game

by Michael T. Kuciak

illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom

Playing for keeps

Outside of the cost for hiring a spy as given in the original edition of the *DMG*, the AD&D® game has all but ignored the possibility of using espionage as a source of adventure. Consider the raw excitement, adventure, and intrigue inherent in almost any spy movie or book, from the wild action of James Bond and Arnold Schwarzenegger movies to the taut suspense of Cold War espionage novels. If your run-of-the-mill dungeon crawl campaign can't hold a candle to even the most boring secret agent story, perhaps it's time to thrust your players into the shadowy world of the spy.

Chase away the idea that spies are ignoble or have no place in ancient society. Everyone from traitors and harlots to generals, ninja, and noblemen have waded the waters of espionage. Fantasy spies are walking, talking adventure. Everything they do is full of danger. Most importantly, they aren't greedy, inexperienced thugs grubbing around in ruins for gold coins.

Spy stories are long on plot, character, and suspense, and short on the "go there, kill this" quality of the typical dungeon campaign. A good spy adventure is full of lying, deceit, paranoia, double-crossing, and white-knuckle action. Basically, all the good stuff. Adding a spy campaign to a fantasy setting takes a little work, but it pays off in dividends of great role-playing.

The job

A spy is a person who gathers information. There are quite a few other things a spy can do, but information is the basic currency of the spy's world. How information is gathered is up to the spy and whoever hired him.

Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher-general who wrote *The Art of War*, built the foundation of intelligence gathering with his book *Ping Fa*, or *The Principles of War*. Besides theories on creating a spy organization, Sun Tzu described five kinds of spies:

❖ **Native agents** are inhabitants of an enemy's state or country. They are ordinarily peasants or villagers who need the cash. Because they lack training and cannot be counted on to take risks, native agents are good only for general information on troop movements or the disposition of the people.

❖ **Inside agents**, like native agents, are citizens of the enemy's government. They are military or government officials paid for inside information. According to Sun Tzu, friendly agents should be on the lookout for enemy officials who dislike their government for some reason, who are in debt, or who are prone to bribery or seduction. Because they have higher standing than mere peasants, the information provided by inside agents is more valuable.

❖ **Friendly or double agents** are enemy agents who have been discovered. Instead of being executed, they are pardoned, bribed, and sent back to their masters to provide information to their new employers while keeping their cover as friendly spies.

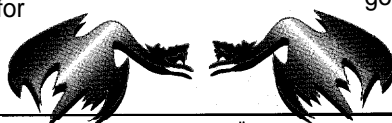
❖ **Agents of death** are those agents who have become expendable. The agent is purposely given false information and sent on a mission. In the course of the mission, the enemy is allowed to capture the agent. Feeling betrayed, the agent tries to get back at his old employers by spilling the beans. The enemy acts on the agent's information, thinking it is good. When the enemy is burned by the false information, he punishes the death agent. Thus, the original employer kills two birds with one stone.

❖ **Living agents** are the classic secret agent-type spies. They are sent into enemy territory to gather information. These agents are picked for their intelligence, hardiness, bravery, agility, and knowledge. According to Sun Tzu, no one should be closer to the commander or receive bigger rewards. The PCs should ordinarily have jobs as living agents.

The above descriptions are just general ideas of spy jobs. Remember to keep an open mind. Anybody willing to gather or sell information is considered a spy of some sort.

Three kinds of organizations hire spies: political, military, and law enforcement. The organization that employs the PCs determines the nature of their missions.

Political organizations are interested in the affairs of other governments. Though most spies concentrate on this aspect of the enemy, spies may work on allies, as well. In today's world, the U.S.



employs spies to keep tabs on countries like Canada, Great Britain, and Israel, and vice versa.

Such "friendly" spies gather information on domestic and foreign policies and their effects. How was last year's crop yield? Will the country sign a treaty? Does the king have a mistress? How high are the taxes? How do the peasants feel about the government? Will they revolt? What is the court wizard working on? What is her favorite color? It is the political spy's job to find out anything one government would want to know about another.

The spy's masters may ask him not only to investigate the other government but also to affect it. Perhaps the spy will have to buy votes on the parliament so a particular trade agreement goes favorably for his employer. Maybe it would be nice for a certain treaty to disappear, or that a particular courtier fall into disfavor after the spy spreads enough rumors. If the spy's client is unhappy with another country's government, would it not be convenient if the disgruntled peasants suddenly decided to revolt, especially if the new government were friendlier?

For all of the potential missions a political spy can undertake, a military spy has more. Spies hired by the military can range from a native agent reporting on local troop movements in exchange for a few coins to a full-fledged military scout who doubles as a guerrilla warrior.

Intelligence gathering is a necessary part of good military strategy, and it is by no means a new theory. Genghis Khan would send out soldiers posing as deserters to enemy camps. Not only would they feed the enemy false information while they stayed in the camp, but they would also report back with information on the enemy's strengths, weaknesses, and territory. Genghis Khan's head general, Subotai, claimed wars were won on the strength of espionage.

Like the political spy, the military spy's job is to find out anything that would be of interest to his employer. Troop movements, soldier morale, strategies, supply lines, leadership, and plans are all fair game. How the spy comes across this information is his business. Many military scouts need only sit in a hidden position and keep a careful eye on the enemy forces, reporting back occasionally. Some may actually infiltrate the enemy camp in order to talk to the soldiers or to steal their battle plans.

During the interminable wars for the domination of Japan, the *daimyô* (feudal

lords) would hire ninja (or *shinobi no mono*, as they were called) from the Iga province to gather information and stir up trouble. Any soldier with a fast horse can act as a military scout, but it took the *shinobi no mono* to climb over castle walls and assassinate generals, set fires, cause confusion, and sabotage weapons and supplies. The Japanese also employed bandits called *rappa* ("grass") or even the honorable samurai to wage terror campaigns. When the *daimyô* Oda Nobunaga decided to invade the ninja's homeland, a small army of Iga samurai were able to beat back Nobunaga's much larger force with the help of the ninja's espionage and unconventional warfare.

Finally, you might want to mix your PCs up in secret service law enforcement. Though essentially police officers, secret service agents often use elements of intelligence gathering and spy techniques. The missions the PCs receive depend largely on how the government uses the secret service. They may be involved in counter-intelligence, ferreting out enemy spies, or making sure their own secrets stay safe. Perhaps they handle the shadier law enforcement jobs, like spying on radical political movements or hunting down potential political assassins with orders to kill. If the government does not trust its people, the secret police may run a network of spies and informants in order to keep dissidents in line, KGB-style.

The secret police is nothing new. Augustus Caesar created a group of "political police" in order to keep on top of domestic events and opinions. A secret police force is not inherently good or evil, either. Even though James Bond is one of the "good guys," he carries a license to kill. The secret police may be a small group of elite, extra-legal professionals devoted to the safety of king and country. On the other hand, they may be sadistic thugs; the tools of an oppressive government. How much the PCs know about their agency — and what they do if they learn it is evil — is up to them.

In any case, the PCs (usually) do not have to work for a particular government or military organization if they do not want to. They may be the leaders of a peasant information network during a rebellion, à la the American Revolution. For a while, even the Japanese depended on the Black Dragon Society, a generally patriotic agency of mercenary spies. Who the PCs work for and what they do should be decided between the GM and the players.

The agent

Anybody can be a spy or work for spies. Ordinarily though, it is more fun to play a character in the thick of things than an ignorant courier wandering around town with an envelope and a password. A government usually trusts only a specific kind of skilled, reliable person for the really interesting, dangerous missions. At the same time, if a character is skilled and reliable, then background, social standing, caste, or religion fail as significant factors in the hiring process. Doors may open up that would not open before. Whether thief or noble, prince or pauper, if the character can come across with the goods, he has the job.

Of course, the character may be hired on as a dupe or a decoy, but that is another situation altogether.

Rogues

A rogue is the best choice for a secret agent. A good rogue is brave, agile, and intelligent. Thieving skills are perfectly suited for stealing documents, drugging drinks, climbing castle walls, eavesdropping on conversations, and escaping before anybody even knows a spy is around.

On top of that, rogues often have the underworld connections to tap the information pipelines. A well-connected rogue spy knows when the ambassador from the enemy country is arriving, how many guards he has, where he is staying, how to get in, who his servants are, what time he goes to bed, and where he keeps his documents just by spending five minutes passing around silver pieces in certain areas of town. Gold is worth risking life and limb to a thief, information is worth more than gold a spy.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the thieves' guild is very similar to a spy cell. Both provide safe houses, information, resources, networks, and missions. The GM may consider allowing spy PCs to learn a spies' cant, similar to the thieves' cant, so they may communicate and tell who is "in the game" and who is not.

Bards are also excellent choices for spies, perhaps even better than thieves. The bard makes his living as a storehouse of history, stories, information, and news, while the thief merely applies skills for the acquisition of money toward the collection of intelligence. Bards are readily invited into the homes and castles of people in power while guards sit at the gate looking for thieves. Bards are ordinarily more charming, and thus better trusted.



Bards not only collect information, they can influence the people around them through song, poem, or music. A peaceful tale when the enemy king is about to declare war on the bard's country or a war song to stir a peasant mob into action is far more useful to a spy than any sword.

Warriors

Warriors usually make the best military spies. Warriors are in the business of war, and spies are in the business of finding out what warriors are doing. A fast horse and a quick mind go a long way toward making a good scout. A warrior knows how a soldier thinks and speaks and may have a better time blending in and infiltrating an enemy camp. Any warrior who can lie convincingly, think on his feet, and remember what he sees and hears is material for a good military spy. The ability to fight his way out of a tough scrape and live to spy another day is pretty useful, too.

In many cases, the military spy is an established member of the army. The Roman legions used agents, called *exploratores*, whose duty it was to go

ahead of the legions to gauge the strength of the enemy and the lay of the land.

Rangers make even better spies. They are used to working by themselves, can move quickly and quietly through natural terrain, keep themselves hidden and, at higher levels, have access to spells. In the wild, some rangers may have an information network equal to a rogue's urban network. Unfortunately, rangers cannot always be counted on. They have a tendency for taking their own initiative and doing as they wish. If it is a cause they believe in, however, there is no better military spy or guerrilla fighter a general could have on his side.

Paladins, with their honorable ideals and aversion to lying, make bad spies.

Priests

Clerics as spies? You bet. In a fantasy world where church officials have the same power and ambitions of the feudal lords, and holy wars are common, the need to recruit spies becomes apparent. The church may not want to sully their hands with "unsavory" types, or it may trust only agents of their own religion. Perhaps secret service agents are needed

by a theocratic government. Whatever the reason, clerics can be as crafty as anyone else. With a grocery list of useful spells at their command, especially in the divination sphere, clerics can be very effective spies.

Druids are dedicated to protecting nature and do not usually serve the petty needs of some country or army. If the need is there, though, druids become excellent spies in a pinch. They have all of the benefits of rangers, plus a greater access to handy spells.

Wizards

Sitting in a dusty tower, reading books and performing experiments, wizards are at first glance awful spies. More than anybody else, however, they have the intelligence to map out complex strategies and devious intrigues. With a little imagination and his trusty spell book by his side, the mage has an arsenal of tricks and powers the best thief around could not touch with a 10'-pole. The possibilities for a mage to wring information out of the enemy is almost limitless.

Most **specialist wizards** have at least a few spells that could be useful for locat-

ing information. For fairly obvious reasons, though, the diviner is best able to dredge up intelligence without even leaving the privacy of his own home. Any general in the campaign world would give an arm and a leg to have an oracle on his side. Any smart general, that is.

On the other side of the espionage playing field is counter-intelligence. The **illusionist** is the best buy for your counter-intelligence buck. ("But I saw those troops heading west! I really did!")

Spy proficiencies

Any of the optional non-weapon proficiency that helps a spy keep his cover is good. A few stand out as particularly helpful to the fantasy secret agent. These include direction sense, modern languages, riding, swimming, heraldry, reading/writing, local history, disguise, forgery, jumping, reading lips, set snares, tightrope walking, ventriloquism, and tracking, to name but a few.

The organization

Whether the PC spy works for a government, army, police force, or some other group, there is usually a spy organization of some kind to coordinate intelligence efforts. The organization as a whole is typically referred to as an agency, and a group of spies working together on a particular job or geographical area is called a cell. For instance, the PCs could work for the King's Intelligence Agency while operating in the enemy capitol city cell.

In terms of operation, the network of cells is closer to a thieves' guild than anything else, in terms of operation. An established cell must have a leader of some kind. Temporary cells may also have a team leader of some kind, or it may be a small group of equally professional spies working on a single job before quickly disappearing.

Like a thieves' guild, the local cell tries to provide as much assistance as possible to ensure the success of a PC spy's mission, including safe houses, background information, blueprints, equipment, informants, and disposable weapons. If the PC is deep under cover, the cell may be the only link he has with his employers.

Remember, everything is mutable. An agency may have only a single base of operation from which it sends out roving spies. In the case of a rebellion, there is probably no agency at all, just a collection of tiny cells working out of caves, attics, barns, and forest camps. A country may have a number of agencies covering the

spectrum of political, military, and law enforcement intelligence. Maybe a government hires spies from a mercenary agency like the Black Dragon Society on an as-needed basis instead of taking the time and trouble to set up their own.

You also have to decide what kind of relationship the PCs have with their agency. Are they valuable, trusted agents with good friends among their employers? Perhaps the leaders of their government consider spying a necessary evil. Are the PC spies just doing their duty, or were they forced into service by coercion or circumstance? Do the PCs even know who they are working for? If you do not think it makes any difference, compare almost any James Bond flick to a movie like *La Femme Nikita*. A character who is fighting for king and country has a very different relationship with his agency than a character who is stealing secrets from his own government because the agency will throw his mother to the gibbering mouthers if he does not. Also, the PCs will approach their missions far more cautiously if they know from the start that their "comrades" consider them expendable. Always keep in mind, though, that the key to a good spy campaign is a certain level of fear and paranoia. Unless you think it would be more fun, the PC agents should never trust anyone, especially the people who call themselves their friends and employers.

Obviously, not every chamber maid who peeks through a keyhole for a gold piece finds herself pressed into the agency. The government/military/law enforcement resources are usually available only to folks who are in the game.

On the other hand, the agency may not allow the characters to leave whenever they choose. Books and movies are full of stories of spies who want to retire from espionage, but the agency decides they "know too much." How the PCs resolve the situation is up to them, of course.

Gadgets

Most of the high-action spy movies feature neat gadgets like pen lasers and flying cars. Even real life spies have certain tools of the trade, such as automatic lock pickers and hidden microphones. But what can a spy stuck in a technology-poor fantasy world use?

In a campaign loaded with magic, this is not a problem. There is a variety of magical items and spells to help secret agents. Consider the usefulness of an *amulet of telepathy*, a *crystal ball*, a *cloak of*

invisibility, or a *rope of climbing*. Magic is especially handy if the agency has the cash to pay for custom-made magical items, like an enchanted ring that casts *knock* spells, or gloves that allow the wearer to effect the *passwall* spell.

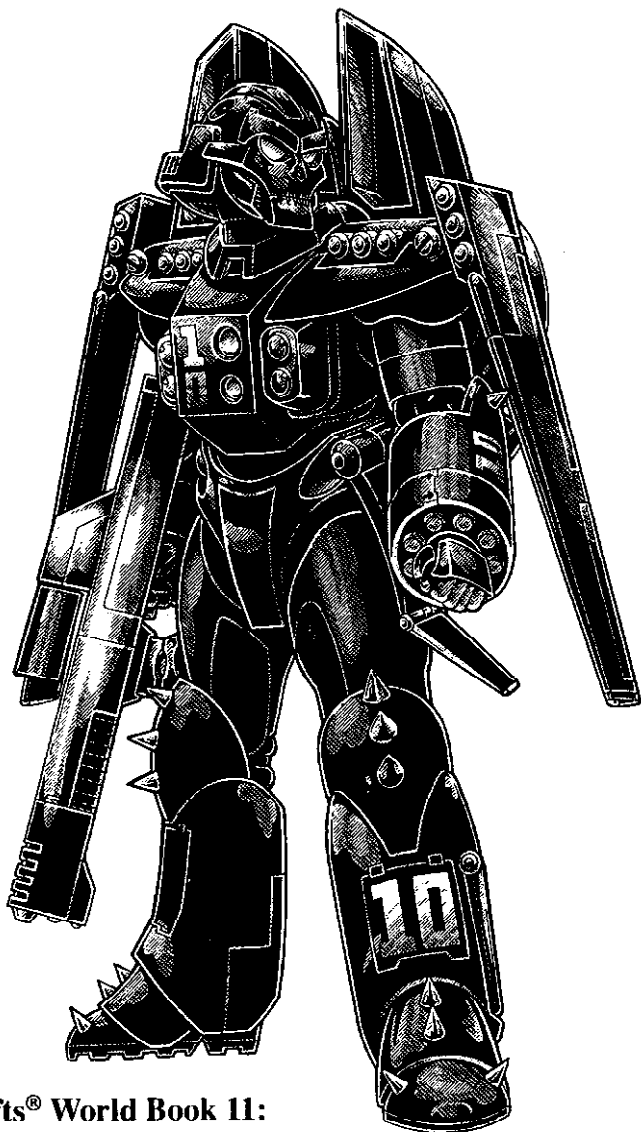
Magic, though cool and useful, is a crutch. In a campaign featuring little or no magic, the players can really stoke their imaginations to create the tools a good spy might need. These items do not have to be overly complicated, either. PC spies could hire tailors and blacksmiths to build hidden compartments in boot heels, sword pommels, lockets, and walking staves. They could devise everything from grappling hook arrows, collapsible boats, and drugged meat to take out guard dogs to intricate codes for safely passing messages. If the PCs have the imagination, time, and money to make something, let them have it. Of course, if enemy spies see the characters with their toys, they will want some, too.

You now have the rough basis for a spy campaign. From here, you have every spy movie and book ever filmed or written as sources for adventure ideas. If you are looking for intrigue and treachery, look no further than real life. The library is chock full of "true spy" books. The intricate triple-dealings and disinformation perpetrated by the real spies throughout history is too complex to even begin to go into. Most of the "true spy" stuff is Cold War era, but a few of particular interest delve into the history of espionage. They give an idea of how spies fulfilled their duty without gadgets, cameras, or sniper rifles.

The fantasy spy campaign is the best of both worlds. It takes the players out of the dungeon and drops them into the even darker world of espionage. The players have something more important to do than kill things. Their actions can decide the rise and fall of kingdoms, or throw them into the deepest pits of suspense and paranoia. They are spies operating in a world where spellcasters can read minds, people turn invisible, and the average doppelganger is far deadlier than any dragon.



When approached by our reporters, the agency would neither confirm nor deny Michael T. Kuciak's involvement in the alleged covert operations leading to the publication of this article. Kuciak himself could not be reached for comment.



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Playing the role of the spymaster

Spying is an ancient, if not quite honorable, occupation; some consider it the world's second oldest profession. In the AD&D® game, intelligence operations can be exciting adventures for PCs. Such missions can be matters of national importance at higher levels, as the PCs guide the fate of their country through their actions.

As explained in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, employing spies is fraught with hazards. The major pitfall of hiring intelligence agents is that many are inherently untrustworthy. Also, role-playing potential is lost whenever the PCs delegate their own intelligence work to NPCs. When PCs become more powerful, however, they may be faced with many enemies. The use of spies and counterspies becomes compelling, since PCs can't be everywhere at once, and their henchmen may lack the skills to protect against a rival's subtle machinations.

When judging the use of spies, the DM shouldn't allow the party to obtain information that damages the campaign or ruins adventures. This usually isn't difficult; the chances of the PCs finding an exceptionally good spy are small, the possibility of gaining such knowledge is not great, the mission could take years, and the enemy probably has far more experience in employing spies and counterspies.

In game terms, the PC may recruit a spy by the normal process. The PC acts as a spymaster: assigning missions, making payments, and interpreting the information the spy provides. The time and effort the PC spends determines the quality of the intelligence. If he's a careless supervisor, the spy may spend time carousing in bars, sending back whatever information the PC would like to hear. If he doesn't pay attention to details or confirm the reports, he will probably be misled. Sending more spies can actually be counterproductive. For example, in 1588, Don Antonio, the erstwhile king of Portugal, employed two "loyal" agents at his court, who both were actually double agents for Philip II of Spain. The pair were unaware of the true situation and spent most of their time spying on each other.

One way to reduce the risk and work by a PC is for him to establish a professional intelligence organization. Virtually all rulers and governments have them. Not only do they spy on enemies, but they keep an eye on friends as well. They may even be watching the PCs!

Intelligence organizations

Intelligence organizations have existed since ancient times. The Persian Empire was served by "the Eyes and Ears of the King." Britain's MI5 and MI6 had their origin in the Elizabethan age; however, one rarely finds anything like the "Department of Spies" in a medieval fantasy setting. Rather, such organizations are referred to by euphemisms such as the "Royal Messenger Service," "Special Archives," "Foreign Embassies," or, more ominously, "Secret Police."

Ancient and Medieval spy agencies were different from modern ones in that they weren't large, paper-bound, bureaucratic organizations, didn't collect and classify massive amounts of information on many subjects, and had no widescale surveillance and communications operations. They relied principally on human intelligence (i.e., spies).

A spy organization consists of a spymaster (described below), a few sages and clerks who analyze and file information, cryptologists, other support personnel, the inevitable agents and spies, and a number of part-time informants and operatives. The spymaster reports to his employer, usually in secret, bypassing all other channels. To protect themselves, all who work for the group keeps their identities secret, and the same goes for the agency's budget, operations, internal organization, communications, and plans.

Inside the group itself, information is "compartmentalized," and only the spymaster knows everything. Even the agency's employer is not privy to these secrets. Centralized control of intelligence can prevent friction between spies operating in the same area.

A spy agency also needs a network of couriers, safe houses, front organizations, and a source of special items, including magic. Many thieves' and assassins' groups are organized in this same manner.

Spying is an expensive business. Spies take great risks and demand high salaries: up to 10,000 gold pieces or more per mission. Expenses must also be paid by the PC; spies travel often and far, and some of them have a reputation for high living. Salaries for support staff and others should be several times the normal amount, to deter bribery.

The need for secrecy means everything takes longer and costs more. A PC who wants to disrupt a neighboring lord's fief by supplying rebellious peasants with arms would find that having his spies do this would cost several times that of simply buying the weapons and handing them over to the peasants himself. On the other hand, if the plot is uncovered, the PC can claim he had nothing to do with it. A clever spymaster carries out the PC's wishes without the need for a direct order, so the PC can truthfully (more or less) deny involvement.

The business of spying

Spy operations include three areas: intelligence gathering, espionage operations, and counter-intelligence. Any single intelligence operation could involve one, two, or all three.

Intelligence gathering

Simply put, this is the collection of information. The information may be public, or it may be obscure and secret. Public knowledge may be assembled from news, rumors, libraries, sages, documents, and reports by travelers or storytellers. Collecting open data is an easy but tedious task, and it can be accomplished by relatively inexperienced agents.



Secrets can be uncovered only by actually spying — eavesdropping, bribery, intercepting communications, and stealing documents, among other methods. Many can be persuaded to tell secrets through flattery, trickery, seduction, offers of sympathy, and camaraderie, or the influence of someone they believe is a friend, relative, or authority figure. Enter the spy.

The best spy is one who's highly

placed among adversaries and who has legitimate access to secrets. Still, problems remain; some enemy leaders won't trust anyone with their secrets, others may change their minds so often as to make secrets nearly useless, and a few may be so Machiavellian that no one really knows their plans.

Another important consideration is the enemy's awareness of stolen secrets. When they know they've been compro-

mised, enemies can take countermeasures to limit the damage and find out who stole them. If they don't know, the secret can be a valuable asset if used at the proper time. But taking advantage of the secret may give the source away. Nothing can be kept secret forever, neither secrets nor their theft.

Once collected, public or secret information must be examined to determine its accuracy and usefulness. Sages can play an important part in this part of the process, as their knowledge and intelligence allow them to make reliable appraisals and predictions. Public information is usually voluminous, detailed, and largely trivial. It must be slowly and carefully analyzed to produce any meaningful intelligence. Secret information is much more to the point. However, enemies may plant false secrets to mislead others.

The analysis of conflicting and possibly misleading data is fraught with pitfalls, and this remains the most daunting intelligence task. Even when correct conclusions are produced, they are not necessarily believed by those in charge. The Crusaders often suffered unnecessary losses when they failed to heed the advice of the Byzantines, who had an excellent intelligence system.

Although spies can travel to and from their assignments, this takes time, limits their effectiveness, and may be dangerous. It's better if the agent can stay in one place and make reports to a messenger, who takes them back to his spy-master. A network of couriers can be used to transmit communications. They can be ordinary persons who hand deliver messages, a pony-express service, or even homing pigeons.

Interception and decoding of enemy communications is a common method of spying. It's standard procedure to code or encrypt all diplomatic and confidential messages. Such messages, once intercepted, must be unscrambled by codebreakers. Alexander the Great used secret messages enciphered into innocuous reports. They were deciphered by wrapping the scroll around a specially-sized baton, which lined-up the words of the secret message.

Espionage operations

Espionage operations are the clandestine and illicit side of the spy business. They include subversion, kidnapping, propaganda, seduction, assassination, blackmail, theft, entrapment, sabotage, smear campaigns, coups, covert

New Nonweapon Proficiencies

Proficiency	# of Slots	Relevant Ability	Modifier
Codes and Ciphers	2	Intelligence	-1
Interrogation	1	Wisdom	-2
Observation	1	Intelligence	0
Analyze Information	2	Intelligence	-2
Spycraft	1	Dexterity	-1

Codes and Ciphers: Two methods of encrypting and decrypting written information with a given key. A failed check means the message is garbled and is unintelligible. The process is tedious and takes 10 times as long as writing the message normally. The character may invent new codes or ciphers on a successful roll (-1 modifier, takes 3d4 days). Decrypting without a key (breaking a code) requires a -2 to -8 check modifier and takes 1d100 days depending on the difficulty of the code. The reading/writing NWP required.

Interrogation: This proficiency enables the character to ask penetrating questions and carefully evaluate the subjects answers, to come up with the truth of the matter. It includes techniques to make a subject willing to answer, including the "good cop/bad cop" routine, repetition, evoking emotional responses, and various methods of producing discomfort and fear. Evil NPCs may use torture.

Analyze Information: The character is able to put together various clues and details to solve a puzzle or mystery, discover a pattern, uncover a secret, or make a educated guess about the possible course of events. Unlike sages, who research little known information, analysis goes beyond facts to produce reasonable conjectures. Analysis is never exact or certain: it's usually given in terms of probabilities. It is only as good as the information that is gathered. Bad, incomplete, or deceptive data produces incorrect analysis. Normally, analysis requires use of reference material related to the question at hand, but a PC who's

an expert in the area does not need to do so. The time required takes from hours to months, depending on the complexity of the analysis. Analysis with partial data gets a -1 to -6 modifier; bad data has a -2 to -12 modifier; deceptive data gets a -3 to -18 modifier.

Observation: This proficiency is described in *The Complete Book of Thieves*. The character has a keen eye for detail and a trained memory. In addition to noting things which may present a danger, he can accurately judge heights, weights, speeds, times, and distances, plus numbers, shapes, types, and colors of items; reliably remembers faces, names, and personal traits, along with locations, paths, entrances, terrain and other features. The time taken depends on the amount of information desired and the observational situation.

Spycraft: The basic proficiency of spying. These include the use of gestures and objects for surreptitious signalling, using code signs, recognizing when one's being followed, evading surveillance or pursuers, eavesdropping, the use of "dead-drops" and "cut-outs," passing small objects undetected, sabotage, use of invisible ink, concealing small items, finding and using small secret compartments, using improvised weapons, setting tell-tales or traps, standing look-out, drawing maps and plans, and creating false clues. The character can make use of codes and ciphers (see above, but with an additional -1 modifier) if they have a key, but they cannot create new codes or break them.



operations, and other dirty tricks. In this instance, a primary consideration is not getting caught, since such ventures go beyond ordinary spying. Spies caught in covert operations are treated as criminals, and diplomatic relations with their homeland are strained at the least.

Espionage operations are very risky and must be judged by the DM on a case-by-case basis. What works in one place may not be effective somewhere else. It is critical to have reliable, up-to-date intelligence and dynamic actions by the involved agents for the plot to succeed. Unlike ordinary spying, it usually takes a fair number of skilled NPCs — and possibly also the PCs — to execute an operation, making timing and cooperation crucial. The intrusive nature of these operations means that they may create a backlash later on, even if they succeed at first.

Counterintelligence

Counterintelligence is the prevention of spying by enemies. It begins with basic security precautions. Does the party discuss their plans in bars or public places where anyone can hear? Do they have loose-tongued followers? What do they really know about the background of their hirelings? Do they keep their valuable items and secrets locked up and guarded? Do the shop owners where they purchase magic and supplies give out information on what they've bought? What about landlords, neighbors, and local police and officials? Are there public records about the PCs

taxes, property, various licenses and registrations, criminal or civil court involvements? Are their messages protected from interception, or are they censored? Security revolves around protecting these secrets.

Counterintelligence agents (counterspies) watch for enemy spies. Since an enemy spy could be just about anyone, this means that counterspies are essentially snooping on their own people, although their main effort is toward strangers and suspicious activity. Reading their mail is a common counterintelligence chore. Historically, most resources used in spying go to counterintelligence.

The use of counterspies is easier than using spies because they operate on familiar ground and have local support when needed. Personnel also include police investigators and bodyguards. A PC might balk at the cost of a counterspy group, but what would it be worth if they saved him from an assassin's blade?

Counterintelligence also involves the spread of disinformation to deceive potential enemies. It may be as simple as paying lowlifes to spread a few false rumors, or it could be a complex deception scheme involving bogus armies, faked communications, and dummy castles.

Example: Some adventurers enter a new city and are accosted by a gang of beggars. Brushing them off, they soon meet a foreign merchant, a visitor like themselves, who chats amiably and steers them toward a good inn. The

innkeeper welcomes the party and provides good food and pleasant company. Are these standard, random encounters?

Not at all. One beggar was an informant who memorized the party's appearance and reported to the secret police as soon as they were around the corner. The "foreign merchant" is a counterspy assigned to watch them, who carefully examined the PCs equipment and tried to find out their background and objectives. The inn is actually a front, and the staff are informers or agents. The rooms are observed by spyholes, and when the PCs sleep, their chambers can be searched. If the PCs are just passing through, they may never know the scrutiny they've been under. If they're up to no good, the secret police chief already knows their descriptions and abilities, and has a plan to neutralize them. A strike force might be standing by, just out of sight.

The secret police

The secret police are a combination of spy agency and security force. Unlike other intelligence organizations, they have legal arrest and judicial powers. They do not merely look for spies but for anyone who dissents with the regime. Secret police forces are almost as old as spies; Sejanus, under the Emperor Tiberius, headed a secret police operation that terrorized Rome. In the 14th century, Charles V of France instituted a security and counterintelligence service that developed into an oppressive secret police force.

The secret police have direct and brutal methods for dealing with enemy spies and traitors. People cooperate with them out of fear, and they often have huge numbers of informants. In nations with secret police, everyone expects to be watched.

Spies

Some spies are professionals, while others are amateurs. Professional spies are usually rogues or thieves, although they may be members of any character class. Their primary incentive is money, although a few have more noble motives. They are difficult to find and hire. Fairly good at disguise, they often masquerade as bards, traveling merchants, nobles, mercenaries, entertainers, heralds, or priests. Unlike modern, patriotic agents, they are generally freelancers. Freelance agents may sell information to the highest bidder and some resell it again to make even more money. Given their background, more than a few are con artists, hoodwinking their way into a PC's confidence.

Any good professional spy will have already checked out a potential PC employer before he shows up for an interview. This enables him to determine the best approach to getting what he wants from the PC.

The spy kit for thief characters is described in *The Complete Book of Thieves*. This type of operative is the archetypical professional spy. Low-level spy-kit thieves are more like amateurs, of course.

An amateur spy is anyone who isn't a professional, including PCs. Not all spies are cloak-and-dagger types; anyone who collects information can be one. Many amateur spies are flaky individuals, whose motives vary widely. They are utilized primarily because there is no other option. An amateur may approach a PC, offering information or volunteering to go on a mission for cash. Some are frauds, and represent themselves as professionals. Only easy assignments offer amateurs a chance of success.

Those spies who turn traitor are usually amateurs, as are those who can be easily recruited. An NPC may betray his master because of blackmail, threats, fear, greed, flattery, or conviction. Sources of amateur spies include amoral (chaotic or neutral-aligned) hirelings, disgruntled followers, criminals, social misfits, idealists, vagabonds, romantics, and thrill-seeking opportunists. These NPCs could be in the employ of a PC or his

adversaries. It is not necessary that they be highly-placed to be useful; even clerks and couriers may have access to top secrets. Obviously, having someone willing to betray his side is a big asset, but it does not make him a skilled agent.

The main difference between professionals and amateurs is that the pros range from passable to exceptional in their spying skills, while amateurs are all beginners. Some amateurs will be able to improve their skills and become professionals, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Amateurs usually require a handler or case officer to direct them, while professionals operate more independently. The pros can perform a wide variety of functions, while novices are more limited. Note that professionals can readily pose as someone else, while amateurs generally operate in their normal capacity, such as merchants, shopkeepers, courtiers, or troubadours.

Many PCs have the necessary power to operate as spies on a short-term basis. This is great for single adventures, but even if successful, they are eventually identified by their opponents. Their tactics are analyzed, and the enemies take countermeasures to protect themselves and possibly even strike back. Also, the PC would probably rather be doing other things than spending all his time sneaking around in enemy territory or looking over his own shoulder at home.

The best spies are not flamboyant daredevils or death-dealing assassins, but bland and forgettable individuals. They blend in with a crowd, often taking on mundane roles. Unfortunately, even many professional agents tend to be a bit too ostentatious. The danger is stressful, and quite a few are heavy drinkers or womanizers. Spies also have their own biases, which may taint the information they report. The DM should determine personality traits for spies, and consider how they affect his performance.

While a spy, either amateur or professional, can be utilized in different types of missions, a secret agent is someone who resides or is planted in another place, and has a single role. Some are "sleepers" who remain dormant for years. Their usefulness is limited to a single area, group, or organization, but they are very difficult to expose. Secret agents who have low to middle ranking positions in government (or as a servant to an official) are very dangerous, because they're too unimportant to attract attention, and may gain access to secrets.

Informants

Informants provide information, from gossip to state secrets. Although the most productive informants are paid snitches, anyone can become one. If a PC has insulted, ridiculed, harassed, rudely treated, or just been cheap with an NPC, then that person is a possible informant. An enemy spy will be able to mention the PC in a casual manner, pick up on the NPC's grievance, and commiserate with him.

From there it's a short step for the spy to persuade the NPC to tell him everything he knows about the PC, ask him to learn more, and eventually have him keep an eye on the PC. In this way a clever spy can build up a network of informants around a character without exposing himself. The PC only sees the usual people in town. No shadowy figures in dark cloaks following him around, so there's nothing to worry about. Right?

Spy missions

Spies can function openly or in secret. Spies operating openly may be diplomats, courtiers, merchants, writers, or visitors, who collect intelligence without overtly breaking laws. Usually public information is what they get, but some secrets are obtained as well. Their enemies are probably aware of this activity, but allow it as part of the spy game. The worst that can happen is to be expelled from the country.

Agents acting secretly pose as someone else and seek to gain information clandestinely. This is far more risky, because if such a pretense is uncovered, even without evidence of spying, the agent is subject to arrest and imprisonment. Getting certain secrets involves breaking and entering, and theft or copying of documents.

The difficulty of a mission depends on the depth of intelligence required and its level of protection. Simple observation is easy; finding out top secrets of the realm is extremely difficult. The time the mission takes is likewise related to the difficulty.

The mission's success hinges on the ability of the spy, the difficulty of the mission, and the strength of the enemy's counterintelligence operations. A mission may be partially or fully successful. A full success usually means that the enemy isn't aware that they've been spied on. Even if successful, the spy might die during the mission, or the enemy could become aware of his activities.

Failure leads to several possible results. The spy may be able to continue the mission, trying another angle, perhaps, or may be in danger of discovery and have to return home for a while. The spy might have his cover "blown" and be useless for further spying in that territory. If he's uncovered without being aware of it, he could be fed false information to deceive his spymaster, or be allowed to continue spying while the enemy tracks his movements to reveal the entire intelligence operation. He could be killed without being compromised, but few spies are that dedicated.

The spy could be captured and possibly forced to reveal everything he knows or be "turned" into a double agent. Captured spies might be held in prison in hopes of trading them for a imprisoned enemy agent. Then again, he might just be killed; the Mongols beheaded enemy spies on the spot. If the spy is a traitor or has been caught red-handed, a quick death is the most likely outcome: execution is the traditional fate of captured spies.

Double agents are spies who work for more than one side. A few do this voluntarily, in order to make more money, and keep both their employers in the dark. Some betray their employer or are coerced into it, and go to work for the other side while still pretending to be with their first employer. This can be a powerful blow against the first side's intelligence; however, if the first employer finds this out (without the other side knowing that they know) they can deceive the other side by giving the agent spurious information. Then again, the spy could just be pretending to double, or the second side may be aware that the first side knows he's doubling and play their own game of subterfuge. The true loyalty of double agents is always in doubt. There have been cases of triple agents and even quadruple agents, but by that time the spy is considered so untrustworthy by everyone that he loses effectiveness.

Spies have been known to defect to the opposition, fully cooperating in identifying other spies and operations. This often happens when a double agent is in danger of being exposed. Again, it is very damaging.

An **agent provocateur** is a spy who tries to stir up trouble by persuading the opposition to take actions which will expose them. He must become one of the opposition, and may even be involved in the actions himself. This has

led to such bizarre situations as having spies assassinate officials of their own government, as happened in Russia at the end of the last century. It's not a pretty sight.

Example: Lord Coroman Gramel establishes a fief in an area under the sway of Long Tom, a gangster organization. After an embarrassing kidnapping, the fighter leads a personal investigation which uncovers the Long Tom members and drives them from the fief. Unknown to Gramel, Long Tom reorganizes, recruits new members and insinuates them into Gramel's new hirelings. They sabotage the Lord's castle-building effort and bankroll various aggrieved citizens' lawsuits against him through third parties. In return, Gramel has a thief henchman spy on the population, while one of his friends pretends to be at odds with him, and tries to smoke out Long Tom sympathizers.

All these actions are carried out by amateurs, although the Long Tom operatives have far more experience in skullduggery. Meanwhile, foreign powers have planted professional spies in Gramel's entourage just to keep tabs on him.

The spymaster

A spymaster is a special NPC whose job is to handle intelligence matters. He has the same basic knowledge as a spy, but he does not personally engage in espionage. His primary role is to "put the pieces together," by analyzing the intelligence his sources have gathered and make logical deductions and estimates of his adversaries' capabilities and intentions. He must be able to direct and manage an intelligence organization. He is a shrewd judge of character, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of his spies. Finally he must be able to keep secrets, even from his employer, by only telling him what he needs to know, without revealing sources and methods.

A spymaster's salary can be extraordinary, as much as 1,000-3,000 gold pieces per month.

Although a professional intelligence agency functions much better than a random grouping of spies, problems can arise. Excessive deviousness, excessive secrecy, and divisive competition with other agencies is possible. Some organizations manipulate information to justify and promote their existence. Others abuse their powers to suppress critics or influence leaders. In the worst case, its discovered that the spymaster is actually an enemy agent.

Magic

The use of magic provides a terrific boost for spies. Invisibility and silence conceals their actions. *Teleport*, *fly*, *pass-wall*, *knock*, and *dimension door* spells aid entry or escape. *Alter*, *change*, or *polymorph self* spells hide their identity. Divination-type spells such as *vision*, *commune*, *contact higher plane*, or *legend lore* can obtain hidden information. *Clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *wizard eye*, *locate object*, *magic mirror*, *reflecting pool*, *magic font*, and *ESP* are available to scrutinize enemies. *Illusory script* and *secret page* may be used for messages. Potions and items with similar effects are even more useful as they can be employed by spies without spell-casting ability.

Yet for every magic there is a counter. *Illusions*, *seeming*, *vacancy*, *veil*, and *misdirection* may befuddle intruders. *Defect scrying*, *dispel magic*, *mind blank*, *screen*, *antimagic shell*, *globe of invulnerability*, and *non-detection* prevent magical snooping. *Know alignment*, *trueseeing*, and other detection spells can penetrate a character's disguise. Areas or items can be protected by *alarm*, *wizard lock*, *explosive runes*, *fire traps*, *wyvern watch*, *glyphs of warding*, and *forbiddance*. Defensive magical items are certain to be employed by counterintelligence agents. High-security areas will be given permanent magical safeguards along with regular patrols by well-equipped spellcasters.

Skills

The following non-weapon proficiencies (NWP) are useful for spies: direction sense, disguise, artistic ability (acting), modern languages, picking pockets and locks, forgery, heraldry, local history, reading/writing, riding, unarmed combat, etiquette, and reading lips. Valuable proficiencies from *The Complete Book of Thieves* include alertness, tailing, gather information, observation, and fast talking.



Larry Granato is the code name of a 37-year-old operative currently living under the guise of a computer programmer in Denver, Colorado. He has an understanding wife and a very active 5-year-old son.



WYRMS of the NORTH

FORGOTTEN REALMS

SETTING



by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

The inquisitive (not to mention foolish) explorations of the famous traveler and author Volo, filtered through Elminster, have yielded details of another dragon of the North: Arveiaturance the White Wym, known to sailors and minstrels alike as Iceclaws, thanks to her habit of drifting low over ships sailing off the Sword Coast and plucking up crew members for quick snacks.

This venerable white dragon is feared by all sailors who ply the shipping lanes of the Sword Coast, except for those who dismiss her as a legend — until it's too late. The Flying Hunt of Nimbral and several aerial patrols from Evermeet have fought her in midair and forced her into flight on occasion, but most ships are helpless against her diving attacks — and when crews scramble down into their holds to escape her snatching claws, she's been known to land on a ship and tear it apart like a child opening a gift. What makes Arveiaturance so deadly is her past: she was the steed of a wizard, Meltharond Thone, who captured and tamed her. Over the centuries of her servitude, her hatred for him

turned slowly to love, and she was plunged into melancholy when at last, longevity magic failing, he died (some time around 1326 DR).

When she is especially lonely, or going into battle, Arveiaturance straps the wizard's old palanquin on her back, and takes to the skies with his skeletal figure riding between her shoulders. A web of desperate magics spun by Meltharond in his waning days keep his bones whole and floating in proper relation to each other, so the wizard's skeleton sits upright, turning its head to look in whichever direction Iceclaws is looking. An observer could be forgiven for thinking Meltharond is a lich or some other sort of undead, but the dragon is truly alone, save on the rare occasions when she mates with the white dragon Arauthator — occasions during which Meltharond's skeleton is left at home, sitting and eternally looking at nothing.

The wizard may be no more than bones now, but his legacy has kept his faithful steed alive in the face of attacks from strange dragons, elves, and humans seeking to rid themselves of her hunting, and her own offspring as well,

whom she drives from the Icepeak to fend for themselves as soon as they grow bold enough to try to slay her and take over her lair. Meltharond's magical boons are twofold: he wove a mighty magic that permanently bonded Arveiaturance with a *ring of spell turning*, so that she enjoys all the benefits of this item, and an *awaken from afar* spell that allows her to trigger the wands, rods, and staves he left behind. She can cast this spell as often as desired, regardless of its level, but knows no other magic except the *mending* spell. She does, however, know how wizards hurl magic, what tactics they employ, and how to recognize some popular battle spells (such as *fireball* and *lightning bolt*) by their castings. This and a familiarity with various wands, rods, and staves makes her crafty in battle against mages. One such tactic is flying low in the troughs of waves, so as to entice a wand-wielding wizard to waste magic by firing at a glimpse of her, only to have his attack absorbed or turned aside by the roiling waters. Another is toppling masts down atop mages standing on decks trying to work spells.

Arveiatrace is more intelligent — and vastly more sensitive — than most white dragons, but she has all the savagery and snarling hunger for revenge of her kind. She grew so used to the company of Meltharond (who chatted with her constantly, treating her as an equal despite the spells that prevented her from attacking him) that she's now governed by loneliness and has been known to spare sailors and others she snatches if they don't like wizards, don't attack her, and have the quick wits to shout out a desire to talk (or demonstrate an ability to sing) before she bites the life from them.

Several humans have escaped from a snatching by Arveiatrace having endured nothing more than a month or so of conversation with the terrifying, always-suspicious, and vigilant Iceclaws. If captives refrain from attacking her or stealing anything of Meltharond's that still lies about his rooms, largely as he left it (including many items of magic and spellbooks, some accounts say), they'll be taken to the locale of their choice on mainland Faerun as soon as they admit to any loneliness. It is from such former that the wider world knows details of the White Wyrms and her lair.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that Arveiatrace is gentle, kind, or has a soft spot for humans. She is clearly looking for a companion she can trust, but evil wizards who would refrain from cheating her, doing her other harm, or trying to enslave her — and yet share her love for destruction and acquisition of treasure — are just as clearly all too rare. Her loneliness drives her to answer the calls of the white dragon Arauthator to mate, but the White Wyrms deals savagely with intruders who sail too close to the isle where she lairs, and she has been known to leave her territory to hunt down adventurers who have entered her lair and then gone elsewhere in Faerûn.

Arveiatrace is more patient than most white dragons, but when roused to battle, she loves to lose all self-control and slay and destroy until nothing remains to withstand her. She knows the winds and waves of the Sea of Swords and Sword Coast (and the Trackless Sea east of a line from Uttersea to the Wave Rocks and the northern shores of Lantan) better than any other living entity, and she is adept at sinking ships and at plucking things from masts, decks, and the waves without slowing down or tumbling into even the roughest seas.

Arveiatrace seems bent on devouring a hungry dragon's share of all Sword Coast seafarers and in making dragons and lesser races alike terrified of venturing north of Ruathym. On rare occasions she will use her skills to rescue shipwreck victims or retrieve floating items — if rewarded with generous amounts of gems and treated with respect, as an equal and not some semi-intelligent, easily-manipulated beast.

Over the years, she has developed a relationship of mutual respect with Laeral, the Lady Mage of Waterdeep, and with the seafarer and shipwright Old Aldon of Mintarn, but the White Wyrms is spoken of with awe and fear in Candlekeep: she once heard from a captive that a certain sage of that establishment had written disparagingly of Meltharond. She arrived unannounced to tear the roof from the main building, snatch up the writer, and set straight his views on the dead wizard. It's reported that less than a month later, Laeral of Waterdeep personally delivered a freshly-printed tome from Candlekeep entitled *The High History of the Mighty Mage Meltharond* to the White Wyrms, and stayed with the dragon for more than a tenday, talking day and night through. She has refused to answer queries as to just what was discussed, but sailors have noticed that the White Wyrms now seems to turn a blind eye to vessels sailing near Waterdeep.

Arveiatrace's lair

Iceclaws makes her lair in a frigid complex of caverns high up in the eastern face of The Icepeak, that isolated island south of the Sea of Moving Ice and west of Fireshear. They lie beside smaller chambers that were once the sanctum of Meltharond Thone. In fact, Arveiatrace dug her caves so that she could carefully remove the walls along one side of the wizard's rooms, to allow her access to them with snout and claw without destroying them with her bulk.

The rock of the Icepeak is soft, crumbling easily under a dragon's claws or a climber's boots alike), and Arveiatrace took the time to sculpt out spaces large enough for her to turn easily in, beat her wings, and sprawl at ease. Unfortunately, such huge caverns are inherently unstable; bits of the roof keep falling when she brushes them with an upraised wing, or when she lands heavily. (Ice at the three entry caves often makes her skid as she lands. Eventually the White Wyrms may find herself at the bottom of a roof-

less ledge, with a fifth or more of the Icepeak that was once above her gone.

Outside each cave entrance is a sheer drop onto jagged rocks, and few creatures dare to dwell on the Icepeak with a hungry white dragon... but there are rumors of gnome tunnels that reach up from deep under the sea into the heart of the Icepeak — and the more foolish sort of adventurers come visiting the island all too often, drawn by tales of the back wall of the deepest of the White Wyrms' caverns: the wall that glitters from roof to floor with heaped diamonds. Those tales are true, although few mention the side-cavern crammed with Arveiatrace's other treasure, all tumbled carelessly together: suits of armor, coins, all gems except diamonds, weapons, and other things that look important or valuable, perhaps even magical items (Iceclaws ignores likely-looking items that she seizes, using only things of magic she knows to have belonged to Meltharond). At least one golem, of the stone guardian type, lies stiffly among the heaped wealth, its origin and means of control unknown. Adventurers hearing talk of the Icepeak lair in dockside taverns up and down the Sword Coast are warned that a hill of cracked and gnawed bone fragments has built up on the rocks below the caves of the White Wyrms — and that almost all of those bones belonged to human adventurers before they provided Arveiatrace with a meal.

One of the rods crafted by Meltharond can generate multiple simultaneous *unseen servants*, and the White Wyrms often makes use of these forces to manipulate small items that are beyond her personal reach or Dexterity, but it is thought that no creatures serve Arveiatrace in her lair or elsewhere, and that she avoids formal alliances or ties that can summon her to battle.

Arveiatrace's domain

From the Icepeak, Arveiatrace holds sway over a territory that stretches along the Trackless Sea east of Evermeet from Tuern and the Sea of Moving Ice (where long-necked monsters lair under the ice and erupt to do battle) in the north to the shores of Lantan in the south, and east to take in the coastal shores and headlands from Tethyr north to Mount Sar beyond Waterdeep.

Arveiatrace has been known to make forays into the Craggs and northern Neverwinter Wood, but other dragons (notably the green dragon Claugiyliamatar) dispute her right to freely enter

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this region. The topaz dragon Iltharagh (who dwelt near the mouth of the Iceflow) fought several vicious territorial battles with Arveiatrace in the skies over the city of Luskan — inconclusive struggles in which both dragons were badly wounded and had to retire to their lairs for long periods of recuperation. Since Iltharagh's recent conversion to a dracolich (assisted by the Cult of the Dragon, who provided the dragon with steady food, lair-guards, and worshippers), however, the former topaz male hasn't bothered to defend any territory of its own.

The deeds of Arveiatrace

Humans are the favorite prey of the White Wyrms, and she spends most of each day hunting over the waves, plucking meals from the decks of ships and using her wings to flip over vessels that menace her with ballistae, fiery missiles, or spells. She drinks from freshwater cascades and lakes in the mountains of Ruathym, on Gundarlun, and on northern Alaron and the Korinn Archipevalo. When on these long hunting forays, Arveiatrace has been known to curl up and rest atop heights on Barth (tallest crag of the midsea islets known as "the Teeth"), Tonter (the most seaward of The Singing Rocks), Ulduth (the more southerly of the two seabird-haunted Weed Rocks due south of Carcathen and west of the Sea Tower of Nemesser), and even on Sunset (in the Moonshae Isles) and on Mintarn itself. This last resting-perch led to her not-quite-friendship with the shipwright Aldon, but it is a spot she rarely dares to frequent today (what with Zhentarim wizards forced west by the fall of Zhentil Keep, sorcerers fled from the turmoil of Tethyr, and outlawed mages from all over the Sword Coast lands fetching up in Mintarn).

When she's not hunting for food or ships that might hold gems, Arveiatrace stays at home, brooding over what Meltharond left behind. She finds entertainment in outwitting and devouring adventurers and in defending her territory against dragons who dare to dispute her authority. She allows young dragons to dwell unmolested at Dragonhome in the Moonshaes and several places in the Nelanther within her territory, so long as they obey her whenever she issues commands to them; she'll tear them apart on the spot if they defy her. Her loneliness drives her to journey inland when Arauthator calls or whenever wizards use magic to contact her,

for she hopes that one of them will have the skills to bring Meltharond back from the dead. Adventurers planning to lure Iceclaws to her doom are warned that she expects treachery to await her on such trips, and she brings along magic items she can wield as well as her full measure of cunning. It is Elminster's firm belief that Arveiatrace regularly uses a crystal ball or other scrying device in her lair to observe weather, shipping, and to scout ahead at her summoner whenever she's called upon by anyone.

Besides her raid on Candlekeep and countless merchant ships, and her aerial battles with the elves of Evermeet, the Flying Hunt of Nimbral, and others, Arveiatrace is famous for tearing apart a midair gate to other planes that opened uncomfortably close to her lair and disgorged some sort of flying ship and an aerial guard of no less than 12 young adult black dragons! The White Wyrms screamed a challenge and charged to the attack, destroying the ship, the gate, and every last dragon in a wild fray that lasted for most of a day — despite the hostile and quite spectacular spells of several wizards aboard the ship. Those accounts come from no lesser sources than Khelben Arunsun of Waterdeep, Alustriel of Silvermoon, and several senior mages in the service of other members of the Lords' Alliance — who were all called upon by an awed agent-wizard of the Alliance aboard the *Lady of the Waves* caravel out of Waterdeep.

Arveiatrace isn't known to have any special bonds with, or hatreds of, any individuals or species beyond the aforementioned relationships. She shows no signs of being interested in closer contact with the dragons or other inhabitants of Faerûn, save wizards who can bring her beloved Meltharond back to her.

In recent seasons, her hunts have grown bolder, particularly along the coast of Tethyr Strife and gathered power seems to attract her, and word has spread along the Sword Coast that the Cult of the Dragon is becoming very interested in converting her to the Scaly Way. At the very least they would like to eliminate her and place another dracolich in her lair at Icepeak. It is not known if Arveiatrace is aware of this rumor.

Arveiatrace's magic

Little is known of the magic Meltharond Thone cast upon the White Wyrms or made available to her, beyond this one (highly useful, to all creatures lacking human-like hands) spell:

Awaken from Afar

(Alteration, Evocation)

Level: 5

Range: 30 yds./level

Components: V

Duration: 1 turn

Casting Time: 5 (1 for Arveiatrace)

Area of Effect: One magic item

Saving Throw: None

This spell allows the caster to activate a single magical item from any distance within spell range, causing it to discharge an attack or perform another usual function. Control of the item is as exact as if the caster were handling and wielding the item directly. If the item's enchantment restricts its use to a particular race or individual, the spell enables the caster to "be" that privileged entity for the purposes of item activation. Control continues until the spell expires or the caster commences the casting of another spell (which ends the *awaken from afar* magic), operating the item in any round desired at its usual rate. The item is made to levitate by the spell, and it can be aimed or moved about, at MV Fl 4 (A), at the will of the caster. Picking locks, wielding other magic items, reading maps or complex directions, and other tasks requiring concentration can't be carried out in the same round in which an activated item is controlled. During a round of neglect, such an item does nothing; it can't be commanded to "fire and go on firing until advised otherwise."

The item and the caster must be on the same plane (e.g., the caster can't be ethereal). For control to work, the item must be one that the caster has previously touched (direct flesh contact) and that is not held by another creature at the time of casting. In other words, a wand held by an enemy wizard can't be turned against him, but a wand at his belt — if the caster has previously handled it — could be made to discharge unexpectedly.

Only one item can be controlled by an *awaken from afar* spell, and if two such spells are cast so as to control the same item, neither spell will work. In all cases where control over an item fails (except for the "round of neglect" previously mentioned), the *awaken from afar* spell ends instantly, and the magic is fully expended (unused time of control can't be used later, or by another *awaken from afar* spell).

If a creature seizes an item controlled by this spell and attempts to wield it, the seizer and the caster each roll 1d20,

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each adding his intelligence score. If the caster has the higher roll, he maintains control. The spell ends if the seizing creature has the higher roll. This roll must be made for each remaining round of spell duration unless the seizing creature loses possession of the item or the caster gets a lower roll.

Only item functions that the caster is aware of, has witnessed, or that are obvious can be awakened by use of this spell, though the spell will overcome lack of a secret command word or special triggering phrase or process. Item functions that require aiming will be "fired blind" if the caster can't see the item or intended targets, and some item functions won't operate without direct sight of a target. (The spell won't overcome this limitation, although it should be noted that the sighting of targets is always between caster and target, not item and target; the caster can't "see through" the item unless such scrying is an integral part of its powers.)

Meltharond's level seems to have been 17th (this spell operates as if cast by a 17th-level wizard when cast by Arveiaturance).

Arveiaturance's Fate

The White Wyrms seem to heal quickly and enjoy vibrant health and strength; it is unlikely that disease will claim her. Misadventure is always a peril, and Arveiaturance's lonely existence could end abruptly at any time, if she loses her latest battle. The Cult of the Dragon seems to be the greatest threat to her future. In addition, there are constant mutterings in Evermeet about ways to eliminate her, and young, ambitious elves may just mount a successful attempt one of these days.

On the other hand, Arveiaturance could become the scourge of the Sword Coast, invigorated anew, if someone returned Meltharond Thone to life or unlaid. She could also, if Thone regained control over her and desired it so,

become a messenger and a potent controlled fighting force, of much less danger to civilized folk than she is at present. In this potential, she is unique among currently powerful dragons of the North.

For the nonce, Arveiaturance's sad life remains an inspiration to minstrels up and down the Sword Coast — and the bane of all sailors. "The White Wyrms came calling" has recently become a popular euphemism for the death of a sailor, whatever the cause.



Ed Greenwood has written more about the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign than any other designer or novelist, which is only fair, since he created the place. For more information on previously undescribed regions of the Realms, check out Ed's continuing "Elminster's Everwinking Eye" articles in POLYHEDRON® Newszine.

The Thief Who Came In from the Cold

Continued from page 18

resists disease gives a country obvious advantages, as do smelting techniques for stronger metal or mechanical looms that weave more cloth faster.

A PC might be a sleeper agent, sent out years before to establish himself. Then, when he is safely beyond suspicion and able to reach important information, he is activated. This allows a DM to introduce espionage into an established campaign without having to start a new adventuring group.

If most of the missions already detailed require a much greater reliance on Charisma, Wisdom and, well, Intelligence, covert operations, the other half of a spy's work, generally require the physical skills of the old-time thief.

Sabotage turns up most frequently during wartime. Silent movement through the shadows is often the only way to get past guards and weaken bridge supports, foul wells, burn supplies, or sink ships.

This type of destruction may also come into play during peacetime (also known as periods of undeclared war). Wrecking the mint or collapsing a gold mine disrupts the money supply and devastates the economy. Pirates (either genuine or a disguised navy crew) might harry a country's shipping, while creative

PCs might loose monsters in the countryside, all to destabilize an enemy's rule, thus keeping the enemy busy at home or forcing a change in government. Along the same line is stirring up discontent or encouraging rebel movements. Students of recent history can find plenty of examples on which to model adventures.

Last in the bag of "dirty tricks" is assassination. Even the most moral and enlightened of governments may find the death of one person preferable to a drawn-out war, and who better than the masters of the shadows to carry out these missions? Poison, the garrote, and the sniper's arrow are all obvious means, but in most cases quiet methods — meaning that natural causes rather than assassins are blamed — work best, for both the agent and his employers. The more highly placed the target, the more planning such a mission requires, but in all cases, getting in, doing the job and escaping safely should involve risks.

For all the missions discussed, DMs must set the risk of discovery. In the AD&D® original Edition DMG, the base chance of discovery is given as a cumulative 1% per day spent on the mission, minus the spy's level, with modifiers for the level of precautions taken and level of mission difficulty. I would recommend

using a similar method, but modifiers will vary according to the individual situation. Among the factors to be considered are the agent's level, his skills in the areas the mission will test, his familiarity with the locale, the quality of his contacts and equipment, and the countermeasures he must face. Don't forget to take into account outside complications, such as accidents, unexpected visits and other changes in plans, or old acquaintances who inadvertently blow a cover. Not every mission should be drenched in bad luck, of course, but DMs should throw out a potential disaster now and again to keep spies alert.

Spies have been around since the first secret. Much of their real-world tasks are tedious paperwork, sifting reports for trends and useful information, but fantasy spies can take James Bond as their model and give those thieves a chance to shine.



Before his death, the sole survivor of the investigation reported that Renee Stern is a freelance writer living in Selah, Washington. She is currently at work on a novel.

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Defilers and Preservers

by Bill Slavicsek

illustrated by John Dollar

The DARK SUN® campaign setting for the AD&D® game presents a fantasy world unlike any other. It's a savage place of alien landscapes and mutated monsters, a harsh environment where metal and water are rare and death is as common as the dust in the Silt Sea.

Perhaps the greatest difference separating Athas (the world of DARK SUN) from other campaign worlds is magic. Magic works differently beneath the crimson sun. Across the burning landscape of Athas, wizards draw the energy to power their spells from the living world itself — from plants, the living soil, and even animals and humans if the wizard is strong enough. How a wizard draws this energy determines much about his outlook and moral tendencies. For this reason, Athasian wizards fall into one of two categories: defilers or preservers.

Defilers are Athasian wizards who don't care what happens to the world around them. They care only about the power they wield and the energy they can call forth. Defilers take the living energy without thought or restraint as they seek the quickest path to power, leaving withered plants and ashen soil in their wake. Most of Athas's devastation can be traced to defilers or to the sorcerer-kings — the ultimate defilers of the world. A defiler can never be of good alignment.

Preservers are Athasian wizards who, through care and patience, take only

enough life energy to cast their spells. They make an extreme effort to leave the plants and soil they tap alive after they've drawn a portion of the life energy. Preservers know that they must care for the source of their power, or that power might not be there when they need it. Fundamentally opposed to defiling methods, preservers consider the defilers to be their enemies. A preserver can be any alignment, though most favor either good or neutral.

For more about Athas and its wizards, see the DARK SUN Campaign Setting boxed set and the new *Defilers and Preservers: The Wizards of Athas* accessory.

This article describes new character kits for use by Athasian wizards, adding to those presented in *Defilers and Preservers*. Kits are optional in the DARK SUN campaign, so check with your Dungeon Master before introducing a wizard kit into the game. Here we present four preserver kits — the gray chasseur, the obscure, the protector, and the relic seeker — and two defiler kits — the pale and the slayer.

Proficiencies

All Athasian characters must use the proficiency rules as given in the *Player's Handbook* and the DARK SUN *Age of Heroes* rules book. New proficiencies for wizards can also be found in *Defilers and Preservers*.

Athasian wizard kits

Each of the kits described below are for use with Athasian wizard player characters. Pay particular attention to the requirements listed for each kit, as these define each type of wizard just as much as the special benefits do.

Gray chasseur

Gray chasseurs, or gray huntsmen, are wizards who specialize in hunting and destroying a specific breed of monster. They seek the undead, those foul creatures with a connection to the plane of the dead — the Gray.

Character class: All gray chasseurs must be preservers. These huntsmen can be multiclassed or dual-classed, and elves and half-elves often combine this class with the fighter class to devastating effect.

Races: This kit is available to all races that can become wizards — aarakocra, elves, half-elves, and humans.

Requirements: Gray chasseurs must have Constitution scores of at least 13 and Wisdom scores of at least 11. Constitution allows them to withstand the rigors of a hunt, while Wisdom grants them the mental stamina necessary to face down the fear and dangers of the undead.

Role: The undead of Athas are, for the most part, unique creatures with powers, motives, and origins that are

different from others of their kind. One thinking zombie, for example, may have different abilities from another thinking zombie, and chances are that the method used to destroy one kaisharga won't even bother the second one encountered. The nature of Athasian undead make the gray chasseur a necessity.

The gray chasseur is a combination of occult scholar, paranormal investigator, and undead executioner. This wizard gathers every scrap of information and legend concerning the undead of Athas, filing it away for when he'll need it most. He collects relics, unusual items, and strange components — anything that might be used to create a defense or a weapon against the monsters of the Gray. He travels from village to village, watching for signs of undead activity. Then he identifies the type of creature he'll be dealing with and devises some means for driving it off or — if possible — putting it to rest so it stops disturbing the living.

Unlike most wizards, the gray chasseur is welcomed (or at least tolerated) by the communities who need his help. A slave tribe or trading outpost troubled by some corporeal undead will often extend an invitation to a gray chasseur, figuring that a wizard is a lesser evil than the walking dead.

Other than his name and a good bit of knowledge about the subject, this wizard has no actual ties to the plane of Athasian dead known as the Gray. He doesn't draw spell energy from the Gray (as Athasian necromancers do), nor does he commune with the dead for knowledge or power (as the pale wizard does). The gray chasseur has one goal — to become an expert on all manner and variation of undead monsters in order to be able to confront them and destroy them before they can harm the living.

Though the gray chasseur is dedicated to learning about and destroying undead, he isn't above being paid for his services. Most will provide help to a village for whatever the community can afford, though these wizards usually seek 1 sp per HD of the monster they're hired to destroy.

Class Modification: The gray chasseur carries, among other things, the holy symbols associated with the four elemental clerics. While not a priest by any means, the gray chasseur knows he must show respect to the priestly powers if he hopes to use their relics in the battle against the undead.

As long as the gray chasseur maintains this respect and doesn't do anything to damage his standing with the elementals, he receives the following priest spells as he advances in level. He may cast these spells once per day, though within 24 hours of casting he must make an offering to the granting elementals or lose this ability. Examples of offerings include teaching an agricultural technique to a village elder (Earth), setting someone or something free (Air), burning anything in dedication (Fire), or adding water to an oasis pond (Water).

Level	Granted priest spell
4th	<i>Invisibility to undead</i> (Air)
6th	<i>Cure disease</i> (Fire)
8th	<i>Negative plane protection</i> (Water)
10th	<i>Dispel evil</i> (Earth)

In addition, a gray chasseur who keeps the pact gains the ability to turn undead as if he were a priest of three levels less than his experience. For example, a 4th-level gray chasseur turns undead as if he were a 1st-level cleric.

Weapon Proficiencies: Gray chassseurs have the same weapon proficiencies available to them as normal wizards, though at 9th level they treat all weapons as +1 against undead foes. They can't bestow this bonus on any other character, as it's a result of their own tinkering and knowledge.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Ancient history and undead lore. *Required:* Religion. *Recommended:* Agriculture, bribery etiquette, fire-building, planes lore, survival, teaching.

Special Benefits: In addition to the priest spells and undead turning granted them due to their respect for the elemental powers and their efforts to eradicate life-threatening abominations from the Gray, gray chassseurs also receive the benefit of being respected (or at least tolerated) in communities that would otherwise drive them off for being wizards.

With the undead lore proficiency (Wisdom -1), a gray chasseur can study a particular undead creature in order to gain advantages over it. For each day of study (during which time the gray chasseur can watch and gain information on only a single type of undead creature), the wizard gets to make a proficiency check. If the check succeeds, the wizard learns one important bit of knowledge to help him fight the undead monster. Knowledge gained in this manner is accumulated in the following order, one item per day of successful study: num-

ber of undead powers, type of undead powers (learn one power per day), and possible weaknesses (learn one per day).

For every Hit Dice an undead is above the wizard's level, the proficiency check receives a -1 penalty. For example, if a 4th-level gray chasseur attempts to study a 6 HD undead creature, the wizard's undead lore check receives a -2 penalty (making a success Wisdom -3 or less).

Special Hindrances: Gray chassseurs must maintain their connection to the elemental powers to get the most of their special abilities. The moment a gray chasseur breaks his pact with the elementals or fails to make a proper offering, he loses the priest spell that power grants and the ability to turn undead. Without these special abilities, the gray chasseur must rely on his own knowledge and skills as a wizard to survive his battles with the creatures of the Gray.

If a gray chasseur reveals his occupation in the presence of a thinking undead (or fails at an undead lore check while trying to study the creature), that monster has a 55% chance of declaring a death hunt on the wizard. In this case, the undead won't rest until either it or the wizard is destroyed.

Wealth Options: Gray chassseurs begin play with (3d4+3) x 30 cp.

Obscure

The obscure is a particular type of shadow wizard, one of the mages who draw energy from the plane of infinite shadow known as the Black. The obscure uses his shadow-inspired powers for espionage and to provide protection by hiding those he defends.

Character Class: Obscures are usually preservers, though it's possible for a one-time preserver who has become a defiler to take up this kit in the service of a sorcerer-king. This kit can be combine the wizard class with any other class except cleric or druid. Obscure wizard/rangers or wizard/thieves can sometimes be found serving a specific faction of the Veiled Alliance. Bear in mind that obscures and shadow wizards have been around for a long, long time but are still considered to be rare among the wizards of Athas.

Races: Humans, elves, and half-elves can select this kit, but the dark and claustrophobic nature of the Black makes it highly unsuitable for aarakocra wizards.

Requirements: Obscures require a minimum Wisdom score of 16 and a Constitution score of 15 to withstand the mental and physical rigor of reaching into the dimension of darkness. An obscure can be of any alignment as long as one aspect of it is neutral (i.e., NG, NE, N, LN, CN).

Role: Shortly after the first shadow wizards developed centuries ago, a few of these mystics found a particular manner of employing their magic. These mystics became the obscure, a society of shadow wizards who operate in the twilight of society, moving like specters through the world of humans and demihumans. They consider it a sacred duty to uncover secrets and shed light on the darkness that hides portions of the world.

Using their spells and abilities granted by their connection to the Black, the obscure became spies and investigators of great mystery and renown. This small order of wizards holds fast to its sacred duty, usually in the service of the various branches of the Veiled Alliance, though at least one of these wizards works for the Night Runners elf tribe. When one of these groups absolutely needs to gather information or root out a secret, if an obscure is available, the job goes to him.

The obscure who work for the Veiled Alliance use their abilities to drift from shadow to shadow as they spy on templars, defilers, or sorcerer-kings. They have trained themselves in stealth techniques, and they take pride in their abilities to observe, listen, and gather information.

The obscure share certain traits with other shadow wizards. Except for those who know of them and their work, most believe that those connected to the Black are evil beings. This isn't an accurate assessment by any means, but their characteristics make such beliefs understandable. The obscure are cold, distant, with a tendency toward neutrality. They believe in balance, for without light there can be no shadow. They are cold to the touch, an effect of the plane of shadow. An obscure must be within 10' of a shadow to draw on the Black's power. They wear robes and cloaks full of folds and shadows, even during the hottest part of an Athasian day. And, like shadow wizards, the obscure sacrifice a part of themselves to the Black, allowing their bodies to become a combination of living flesh and living shadow.

Class Modification: The obscure tend to favor spells that produce either light

or shadow, either as a direct result or an after effect of the casting. They also employ divination spells and spells of stealth and concealment. They avoid darkness spells, as these obliterate shadows and weaken their powers. Because the connection to the Black isn't constant, the obscure must roll on Table XVII: Gathering Energy Through Defiling Magic (in both the new *DARK SUN* rules book and the *Defilers and Preservers* accessory) to determine how many spells they can memorize each day. Instead of determining the terrain benefit for energy gathering, the table is used to represent how strong the wizard's connection to the Black is at the time of energy gathering. Roll to see which terrain line to use:

Roll 1d10	Result
1	barren
2-4	infertile
5-7	fertile
8-9	abundant
10	lush

Note that a wizard can improve his connection by basking in a shadow at the time of energy gathering. This gives him a +1 to the roll.

Weapon Proficiencies: The obscure follow the regular restrictions applicable to all wizards.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Planes lore. *Required:* Path lore. *Recommended:* Astrology, bribery etiquette, direction sense, fire-building, meditation, mental armor, reading/writing, spellcraft.

Special Benefits: At 3rd level, a portion of the obscure's body becomes living shadow. This portion is equal to 20% of the wizard's body. Each level thereafter, another 5% portion turns to living shadow, spreading every level advancement until 50% of the wizard's physical form has been replaced. This shadow has a permanent *chill touch* spell effect upon it which can be used once per level per day.

At 7th level, the obscure gains the shadow form ability. This works just like the psychometabolic science of the same name, but doesn't require the expenditure of PSPs. This is a granted ability, not a psionic power. The wizard can assume shadow form and remain in it for a number of turns equal to his level per day.

At 9th level, the obscure's body has become 50% living shadow. At this time, the wizard's natural armor class drops to AC 5 because half of his form is immune

to damage from non-magical weapons. Enchanted weapons hit as though he were totally physical, with a base AC 10 (not counting any bonuses for Dexterity or magical items).

Special Hindrances: The shadow stain spreading over the obscure and the chill air that hangs around them give these wizards a reaction check penalty that increases as they advance in level: Levels 1st-3rd, -1 penalty; levels 4th-6th, -2; levels 7th-9th, -3; levels 10th and above, -4. In addition, the first time any character sees the shadow stain, that character must make a saving throw vs. petrification or flee in terror — possibly raising an alarm.

In total darkness or otherwise in the absence of shadow, an obscure is cut off from the Black. Granted powers are diminished, spells must now be cast through normal preserving or defiling methods, and the obscure must make a Constitution check with a -2 penalty to withstand the sudden absence of the chilling cold. A failed check indicates that the wizard immediately suffers 1d4 hp damage.

When the obscure accesses the Black for spell energy, he must make a Constitution check to withstand the physical and mental chill of the shadow dimension. The wizard isn't actually entering the plane, just opening a conduit through the use of his magical training. If the wizard gathers spell energy as he casts spells, a failed check inflicts 1d2 hp damage upon him and the spell fails. If the wizard gathers energy during the memorization process, a failed check inflicts 1d6+1 hp damage. He can make a second attempt, but if that fails as well he suffers another 1d6+1 hp damage and no memorization occurs that day. The obscure can't memorize new spells until 24 hours have passed.

Finally, because of their connection to some group (the player or DM picks either a Veiled Alliance cell, a tribe, a merchant house, or a sorcerer-king), the obscure can be ordered to take an espionage mission of some sort once every two months of campaign time.

Wealth Options: The obscure begin play with (1d4+1) x 30 cp.

Pale

The pale is a particular type of necromancer, those wizards who draw magical energy from the plane of the dead known as the Gray. Unlike necromancers, however, pale seek to command and control undead, eventually

ruling these creatures by becoming as undead as they are.

Character Class: Pale are always defilers, and they always have alignments of neutral evil. The pale are always pure defilers, not wanting to sully their art by attempting to combine it with any other class.

Races: Only humans and half-elves have the will and desire to become these death-wizards.

Requirements: Manipulating and maintaining the delicate balance between life and death takes a toll on these wizards. To become a pale, a defiler needs a Wisdom score of at least 16 and a Constitution score of at least 14.

Role: Through their fascination with the undead, the pale have become connected to the Gray. This connection allows them to draw the energy for spells not from plant life but from the life forces trapped in the Gray. Unlike necromancers, who study death to learn more about life and extending it for as long as possible, the pale only want to call upon undead creatures to do their bidding. With every increase in level, with every piece of knowledge gained, the pale move closer to becoming undead beings of incredible power — at least that's what they hope for.

The pale call forth undead servants to wait upon them, defend them, and even fight for them should the need arise. They commune with undead beings to learn more about life, death, and the Gray existence that waits beyond the mortal coil.

As a member of an adventuring party, a pale can be a potent companion — provided the rest of the party can stand his ghoulish ways. It also takes a lot for the living fully to trust someone so captivated by the dead. Still, a pale's powerful spells and abilities to turn or command undead can be useful to any adventuring party.

Class Modification: The pale favor necromantic spells, as well as spells of an offensive nature. They require a shard of obsidian that has been prepared with the essence of an undead being to maintain their connection to the Gray. Without this shard, they cast spells as if they were normal defilers.

Because the connection to the Gray is unstable at best, the pale must roll on Table XVII: Gathering Energy Through Defiling Magic to determine how many spells they can memorize each day. Instead of determining the terrain benefit for energy gathering, the table is used

to represent how strong the wizard's connection to the Gray is at the time of energy gathering. Roll to see which terrain line to use:

Roll 1d10	Result
1	barren
2-4	infertile
5-7	fertile
8-9	abundant;
10	lush

Weapon Proficiencies: The pale are proficient with all weapons normally available to the wizard class. In addition, they can learn to wield any weapons made of bone without penalty.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Planes lore. *Required:* Languages, ancient. *Recommended:* Ancient history, astrology, bargain, intimidation, reading/writing, religion, spellcraft.

Special Benefits: The pale learn to fashion an obsidian shard to use as a conduit for drawing energy from the Gray. This shard must be prepared through an elaborate ceremony and ritual that lasts for 1d4+2 days. At the end of this period, the pale reaches into the Gray and makes a Wisdom check. A successful check inflicts 1d4+1 hp damage on the wizard and imbues his shard with a individual life force from the Gray. With this imbued shard, the wizard maintains a constant connection to the Gray. The life force is rendered comatose, providing nothing more than the spark necessary to maintain the open conduit. If the check fails, the shard isn't imbued and the wizard suffers 2d4+2 hp damage.

The pale have the ability to take control of unintelligent undead. This is reflected as a pale's Wisdom score plus 5% for each of his levels. This control lasts for 1d6+1 rounds, and the number of undead that can be affected by this power is a number of Hit Dice equal to the wizard's level times two. So, a 3rd-level pale can control up to 6 HD of unintelligent undead creatures.

Through force of will, the pale can also attempt to command intelligent undead. The chance is equal to the wizard's Wisdom score plus 5% per level, minus the creature's Hit Dice. So, a 3rd-level wizard with a Wisdom of 16 has a base 31% chance to command an intelligent undead. If the undead was a 6 HD monster, the chance would be reduced to 25%. This command lasts for 1d4 rounds.

At 5th level, a pale gains a constant undead companion. One undead being can be called per level that remains at

the wizard's beck and call until the creature is destroyed or a new creature is summoned (at the next level of experience). The type of creature that responds to the summons depends on the level of the pale:

Level	Undead Type
5-6	normal skeleton
7-8	normal zombie
9-12	thinking zombie
13+	wracked spirit

Finally, a pale is immune to any fear caused by undead, unless that undead's Hit Dice total exceeds the pale's level by three or better. Then the fear affects the wizard normally. For example, a 3rd-level pale would be affected by the fear of a 6 HD undead monster.

Special Hindrances: When a pale accesses the Gray for spell energy, the wizard must make a Constitution check to withstand the negative power of the dimension. If the wizard gathers energy as he casts a spell, a failed check inflicts 1d2 hp damage and the spell fails. If the wizard gathers energy during the memorization process, a failure inflicts 1d6+1 hp damage as he drains life energy from himself instead of from the Gray. He can make a second attempt, but if that fails as well he suffers another 1d6+1 hp damage and no memorization occurs that day. The pale can't memorize new spells until 24 hours have passed.

Additionally, the pale have the look of death about them. They have pale flesh (as their name implies), and they are skeletal and gaunt to an unnatural extreme. The pale are also surrounded by a carrion stench — they smell like ghouls. This makes everyone they meet very uncomfortable, and if the pale doesn't make a successful save vs. death magic whenever he encounters someone, that person flees in terror.

Wealth Options: The pale, too preoccupied by death to worry about money, begin play with (1d4+1) x 10 cp.

Protector

The protector is an elf wizard dedicated to the defense of his tribe. He combines magic with warrior skills to create a true combat mage. Indeed, protectors are among the most ferocious and dangerous elf opponents enemies of an elf tribe can face.

Character Class: Protectors must be preservers, as defilers don't have the commitment or honor necessary to adhere to the tenets of this kit. In addi-

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tion, a protector must be a multiclassed fighter/wizard of some kind.

Races: Only elves may become protectors, though a DM may rule that a half-elf who's dedicated to a particular slave tribe might become that tribe's protector.

Requirements: Only the best elves can meet the standards set for this kit. A protector must have a Strength score of 13 or better, a Constitution score of 12 or better, and an Intelligence score of 14 or better.

Role: Protectors defend their tribes from all threats and dangers, using magic and muscle to keep those they have sworn to protect from harm. Not every fighter/mage can rise to the standards of this kit, for it takes skill, commitment, compassion, and a dedication not seen very often among the elves of Athas.

An elf tribe usually has one designated protector at a time. This elf receives the traditional weapon of protection to use in defense of the tribe. This weapon is a bone *long sword* +3 that's sometimes imbued with an additional power depending on the tribe it belongs to. For example, one tribe might have a thri-kreen slayer, while another has an undead slayer, each inflicting extra damage (usually becoming a +5 weapon) against their dedicated foes. The protector ranges far from the tribe for months at a time, seeking any threats long before the tribe is placed in danger.

When traveling with the tribe, the protector runs at the head of the tribe in a place of honor reserved just for him. He provides counsel to the chief and tribal elders, trains tribal defenders, and keeps alert for any dangers. When danger presents itself, the protector often leads the tribe into battle, wielding the tribal sword where all can see. He inspires the tribe, casting magic and striking quickly with his enchanted sword.

Class Modification: Protectors always seek to learn spells that can be used to defend their tribes. Offensive spells are selected first, followed by spells that can be used to defend those in their care. Some protectors even learn divination spells in order to gain as much warning to dangers as possible.

Weapon Proficiencies: Protectors can learn to use any weapons, though they must select the long sword among their initial proficiencies.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Survival. *Required:* Tracking. Recom-

mended Proficiencies: Direction sense, armorer, blind-fighting, weaponsmithing, mental armor.

Special Benefits: At 3rd level, a protector is only a protector-in-training. He receives a bone *long sword* +1 to use until his training period ends. During training, the protector-to-be travels with the tribe's protector for one month per level. The rest of the time he is encouraged to find an adventuring party to join with to further hone his abilities.

At 5th level, the training period ends. If the tribe's protector is ready to step down from his post, the new protector receives the bone *long sword* +3. If not, the young protector is encouraged to keep traveling until such time as his tribe has need of his services.

A protector carries around a pouch full of items that are important to his tribe. With this pouch, the protector and the tribe are always connected. At 5th level, a protector gains danger sense in relation to his tribe. With this ability, he knows when his tribe needs him and can follow the tingling sensation right to them. This ability works best as long as he's within 10 miles of the tribe; at farther distances the tingling is too weak to do more than warn him that something is amiss. If the protector loses the pouch, he loses this ability.

Due to his training and combat orientation, a protector receives extra offensive spells to memorize every day. Up to 5th level, he receives an extra 1st-level spell; from 6th to 9th level he receives two extra 1st-level spells; from 10th to 12th level he receives two 1st-level and one 3rd-level spell; at 13th level and above, his extra spells are two 1st-level and two 3rd-level spells.

Special Hindrances: Through the connection formed by the tribal pouch, a protector must respond to a summons from his tribe. The tribal shaman can use the pouch to summon the protector, and any true threats to the tribe also force the protector to respond.

If a protector's tribe is ever destroyed and the protector survives, he becomes an avenger. An avenger wanders the land, seeking to protect others from whatever danger destroyed his tribe. He also seeks to avenge the tribe by hunting down and eliminating whatever destroyed them — though this isn't always an easy task.

Wealth Options: Protectors begin play with little money, only (1d4+1) x 5 cp, but they do receive a bone *long sword* +1.

Relic Seeker

Relic seekers are wizards who search for ancient items. They look for books, scrolls, tablets, metal tools — anything tied to the past that can increase their knowledge or otherwise help them piece together the mysteries of ancient Athas.

Character Class: Preservers normally take the relic seeker kit, as they are more concerned with preserving not only nature and life, but even the past. Defilers can select this kit, but they do so more to increase their own power than for any love of knowledge or desire to unlock ancient mysteries. When multiclassed, the only other class that logically combines with relic-seeking wizards is the thief class.

Races: Any race that can become a wizard can select this kit. Aarakocra and humans make the best relic seekers, but there have been relic seekers among the elf tribes, and even a half-elf or two has dug into the ruins of yesterday to learn more about the world.

Requirements: Relic seekers have only two Ability Score requirements — they must have Intelligence scores of at least 12 and Wisdom scores of at least 11. Otherwise, a relic seeker can be of any alignment as long as one of its aspects is lawful.

Role: Relic seekers are scholars of the highest order, curators who locate, catalog, and carry their museums with them wherever they go. Most relic seekers aren't interested in power. They're historians or sages who simply want to learn and preserve that learning for others. Any power that might come their way through this course is simply an added bonus.

Relic seekers are adventurers in the classic sense — they'll go anywhere, brave any danger, to recover a relic, learn a new bit of information, or discover an ancient secret. Tall mountains, deep caverns, ancient ruins — these are the obstacles the relic seekers learn to circumvent in the pursuit of knowledge. Relic seekers will join adventuring groups to gain assistance in their work, for everyone knows that adventurers spend lots of time in just the sort of places a relic seeker can uncover some piece of the past.

Artifacts, historical accounts, spells and magical items, objects of art, even odd bits of metal — these are the treasures that relic seekers constantly search for. It's their passion, the driving force that defines their ultimate motivations.

In a world where reading and writing is prohibited, where the secrets of the past are considered better left buried, the relic seekers see it as their duty to preserve and often rescue such items from the forces that would destroy them.

Class Modification: Divination spells are clearly part of every relic seeker's repertoire. They also tend to have lots of uses for abjuration magic.

Weapon Proficiencies: Relic seekers have the same weapon proficiencies available to them as normal wizards.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Ancient history and ancient languages. *Required:* Reading/Writing. *Recommended:* Appraising, bribery etiquette, direction sense, rope use, somatic concealment, teaching.

Special Benefits: Every relic seeker starts play with a minor magical item of some sort (as selected by the DM). For every magical item and ancient relic they collect, they receive a 5% bonus to their awarded experience.

Relic seekers learn how to identify ancient items with some success. They have a 5% chance per level of being able to identify an item as genuine or magical in nature. They can attempt this identification process once per item, regardless of the result they come up with. (DMs might want to make the check in secret for the relic seeker.)

Finally, to reflect the time relic seekers spend digging through ancient ruins, they get to buy skills that are usually only available to thieves. They receive 15 points at 3rd level (the starting level for DARK SUN characters) and 5 points each new level to put into these skills. The skills and their base scores are:

Open Locks 0%, Find Traps 0%, Climb Walls 15%, Read Languages 10%.

Special Hindrances: Curiosity killed the mekillot, and it certainly gets the relic seeker into trouble. Whenever the relic seeker picks up a rumor concerning an artifact or other worthy item, he must make a successful Wisdom check to keep from rushing to immediately find it. If the check fails, he's off at the first opportunity.

As scholars, relic seekers often have their attention turned toward matters beyond the here and now. The first round of any combat, the relic seeker suffers a 2-point penalty to his initiative roll, and in any location other than ruins or while on a relic hunt, the relic seeker is always surprised.

Finally, when traveling in a place where reading and writing is prohibited,



such as the city-states of Urik and Nibenay, the relic seeker must be extremely careful not to give himself away. This can be harder than it sounds, as they always carry scrolls, tablets, and other ancient artifacts in the many pouches and bags they wear.

Wealth Options: Relic seekers begin play with $(1d4+2) \times 30$ cp and a minor magical item of the DM's choice.

Slayer

Slayers are wizards who profit from their art by selling their services to the highest bidder. However, the services they sell are very specific — they use their magic to kill. Wielding their magic the way a bard wields poison daggers, slayers take contracts for merchant houses,

nobles, and sorcerer-kings, earning fortunes if they're good at what they do.

Character Class: All slayers must be defilers, as preservers have too much respect for life so callously to end it. Multiclass slayers are possible. Among elves, these wizards often combine with the fighter or thief classes. Half-elf slayer/bards make for a most dangerous combination.

Races: Elves, half-elves, and humans can select to follow the dark path of the slayer. Aarakocra wizards would never take on this role.

Requirements: Slayers have no Ability Score requirements beyond the normal ones for their race and class. However, the best slayers (those who

survive to make a name for themselves) usually have the highest scores. Slayers may not be of good alignment; most tend toward some aspect of neutrality, though the worst among them are evil.

Role: Slayers, like Athasian bards, have a specific function in Athasian society. They sell their abilities to society's elite, eliminating a merchant's competition, a rival noble, a pushy templar, or an adventurer who just doesn't know when to back off. Most slayers never reveal their true nature, not even to their adventuring companions. They travel the Tablelands and beyond with these companions, slipping away when necessary to handle a job, then returning to continue their adventuring careers. Slayers are in high demand, but even the best isn't called upon to perform more than three or four slayings in a year.

When a slayer takes a job, he watches his target for a few days. This gives him the opportunity to chart his victim's movements, watch for habits or abilities his employer forgot to warn him of, and gauge the protection he must circumvent to get close to his target. When he's ready, the slayer picks the appropriate spells and begins his onslaught.

Unless specifically asked to put on a big show (which costs more as this puts the slayer at greater risk), a slayer employs spells of a subtle yet deadly nature. Necromantic spells used over a number of days can appear as a withering disease of unknown origin. Illusions can be used to literally scare a victim to death or cause a victim to blunder into a fatal accident. Even summoning magic can be employed to send wild creatures or dangerous monsters to deal with the victim. Every slayer has his own specialty and signature method for completing a job.

In the case of half-elf slayer/bards, the wizard might even be audacious enough to get close to his victim, entertain him, befriend him, and then deliver the death-dealing spell once the victim's trust has been gained.

Class Modification: Even more than other wizards, slayers keep their profession a secret. Nothing stirs up a mob faster than the revelation of a wizard who uses his magic for murder. So, a slayer works hard to keep his identity as a defiler secret and never reveals his nature as a slayer except to those who have the money to afford his services.

Every slayer picks a signature method for dealing death — spells of a subtle and quiet nature. In addition, all slayers also learn a few obviously offensive spells to use if the need arises — spells like *fireball* and *lightning bolt*. Finally, it makes good sense for a slayer to also have a few spells on hand to use when he needs to make a quick escape. *Dimension door* and *teleport* work well for most slayers.

Weapon Proficiencies: Slayers have the same weapon proficiencies available to them as normal wizards.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Somatic concealment. *Required:* Spellcraft. *Recommended:* Bribery etiquette, disguise, herbalism, intimidation, mental armor, reading/writing, spellweaving.

Special Benefits: A slayer starts play with a patron, a specific noble or merchant lord who retains his services. This translates into help when the slayer is within the patron's sphere of influence, a ready supply of resources while in the patron's good graces, and a contact to exploit when involved in his own adventuring endeavors.

Special Hindrances: The patron also translates into the slayer's hindrance, as the slayer must perform at least three assassinations for the patron in a given year. When a slayer agrees to a job, he must concentrate on that job until he gets it done. Otherwise, he may find himself the object of a chasseur (or mage hunter) who has been hired to cancel his contract.

Because slayers are even more despised and feared than other defilers, a slayer always runs the risk of being revealed for what he is. Even a patron or client may turn on him, and he never knows who to trust. Consequently, slayers learn to sleep with one eye open and a spell on their lips.

Wealth Options: Slayers begin play with (3d4+3) x 30 cp.

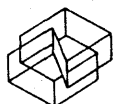
Bill Slavicsek lives, works, and plays too many games in Lake Geneva, WI. He is a designer and editor for TSR, Inc. and knows more about the Star Wars universe than any mortal should know.

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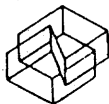
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Guardian's Key

Anne Logston
Ace

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It's no trouble at all to report that ***Guardian's Key*** may well be Anne Logston's strongest novel to date. Trying to classify the book, however, is another matter entirely. It isn't capital-L Literature of the "reading this will be good for you" school. As with Logston's previous books, her intent is clearly to entertain, and it's a task at which she succeeds admirably. She doesn't entirely escape the bounds of literary nutrition, as there are a handful of thematic vitamins and minerals scattered through its pages, but Logston's tale definitely doesn't qualify as the fantasy-novel equivalent of 100% Bran Flakes.

Neither, however, is this book "popcorn fantasy" in the usual sense of that phrase — a book meant purely as escapist adventure, whose sole value is as a distraction from real life. While sometimes used as such, the "popcorn" label isn't necessarily a pejorative; it can legitimately mark everything from Conan-esque blood-and-thunder yarns to tales of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Setting to *Star Wars* novels to comic fantasy such as Terry Pratchett writes. But ***Guardian's Key*** is none of these; there's a thoughtful quality to the novel that sets it above the storytelling equivalent of mere snack

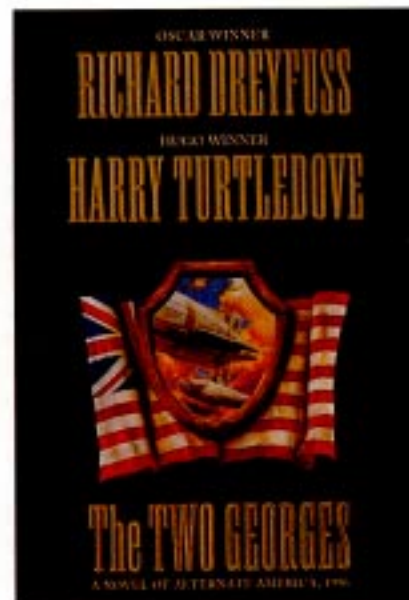
food, and a major plot element deals with the consequences of a cruelly intimate betrayal.

It isn't exactly an adventure story, although its heroine, one Dara, has a fair number of adventures as she explores the vast labyrinth of realities branching outward from the mysterious Crystal Keep. True enough, she meets a dragon, is set upon by imps, and encounters a mysterious woman out of legend, but just as much of the story involves cooking and mending and studying dusty books — and all of these are just as important to the plot as the more adventurous incidents. Impressively, though, Logston narrates even the most mundane episodes without lapsing into dullness.

It's not really a romance, even though the motive behind Dara's quest involves sealing a marriage contract. Her intended husband spends nearly the entire book offstage, and the relationship that develops between Dara and the Crystal Keep's mysterious Guardian, Vanian, is considerably more three-dimensional than the word "romance" might suggest.

Nor is it precisely a fairy tale or fable, though Logston incorporates elements of both. There are familiar characters and props — a peppery old witch, a magic mirror, a magical key. The prose conveys the once-upon-a-time mistiness typical of fairy tales, and Dara's ultimate choices reflect the increased self-knowledge that usually accompanies a fable's moral. But Logston develops her themes more subtly and with less preaching than fables usually offer, and while the ending is cheerfully upbeat, it doesn't have a fairy tale's happily-ever-after simplicity.

Just because ***Guardian's Key*** can't be pigeonholed, however, is no reason not to enjoy the book. With this novel Anne Logston carves out a new niche for herself and sets a standard that other fantasy novelists may well find difficult to meet or exceed.



The Two Georges

Richard Dreyfuss
and Harry Turtledove
Tor

\$23.95

By almost any measure, ***The Two Georges*** is not the book you'd expect it to be. It's not a publicity-stunt novel; all evidence says that actor Richard Dreyfuss was an equal partner in the project with veteran writer Harry Turtledove. It's not the sort of quiet, contemplative yarn you might expect from Dreyfuss; rather, it's an action-adventure tale with express-train pacing and a Harrison Ford hero. Nor, however, is it crisp, cogent alternate history such as you'd expect from Turtledove, who's usually regarded as that sub-genre's leading craftsman.

Not that the setting isn't intriguing. In the world Dreyfuss and Turtledove create, 1990s America is part of the British Empire, a treaty signed in the 1760s by George Washington and King George III having prevented the Revolutionary War. The legendary Gainesborough painting that commemorates the event

has just arrived in California to begin a national tour, and Thomas Bushell of the Royal American Mounted Police is in charge of the security arrangements.

For Bushell, though, air travel is by dirigible, automobiles are steam-powered, and television is just becoming available as a curiosity for the wealthy. It's a colorful landscape, but the vintage technology is oddly assorted and the explanation for its presence nonexistent. The steam-cars date to around 1920 in real history, while the airships are at least ten years more advanced, and both are in much wider use than ever occurred in our own world.

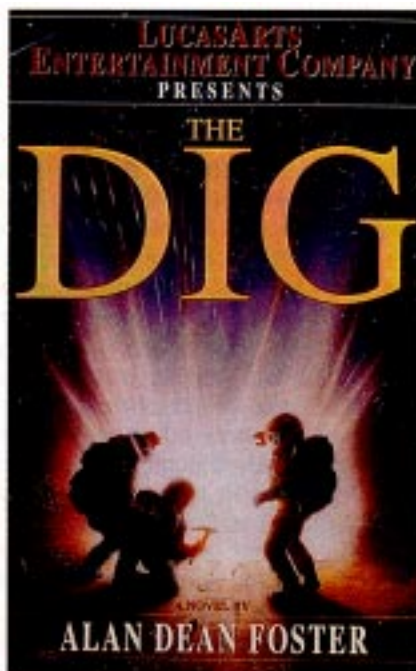
The politics are equally peculiar: Britain's chief rivals in world affairs are a French-Spanish collective and the Russian empire; the Chinese and Ottomans are under British rule, the Germans are insignificant; and many Native Americans enjoy a reclusive semi-independent status. Yet though the civil rights movement seems never to have happened, North America's chief administrator is none other than Sir Martin Luther King, while a certain "Tricky Dick is a wealthy used-car magnate, and the Sons of Liberty are dangerous terrorists.

What handicaps the novel is an odd combination of too much and too little detail. Turtledove and Dreyfuss go to considerable lengths to make sure that we know the broad outlines of this world's history and the dates of key events, and a pair of maps clearly describe the political landscape. Yet at the same time, they're curiously reticent about why events unfolded as they did, especially when it comes to justifying some of the sharper divergences from real-world history. It's a mystery, for instance, as to why the British Empire outlawed slavery in 1834, neatly forestalling an alternate Civil War — or how surviving Native American cultures managed to fare so much better in this reality. The reader is left with few clues as to why this world has evolved so differently, and the puzzle is an ongoing distraction that detracts from Dreyfuss' and Turtledove's primary interest.

Yet while the novel is remarkably weak as alternate history, it works very well as a spy thriller. Once the Sons of Liberty make off with the title painting (doing away with "Tricky Dick" in the process), we're launched swiftly into a breathless chase that takes Bushell, his aide, and an attractive female art expert across the length and breadth of the continent, through bullet-riddled fire-

fight and intrigue-ridden diplomatic receptions. Not surprisingly, there's a definite cinematic quality to much of this, and it's the sort of adventure that should translate well to film.

Those who enjoy high-spirited post-Victorian adventure will probably find *The Two Georges* a lively and personable read. But those with any taste for well-realized historical speculation should look elsewhere, and Turtledove fans in particular may find this novel below his usual standard.



The Dig

Alan Dean Foster
Warner

\$19.95

Novels based on computer games aren't especially new — we've seen books spun out from the worlds of *The Bard's Tale**, *Wing Commander**, the *Ultima** adventures, and many more. Most of these, however, have been original stories set in the world established for the game. *The Dig* is different; Alan Dean Foster's book looks to be a straightforward novelization of the game adventure itself.

A couple of warnings are in order at this point. First, I haven't actually played through the CD-ROM version of the story. I have, however, spent time with the game, and I've seen and absorbed the walk-through in the official strategy guide. Second, those who don't want the game's ending spoiled should skip to the next review. While Foster's novel isn't a hint book, it sticks sufficiently

close to the CD-ROM script that those wishing to be surprised should finish their chosen version of the story before seeking out its companion piece.

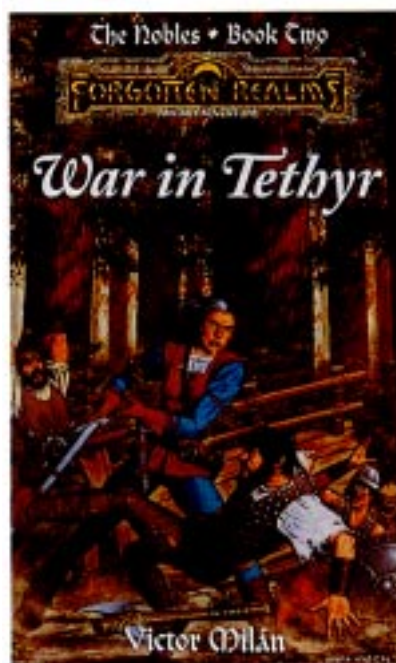
You don't need to get farther than the cover art, though, to figure out that *The Dig* is the Spielberg/Lucas empire's homage to the film version of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The blend of wide-eyed awe and crisp professionalism is much the same, and *The Dig's* ruggedly exotic landscapes are a match for 2001's mysterious obelisk. The two stories diverge sharply in plot and character development, but the atmosphere and themes are dead ringers for each other.

Novel and game follow the same path; an unusual asteroid has suddenly appeared from nowhere on a near-collision course with Earth, and astronaut Boston Low is brought out of retirement to fly the NASA mission that will hopefully nudge it into Earth's orbit instead. But Low and his fellow crew members quickly discover that the asteroid isn't what it seems, and they are transported to the distant and seemingly dead world of Cocytus. Only if they can somehow unravel the planet's secrets and revive long-idle technological systems is there hope of returning to Earth.

When Foster is unfolding the Cocytan landscape and architecture, his prose pleasantly complements the visually cinematic quality of the computer game. Foster also provides a lightly sketched attraction between Low and journalist Maggie Robbins, and this too is effectively-conveyed — a distinct plus for the book. On the minus side, however, Foster also deliberately undercuts any suspense in the plot by switching often to the viewpoint of the hordes of disembodied Cocytans watching the human explorers from the parallel dimension in which the aliens are trapped. The general outline of the Cocytans' problem is apparent to the reader long before Low and Robbins (and thus, by implication, the game-player) have any idea of what's going on around them. It's a strange choice, all the more so because the viewpoint-shifts are handled in an oddly abrupt, inelegant fashion.

Overall, *The Dig* in both its forms looks to be a solidly traditional science-fiction puzzle yarn. This is one case, though, where there seems little reason to seek out the story in more than one form; those who've successfully played the game are unlikely to find much of interest in the book, while those who finish the novel first have little apparent

reason to invest in the game. The tale is entertaining enough, but not so memorable that it stands up well to multiple retellings.



War in Tethyr

Victor Milan
TSR \$5.99

If *War in Tethyr* were investigated by the Better Business Bureau, it might well find itself accused of false advertising. Though it's billed as part of a series about the nobles of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, protagonist Zaranda Star is about as likely a titled lady as Roseanne Barr. And while the title promises a war, there's little in the way of straightforward military conflict within the book's pages. Neither of these factors, however, prevents Victor Milan's novel from being a clever and entertaining saga set in a part of the Realms far removed from the familiar paths linking Waterdeep with the Dales.

Unlikely or not, Zaranda does hold the title of Countess Morninggold, but she's still making payments on the castle that goes with the rank. And her aides and associates are a wildly assorted lot even by Tethyrian standards — her horse talks, the castle steward is a bugbear, and one of her newest companions is an ogre who claims to be a paladin of Torm.

Left to herself, Zaranda would just as soon rest in her chambers and recover from her recent travels, which have included such lively lands as Thay and the Tuigan frontier. But circumstances

won't let her; the usual simmer of intrigues in Zazesspur, Tethyr's nominal capital, is coming to a boil, and if Zaranda doesn't act to protect her interests, her status in Morninggold may be in danger.

Milan takes this foundation and builds on it an adventure that's both surprisingly mild-mannered and more tangled than a ball of yarn after six cats are through playing with it. Zaranda, trained both in magic and swordcraft, must use both skills in an effort to keep the already dangerous political climate from erupting into full-blown violence. But mere political enemies may not be the most critical threat — something even more sinister is operating beneath the surface, both literally and figuratively.

Milan stage-manages both Zaranda's group and their diverse enemies with practiced skill, displaying both an admirable grasp of tactics and a clever hand at springing plot twists. While very few readers will correctly anticipate every change of allegiance, at no time does Milan offer a revelation that hasn't been justified by earlier events.

If there's a criticism to be leveled, it's that *War in Tethyr* sometimes feels like the second volume of Zaranda's adventures — and I don't recall seeing such an earlier tale. The origins of her talking horse are a mystery that the current book declines to explain, and the hints of prior adventures occasionally feel as if there's something specific but unrevealed behind them. But as flaws go, this one is both small and easily remedied; Milan simply needs to write and publish the earlier story. (Or, if my memory is failing me and the prequel already exists, TSR needs to include mention of it somewhere in subsequent printings of the present book so that readers can track it down.) Zaranda Star is too likeable a heroine to abandon after just one adventure.

The Gates of Twilight

Paula Volsky
Bantam Spectra \$12.95

There's no doubt that Paula Volsky's newest novel aspires to a grand scale — not when its ultimate villain is a god-gone mad, much of the action takes place in a towering temple complex crawling with assassin-priests, and the cast ranges from royalty to beggars to bureaucrats. Yet for all its rich, panoramic scenery, *The Gates of Twilight* dwells too much on side trips and travelogues

to sustain the high-energy adventure it tries to hang on its initial premise.

Three interwoven plots form the heart of the novel: a cultural and political clash between the traditional monarch of Kahnderule and the more modern civilization of Vonahr, the efforts of the Cult of Aoun to steal power from both realms, and the gradual bond that forms between Vonahrish civil servant Renille vo Chaumelle and Jathondi, the heiress to Kahnderule's throne. But that's not enough for Volsky; she adds several more subplots to the mix that connect only loosely to the main adventure — the foibles of Renille's family have little impact on the political intrigues, and Renille's encounters with a clan of urban street-folk likewise don't advance the core story. Yet these elements take up pages at a time, diverting attention from the shadowy agents of Aoun and the deeper textures of the cultural conflict.

That's a shame, because the parts of the book that do focus on the primary plots show style and ingenuity. The Aoun-Father's assassins, aided by deadly flying serpents called wivoori, are a clever hybrid of Oriental ninjas and the thuggee of India. The magically sealed library in which Jathondi and Renille must seek the key to Aoun's defeat is well-imagined, and the key to its unlocking is neatly constructed. And the relationship Volsky builds between these two unlikely allies is drawn with assured, light strokes.

But the cleverness is too well-muted. Too many scenes fail to advance the story, and the rich, descriptive style that Volsky adopts — while it fits the mood and society she establishes — assures that she can't simply rush through the extraneous subplots and get back to the main adventure.

Part of the difficulty may be that Volsky has tried too hard to give the tale the trappings of genre fantasy. In atmosphere, there's a decidedly Kipling-like feel to the book, and the setting has a definite resonance with the British Empire's efforts to extend its influence over the jungles and maharajahs of India. But the names of places and people are determinedly artificial, perhaps a little too much so. As it is, Volsky must spend time and space developing her invented world's flora and fauna that would have been better used on action-sequences and plot development.

Again, when *The Gates of Twilight* is on track, it's as skillful and suspenseful a

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roller-coaster ride as one might wish. But too much of the book is spent rolling sedately along a flat course around the edges of the amusement park. The result is a world that's mildly entertaining to visit, but not worth the summer-season ticket price. Best advice here is to wait for the mass-market edition.

Recurring Roles

Two recent hardbacks compete for the status of most-anticipated series entry in recent months. The first of these is *The Hedge of Mist* (HarperPrism, \$22.00), which brings Patricia Kennealy-Morrison's "Tales of Arthur" Celtic triad to a close in high style. As usual, this Celts-in-space saga is narrated with an assured hand and a crisp sense of language, and the present volume finds Kennealy-Morrison putting a decidedly unusual spin on the legends surrounding Arthur and the Holy Grail. The author's taste for pagan and neo-pagan legend shows a little more strongly in this book than in her earlier novels, but the result adds to its intriguing quality rather than detracting from it.

Second, of course, is David Weber's *Honor Among Enemies* (Baen, \$21.00), the first of the Honor Harrington adventures to debut in hardcover. It's a satisfyingly thick volume, with plenty of action and a fistful of intriguing subplots. One of these, involving a would-be mutineer, is paid off rather abruptly toward the volume's end, but otherwise the series is as strong as ever, with engaging heroes and a wide-ranging cast of adversaries. One subtle and amusing design element is worth noting; a quick riffling of the illustrated corners of the books pages produces a clever "flipbook" combat scene.

Sharon Shinn's *Archangel* (Ace, \$13.95) is utterly unlike her first novel, *The Shape-Changer's Wife*, but it's no less compelling for all that. Science fiction rather than fantasy, it takes readers to a highly unusual world where only the combined efforts of angels and humans can keep planetary disaster at bay — no small challenge amid a host of unthinkable betrayals and deadly rivalries. Both the romance and the language here are somewhat less striking than those of her prior book, but Shinn is still a skillful, highly inventive storyteller, and this new tale is not to be missed.

Scholar of Decay (TSR, \$5.99) is veteran writer Tanya Huff's contribution to the Ravenloft milieu, and as might be expected, Huff provides a clever and well-crafted yarn involving estranged brothers marked for tragedy by a clan of were-rats. What's interesting about this book is that Huff manages both to retain her own flair for smooth characterization and to evoke a setting that feels consistent with the larger AD&D® game multiverse. This has been a problem in a number of the RAVENLOFT® books, and it's good to see that the two goals can indeed be met within a single volume.

John C. Bunnell is convinced that books are more addictive than coffee, cigarettes, and Diet Coke combined, but he refuses to seek treatment. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" may be addressed to him at 6663 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy. #326, Portland, OR 97225-1403.

TURN THE PAGE FOR PART II OF "THE BARGAIN"


CREDITS

STORY
JEFF GRUBB

ART
ROBB RUPPEL
TONY DIETERLIZZI

For the complete story behind "The Bargain," read the PLANESCAPE™ boxed set, *Hellbound: The Blood War*. The set also features DM and players guides to the Blood War, a full-color digest of illustrations and maps, and three adventures that change the war — and the fiends — forever.


COMPUTER GRAPHICS
& DESIGN
DAWN MURIN



Damn.

Damn damn damn.

Damn.




I expected a hero's
welcome, and I find her ...
I find that balor ...


I find them both ...

Excuse me?

Damn damn damn.




Forgive me for interrupting, but I
must ask. Are you not the
Zaxarus, hero of Malevolus, the
great caution spy?



An arcanaloth. Loyal to
neither side in the Blood War.
Always making a deal with
everyone. They are as slippery
as a greased basilisk, and just
as deadly.

Yes, I am *that* Zaxarus.

Not that it matters.



What? Well, of COURSE it matters. Every chasme is simply *abuzz* with your exploits. I've heard you've brought some sort of great documents back with you.

A battle plan.
Nothing
important.

basilisk



ANY wish?

Important enough to
those who are interested.

Arcanaloths are little
better than *vipers*...

I have... a client, if you will, who
is *very* interested in
seeing the plans you hold.

... smug little snakes
wrapped in velvet and
fine lies...

This client would reward you well.


... serpents without honor...

Sold, magic, renown—my client is
powerful enough to grant *ANY* wish.

ANY WISH!



Ah, I have struck a
nerve. Now what
would a half-breed like
you wish for?



I'd wish for Alam . . . no,
for *everyone* to know my
achievements, to know
who I *am*.
I want to be recognized
for my deeds.

I want to be
known as a *hero*.

I think that can be
arranged.

A planar portal — *here*?
Where does it lead?

To my client.

Can he grant
my wish?

Yes. I want all the
Abyss to know I am
a *hero*. That I risk
my lives for theirs.

When does your
client get here?

Granting reputation and honor are as
simple as *children's* toys for my
client. Is *that* the deal you wish to
make? Recognition — *heroism* — for
the battle plans?



I am already **HERE**, little fiend!

The arcanaloth's client is an *asimon*, a being of pure light. Goodness Incarnate. My flesh crawls at the very touch of its radiance. Its pompous lawfulness ripples across my skin like acid.

THIS small being brings the plans?

He is like any other creature — he has his wants and desires. His mortal blood betrays him.

What **ARE** his desires?

Fame. Recognition. Admiration.
The usual.

I want the tanar'ri to respect me as a *hero*. I want to show I'm *better* than that sodding balor. I want *Alamanda* to respect me. To love only me.

And in exchange, he will hand over the baatezu's plans for assaulting Malvolus.





DONE!












To select a topic, left click on its button. To receive help on a topic, right click on the topic text. For an explanation of the current screen, left click on the Wizard button.









Player Character

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-  [Update Existing Character](#)
-  [Enter Existing Character](#)
-  [View Character Sheet](#)


Books On Line

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-  [Monstrous Manual™](#)
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-  [Tome of Magic](#)
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 Wizard

The Electronic Wizard



A sneak preview of the AD&D® CD-ROM

by Steve Winter

Most of you reading this have probably already guessed that working in TSR's Creative Division has certain perks, from a gamer's point of view.

One of the best is that we know all about upcoming AD&D® game products long before anyone else (because besides writing, editing, illustrating, and producing the products, we decide what they'll be in the first place).

Even better, we get to see what people outside TSR are doing with licensed products. That's been particularly exciting during the past year, when we've worked with Evermore Entertainment, Inc., on the upcoming AD&D CD-ROM Core Rules for Windows.

Before I get started describing what's on the CD-ROM, I want to stress right up front that the software I've seen and played with is still under development. There will be changes between the time of this writing and the time the product goes on sale (it premieres at the GEN CON Game Fair). Because of deadline differences between printed and electronic material (it takes longer to print this magazine than to make a CD), you'll probably find differences between the software I'm describing and what's on the demo disk in this issue. Some screens may look different and some functions may operate differently; the folks at Evermore Entertainment are working constantly to improve the look and performance of the program (and I do mean constantly; the last time we visited the EE offices, some of their artists had been at their desks for almost 24 hours and had only recently gone home to catch a few hours' sleep before returning to demonstrate their latest accomplishments.)

The best place to start looking at the CD-ROM is in the table of contents. It's divided into three sections: Player Character, Books On Line, and DM Toolkit. We'll discuss them in detail, but slightly out of order.

Books On Line

The heart of the CD is the complete text of the *Player's Handbook*, *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, *MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome*, *Arms & Equipment Guide*, and *Tome of Magic*. Every word from these five manuals is available in both rich text and word processor format.

In rich text format, the text can be read like a help file. All five books are completely cross-referenced and hyper-text

linked both internally and to each other. If you're looking for information on a particular topic, you can find it by scanning the table of contents and clicking on the desired section, by entering the "key topic" search utility and typing the words you're searching for, or by scrolling through text until you come to the pages you want.

At the end of each sub-section of text is a list of cross-references to related material in all five of the books; click on a word, and you're there.

Assume, for example, that you're reading about elves in the *Player's Handbook*. At the end of that section you will find a string of related topics. By clicking on one of the key words, you can instantly send yourself to the elf entry in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, to a description of elven chain mail in the *Arms & Equipment Guide*, to the bonuses and penalties assigned to elven thieves, and numerous other topics that involve elves.

You can also click on highlighted words embedded in the articles and do the same thing. In the description of elf characters, for example, is a mention of their immunity to sleep and *charm* spells. By clicking on those words, you can jump instantly to the descriptions of the spells, and then back again to the elf character rules.

The books are also stored in a format compatible with the word processor program that comes packaged with every copy of Windows. If you don't like the way I edited the 2nd Edition handbooks, you can pull the text into the word processor and rewrite, revise, and reorganize to your heart's content. If you play with a house rule that lets a shield improve AC by three points instead of one, you can make those changes directly to Table 46 in the *Player's Handbook*, then store that file on disk or print out a copy for everyone in your campaign to insert into their *PHBs*. Or, you could build one file containing all the spells from the *PHB* and the *Tome of Magic*, reorganize them however you want, and then build a second file containing only the

Before using the demo disk, try to play it as an audio CD in your CD-ROM drive. If you hear sound, everything's fine. If you don't hear it, do not use the Wizard function in the demo it'll lock up your system and make you reboot). The other features will still work normally.



spells that are in your character's spell book. Add a snazzy border from the DM's Toolkit, print it out, and you have a professional-looking spellbook to attach to your character sheet. And you didn't have to retype anything!

Player Character

As impressive as the on-line manuals are, character manipulation is where the program really starts to shine. The Player Character options on the main menu include Generate New Character, Update Existing Character, Enter Existing Character, and View Character Sheet.

Some of those are self-explanatory, but the character generation utility is of special interest. This is, by far, the fastest, easiest way to create an AD&D character that has ever been put together.

The process starts by selecting which dice-rolling method you want to use to generate the six ability scores. When the scores come up, you can alter them if you want (for the cheaters out there). The screen highlights every race and class combination that is open to a character with those ability scores. Click on the one you want and the ability scores are modified automatically, if necessary.

From there, you go on to select priest or wizard spells (with the computer handling all the dice rolls for learning and guaranteeing that you don't select too few or too many), assign discretionary points to thieving skills, select an alignment, roll hit points, and select weapon and nonweapon proficiencies. Not sure what a particular nonweapon proficiency lets you do? Click on it and get a description.

The best part about all this is that the whole process is foolproof. At each step the computer displays every alternative and prompts you for a choice. You click on the option you want, the computer makes all the adjustments, and you're on to the next step. The whole process,

using every optional rule in the core handbooks, can be completed by even the most fastidious min/maxer in 10-15 minutes. That's an impressive performance for a task that can take an experienced player up to an hour with dice and paper.

Better yet, there is no possibility of making a mistake. No optional rule can be forgotten or misinterpreted, no modifier can be written down wrong, no table can be misread. If you don't like the way things are turning out, you can back up to a previous step and try again, or simply override the computer. (Even illegal combinations, like dwarf paladin/bards, can be requested; if your DM allows it, none dare call it cheating.)

If you have a character already, you can type it into the character database and get it printed out on the attractive, color character sheet. After each playing session, a few keystrokes update the electronic record so it is ready for the next game.

There's also a gallery of head-and-shoulders character portraits. You can pick the one that looks most like your PC and plug it into the character sheet. Because they are bitmap files, you can load a portrait that's close, but not quite right, into Paint or Paintbrush (you have one of them if you're running Windows) and modify it to look exactly the way you want. (This assumes you have enough artistic talent to do that sort of bitmap editing, but anyone who paints miniatures should have no problem.)

DM Toolkit

This portion of the CD-ROM is a collection of utilities that are invaluable to any Dungeon Master. A list of the options under DM Toolkit includes: Handout Generator, Treasure Generator, Monster Generator, NPC Generator, Encounter Generator, Map Maker, Dice Rolls, and Table Rolls.

The handout generator is a collection of preset word processor page formats for making attractive printouts to hand to the players. Lend any document an air of authenticity, or simply dress it up, with a variety of colorful, medieval-looking borders or a scroll background.

The treasure generator does much more than randomly determine how many coins and gems a monster has in its pockets or its lair. If the DM wants, it will completely identify every item in a treasure hoard, from art objects to armor to magical items and scrolls with multiple spells. It uses all of the treasure

tables in the core rules. The DM can add new items of his own to those tables or delete items that don't fit into his campaign, and those changes will always be taken into account every time a new treasure is needed.

The monster generator is a series of prompts that helps you create new monsters for your campaign. The trickiest aspect of monster designing — calculating experience points — is handled by a simple, yes-or-no, point-and-click menu.

The NPC generator is a stripped-down version of the character generator. You can skip steps along the way, alter things as much as you like, break the rules, or just let the computer crank out NPCs at a lightning pace. (This is really handy for those times when you want a fully fleshed-out band of 30 individualized brigands but don't want to spend your valuable time rolling dice. The computer can do it in a minute or two, saving you time and reducing wear and tear on your wrist.) The computer will even name your NPCs if you wish.

The encounter generator is one of the features that I'm looking forward to the most. It is remarkably flexible and will save a great deal of time for DMs who use random encounter tables. To build an encounter table, you select the type of terrain and the level of play. The computer scans its database of monsters and builds a table with all the correct probabilities according to monster frequency, toughness, and terrain type.

You can also pre-assemble encounters but let the computer do all the dice rolling to determine the number of monsters appearing, their hit points, the weapons they carry, and their treasures.

The map maker is a utility beyond price. This functions much like a paint program. You select the type of terrain, then point and click it onto the map.

There are three map scales (and sets of icons) to choose from: dungeon/building interior, city, and countryside. All of them use a top-down view for clarity, with some orthographic (perspective) elements to add a nice bit of dash. The maps are drawn on a square grid but the computer will overlay a hex grid, if you prefer, or remove the grid entirely for a more natural look (especially nice for player maps, if the DM wants to keep obvious game mechanics out of his handouts).

But the fun doesn't stop there. Anyone can draw maps. Remember the encounter generator? The encounters created with that tool can be keyed to



the maps. They appear as a capital letter; click on that letter and a window opens with the description of your encounter. All the notes for your dungeon rooms, city buildings, and wilderness areas can be linked directly to the maps so there's no paper shuffling to find out what's where. With the monsters, NPCs, encounters, and treasures generated earlier plugged into your maps for instant reference, you're switched on and ready to rock.

Obviously, this system works best if the computer is sitting on your gaming table. But even if you can't bring the computer to the game, you can print everything out and have it in nice, neat, well-ordered, legible pages. And it's easy to update without erasing or scribbling notes in the margins. (Have you ever tried updating a hand-drawn color map after gnoll raiders pass through the frontier and burn a dozen villages to the ground? If so, you'll really appreciate this map maker.)

One last feature of the mapping utility has to be mentioned: 3-D. After drawing a dungeon map in the standard top-down view, the computer will convert it to a first-person perspective, you-are-there, 3-D view that you can walk through (electronically, of course).

Besides just being a lot of fun to play with, this is a great way to improve your dungeon designing skill. You can see exactly what the characters would see from any position in the dungeon.

Remember *Tomb of Horrors*? Or *Labyrinth of Madness*? Those adventures came with illustration booklets so the DM could show players what they saw when they entered a room. You can create your own illustrated dungeon adventures with this 3-D mapping tool by printing out the screen images you want the players to see.

The function of the die rolls and table rolls tools is pretty obvious, so I won't belabor it here.

The Wizard

All of this is wrapped up with two help features: the wizard and the right mouse button. As in most Windows programs, right-clicking on an icon or screen button brings up a brief description of what it does. That description is also interactive, in that you can use it to jump to the topics mentioned in the help window. Clicking the wizard button brings in — you guessed it — the wizard, who presents a brief, animated tutorial on all the functions that can be accessed from the current page.

Putting it all together

What excites me the most about this project is that the whole is much more than the sum of its parts. The tools and the text can be combined in so many ways, to accomplish so many different tasks, that I haven't even begun to scratch the surface in this article. It's clear to me that the work going on at Evermore Entertainment is opening up a whole new area of role-playing accessories. Try the demo disk, and I think you'll agree.

And one last note: I'd like to acknowledge the work of puppetmaster Bill Connors, whose flawless master plan and behind-the-scenes manipulation brought us this fine product. His unwitting tools have performed beautifully.



By age 24, Steve Winter was mired in an endless spiral of easy women, fast cars, cheap liquor, and dirty money. Then in 1981 he took a job with TSR inc. and has never looked back. Besides a full-time job overseeing the AD&D® game, he keeps himself busy with a wife, two sons, a 90-year-old house, a 47-year-old Chevrolet truck, and a six-month-old computer.



Tales of the Fifth Age



Measure of the Home Guard

by J. Robert King

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

9 SE:

With the departure of the gods and the death of Lord Knight Gunthar Uth Wistan, the Knights of Solamnia faced dissolution. In the ninth year after the Second Cataclysm, however, Gunthar's successor gathered the Knights for a High Council at Whitestone Glade. There, he revealed for the first time the foundations of a new Measure...

— from the *Chronicles of Nathal*, compiled in 31 SE

I knew it was a big mistake, but at least it was my mistake. At least, and at last, my own big mistake.

I'd been living out dad's mistakes all my life: stuck on his farm in Markennan, slopping pigs he bought and never tended, fixing the house he let fall to pieces, tilling the rocky ground that the only one good spot of which was the bottom land where he was buried, bringing in turnips and beans not fit for pigs but fit for me until one of the pigs was big enough to eat, loading the wagon with slop for the pigs and then actually drawing it myself since dad, when he died, took with him the only one worthwhile thing I ever owned, which was my mule, Vinas Solamnus.

Sure I'd been building muscles, but for what?

And all the while, there was evil at large in the world. Even in Gunthar, itself. Not in Markennan, of course. Markennan was too boring to attract anything evil. But in Garret and Khas, for sure there was evil. I met a fellow from Khas who once even saw a draconian. There sure enough was evil out there needing a bashing and me in here with muscles all itching to bash something and never the twain shall meet.

Well, this evening they were going to meet. That's what I was going off to do with this first big mistake of mine.

I penned up the pigs and left a lantern going in my room with my work coat kind of slumped up on my chair by the window so Charla wouldn't come by and let the pigs out and try to ride them. Then I went out the back door and off toward Whitestone Glade.

You see I, Jarrad Borfson, was hiking out to join the Knights of Solamnna.

I know, I know, that's not the way you join the Knights. You don't just show up at a meeting of the Grand Circle and say to them, "I, Jarrad Borfson, hiked out here to join you." But I told myself that any Knight who loved justice and learned that a man with my frame and my mind and my love of justice was farming pigs — such a Knight would have to save me. I no more belonged on the farm than a draconian belonged in Khas.

Of course, I half expected to be run out of there. That's why I didn't sell the pigs and farm before going. On the other hand, if the Knights turned me down, I'd run the pigs off and burn the farm, just on principle. Still, I wanted to get into the Knighthood, and there were a couple things I could do to help my chances.

One was to prove I was brave, which meant bringing with me some token of my fighting skill. The problem was, I'd been so distracted by the pigs and piling up my coat against the window, I'd

forgotten to bring anything like that — not that I had anything to bring. I'd spent two years in a regular war against raccoons, once even chasing one over the barn roof until I fell through, but I didn't have even a cap or a tail to prove any of it. Besides, I didn't figure raccoons counted as forces of darkness, though they should.

Maybe just showing up at a Knights' Council would be proof enough of my courage, I thought suddenly. Or my stupidity.

The other thing I could do to help my case was, once I got there, to get one of them to sponsor me. That would mean squire work. Spit-shining boots and spear-bearing and saying things like "Good show, Sir Knight!" I wouldn't mind that kind of work. It wasn't just a step above pig farming; it was a whole staircase.

I'd gone off like a half-wit, true enough, with only my tunic, breeches, boots, a few daggers, and a mangy deerskin cape. But at least I'd gone off, which until then I'd not done at all. As I said, I'd been too long living out dad's mistakes (what he'd called his "dreams," which amounted to things he thought he'd be good at but wasn't), and figured it was time to make some mistakes of my own.

It was probably just as well I left my brain behind: evil was waiting up the road, ready to bash in what I hadn't even brought along.

It was coming on to dusk when I wended transverse up a long-sloped swale full of pixie grass and little dots of white and pink beggarweed. I looked up and saw, at the upper edge of a fenced pasture atop the rise, two fellows standing and talking.

Now, I knew right off these weren't farmers. Farmers don't stand to talk. They sit on their heels because what is there to talk about but the ground and what's growing on it? Neither do they sit on a fence, like the one was doing now, because nobody who has had to split his own rails and notch them and post them is going to sit on them and break them down, like just happened to the one fellow.

While this one was getting up and the other was laughing into his hand, I got closer and could see what they wore. Armor, black and scarred as lard-boiling kettles, and capes equally black, and above all this, faces whiter than mushrooms, like these fellows lived underground. City folk. They had swords, too, which I didn't. I carried only a stout stick that I'd picked up because it was lying on dad's grave, and which I'd kept because it had the right weight and swing for a walking stick. I didn't know what city folk were doing out here breaking down somebody's fence, but I didn't have time to ask.

I didn't need to. "Hey, Farmer," one of them shouted to me. Again, it showed they weren't.

Farmers don't call each other farmer, any more than human beings say, "Hey, Human Being." Anyway, he called out, "Hey, Farmer, where do you think you're going?"

"I'm going to Whitestone Glade, to join the Knights," I said as I got near.

They, the two — the one talking had black hair and a mean little goatee like on Jesse's prize ram, Puggins, and the other one was as blond as the dust he was still trying to knock out of his pants — they stepped into my way.

The dark-haired one complained, "Not another one. Go back home, Farmer." He sniffed, his nose flaring like he was more used to coal smoke than manure-smell. "The Knights don't need any pigs, Farmer."

I stopped and stood, my head back on my neck like a rooster ready to pluck out an eye. "Yeah? Well, how do you know? Are you a Knight?"

They thought that was pretty funny, and then Puggins said, "We are. But Knights of a different color."

Knights of Takhisis, I realized. See? Evil at large, and not five miles from my barned-up pigs.

I lifted the staff the way I saw a prophet do on a woodcut, and I said, "Out of my way."

Next thing I knew, I was looking up at them from the ground, and they were laughing again. Two on one's never fair, of course, but these two — a yearling pig could outweigh either of them. Besides, I'd so convinced myself of my strength, wrestling hay bales and all, that I was surprised to find that villains wrestled back.

I stood up. They let me. This time I raised the stick not like a holy staff but like a club. "Let me by."

More of that jackanapes laughter, like dogs wheezing with croup. Puggins sneered, "We haven't let anybody else by yet. Why should you be the first?"

I walloped him. Just like that. As he went down, I couldn't help thinking how his head looked like a black-haired raccoon beneath my walking stick.

It seemed like an all right thing to do. I go to a temple of Kiri-Jolith where if you talk during the service, they club you in the head. Now, if a priest could do that in a temple, and to well-meaning people, why couldn't I do it in a field and to an evil-meaning Knight of darkness? Besides, it wouldn't hurt too bad. I knew from experience how this fellow felt as he staggered around and clutched his head. You see, I used to talk sometimes in the temple.

No sooner than I pulled my stick back, the other one had his sword out and was coming for me.

His sword was sharp. It cut the last four inches from my stick. I thought swords weren't supposed to

be sharp but be like plowshares, where a sharp edge would notch too easy. I've since decided these particular Knights were in with Takhisis more for the fashion of the armor than for real battle, and their swords were ornaments that hadn't been used against anybody before me. But, at the time, this guy seemed a true servant of evil, and the four inches could have come off me rather than the stick.

He took a jab at me and caught me in the rib. Yeah, it was a sharp sword. I didn't even feel it, except the wet heat like sweat rolling down my gut. He sneered to see it.

I couldn't figure why he'd done that except sheer meanness and stupidity. Sneering at a guy that's three times your weight just after you stab him is like kicking a bear and then taunting it. I suddenly wasn't hurt or scared or anything, just plain mad.

"Raauurr!" I said. I'd always thought my first battle cry would have more poetry, naming the honor of my dead dad or maybe the love of Clarabella Gabriella Brendabule of the Garret Brendabules, but this was all I got out.

Still, the stick whacked him good on the head, whacked him good enough that it — the stick — broke in two and sent him stumbling around like Puggins.

Only Puggins wasn't stumbling anymore. He was up and ready to fight. For that matter, I no longer had a stout walking stick, but a stout crawling stick. My boot helped Blondy to the ground, but not before I snatched away his too-sharp sword and whirled on Puggins.

He looked disappointed that my stick'd turned into a sword. Still, there was wounded pride in his eyes, and the part in his hair crossed a rising goose egg. He swung at me. I knocked his sword back with a big roundhouse clang. It nearly spun him around. I didn't even pretend to know what I was doing with a sword. I just put up my fists like this was a brawl, and when I'd take a punch at him, I'd make sure the blade got between us.

It must've looked queer, a fellow with a sword fighting like he had only knuckles. Puggins might've laughed if I hadn't just banged him in the shoulder. From underneath a metal plate, blood came smooth and even.

Still, he wouldn't stop. Puggins wanted a piece of me, and he came on like he was going to knock me down with an elbow. Now, even a dumb goat won't ram an oak tree: goats don't like headaches anymore than anybody else. Well, this goat got one, quick, his head meeting my free fist.

His sword dug down into my punching arm.

I felt that one. I slugged him another one in the head, and he staggered back, dragging the sword

through the wound in my arm. Enough was enough. I pulled my arm away and stabbed the Knight in the leg. He went down after that, and I could tell he'd not be walking again anytime soon. I looked at his friend, who lay unconscious on a rock nearby. There was a heck of a lot of blood on that rock, but that's the way it is with head wounds. It didn't mean anything.

I wasn't in great shape, myself. The cut on my arm was deep and bled evenly, though I could move my fingers, and the one over my rib stung with sweat. Still, I could walk, and bandage myself while I did. I'd get to Whitestone Glade looking all the better for wear... and carrying the sword of a Knight of Takhisis. That ought to be worth something.

I turned, and continued on up the path, which ran for a little bit along the pasture fence before it cut into some old-growth forest.

"Hey, Farmer!" shouted Puggins as I walked away. "You're just going to leave us here to die?"

"I'm going to Whitestone Glade. I'm going to join the Knights of Solamnia," I answered, wrapping my arm and refusing to look back.

"It's dishonorable to leave a foe to die," Puggins pointed out.

This gave me pause for a moment, until I heard the nearby buzz and distant crack of a crossbow bolt whiz past my ear and strike a tree ahead of me.

I glanced at Puggins, who struggled to reload the hand-crossbow he bore. I shook my head. He'd just been trying to get my goat so I'd turn and he could shoot me between the eyes. "I'm not a Knight yet," I told him. "Besides, the farmer'll find you two — the fellow who built this fence you tore up. If you aren't dead before that, you'll probably be dead after."

He might not have heard the last, because I was already in the woods. It didn't matter. They'd tried to stop me from going to join the Solamnic Knights, even tried to kill me, and then they'd ended up lying in a bed of their own blood — which they'd made in spite of me and which they'd asked me to help them out of only to shoot at me when I considered. . . .

Evil seems, sometimes, just too stupid to be really harmful.

It was still miles and miles to Whitestone Glade. I'd not be there until three hours after sundown, and by then the blood-soaked rag around my arm would be cold with night.

I walked. It got dark.

Around me was an old-growth forest from the time of Vinas Solamnus, which held in it a few newer glades, where fires had once reduced everything to primeval blackness, or where saplings grew up through ruined rafters and birds nested in chimneys of old, abandoned farms. I started won-

dering if this was what would become of dad's place, wrested away from nature only to be plowed and plied awhile in futility and then given back to nature, again, like some broken and worthless tool.

It was funny: trees that had taken root before even the Third Dragon War stood beside plots of ground that wouldn't grow a damned stalk of corn. It made me think of the difference between Vinas Solamnus and me: His smallest actions changed the whole world for all of time, and yet I can't even fix the barn latch and make it stay fixed.

I almost went back, then and there. I'd never make a Knight. I wasn't noble. I wasn't anything at all. A wise man once said that cats look down on you, and dogs look up to you, but a pig'll look you in the eye and see his equal. That was me — Jarrad Borfson, first among equals when tending pigs.

In fact, I would have turned back but for that sword in my hand. It had been the tool of evil, and now, here it was, in a muscular grip pledged at least to pigs and perhaps even to good. That silly, sharpened, ornamental sword told me I must go on. Let Charla ride my pigs. I must go on.

The very next voice of intuition issued a countermand — "Halt!" In actual fact, it wasn't a voice of intuition, but an honest-to-goodness voice. "I said 'Halt,' Farmer!"

This wouldn't be another farmer, either. I halted but still held that sword up from my hand, ready to punch.

From out of a big yew bush came a soldier, his armor all scarred and polished gray metal, and his face serious with one of those long drooping knight mustaches. He looked me up and down, gave one sniff, and said, "Where're you off to, Farmer?"

I found myself dropping for a moment to one knee, my head dipping toward my chest like I was trying to stop a belch. (This was the way you'd start off when talking to Kiri-Jolith in the temple.) "I, Jarrad Borfson, am here to become a Knight of Solamnia."

The man sheathed the sword he had, crossed his arms on his breastplate, and looked down at me. That is, he looked down until I stood up, and then he had to crane his neck back to see me. "You know, Farmer, you don't just show up at a meeting of the Grand Circle and —"

"I know, Sir Knight. Well said," I replied, having expected this and rehearsed it a few times on my way in. "But I was just so sick of the pigs, and there's evil at large — in Gunthar, even, not twelve miles back —"

His eye on me glared as if he were picking out a soldier for latrine-cleaning duty. "You're of the faithful of Kiri-Jolith?"

"Why, yes, Sir Knight," I said with pride. He must have guessed it from the way I'd knelt and dipped my head. I suddenly felt ashamed of my pride. "The pigs keep me pretty busy, and sometimes I miss services. I guess I've not been completely faithful in about five years."

He smiled. "That's all right. Kiri-Jolith's not been faithful since the Second Cataclysm." As to what he meant by that, I couldn't've told. "When you say there's evil in Gunthar, you're right about that."

"I know it," I said. I gestured over my shoulder with the sword, which I realized was a mistake when two more Knights came out of two more yew bushes and pointed crossbows at me. I smiled and dropped the sword to the ground. "I ran into two Knights of Takhisis who wanted to keep me from coming here. This — " I gestured at the ground " — is the sword of one of them."

The three Knights traded nervous looks, and then the lead one unfolded his arms and picked up my sword. "Knights of Takhisis, aye? We'll have to take this sword — and your other weapons — but then you can come in. I'm sure the new Grand Master would like a talk with you."

I nodded in stunned-dumb excitement, and then quickly flicked all my weapons onto the ground, including my boot dagger and the little knife that I use only to clean my teeth. Again, they looked fearful each time my hand darted into my clothes, but I was so fast at flinging the weapons away that I was done before anybody could shoot me. They checked for other weapons, but I'd gotten them all. The first Knight that had spoken said to his friends, "I'll escort him to the glade."

The other two nodded, and rustled their way back into the bushes. My guide and I started forward, into a birch forest.

I noticed now that what we walked was not just ground, but a kind of secret path, like a deer trail, except made by the feet of iron-shod Knights. However he was shod, the man in front of me moved with the silence of a deer. The narrow black channel we followed wound like a little runoff creek among the indigo leaves of the boarscrub, and even though I walked as quietly as possible, the scrub prattled around my ankles. Soon, a breeze came among the gray birch boles, which swayed in the darkness around us. The small, eye-shaped leaves overhead winked down.

The ground rose. The forest was open between the slender trunks, and in the darkness I saw old, old boulders stranded, half-sunk, in the hillside. Now leaves brushed our shoulders, and the land opened up so that, in daylight, it would have shimmered and glowed. We climbed the trail. It

switched back patiently, and up farther. Even though I couldn't see it for the leaves and the slivered moonlight, I could feel the whole vast world dropping slowly down beneath me as we climbed the rise. It is what a tree must feel when it goes from seed to sapling to sentinel, goes from being a tiny idea under everything to being a big actuality above everything.

We rounded another weathered wedge of stone, rooted in the ground like a worn-out giant-tooth, and then there it was — Whitestone Glade. The ground dipped just before us, between two boulders, which stood sentry at the mouth of the glade as though to keep the trees back. Beyond the stones was a great flat clearing that held the Whitestone.

Megalith is a word I once heard, and it fit for that thing. The Whitestone looked like a chunk of Solinari fallen to Krynn, or perhaps the whole moon itself. The stone was taller than the trees and so big that it sent moon shadows down over half the glade. It sat on a tapestry of grass that was mottled with rain and lantern light — and the figures of Knights.

There must have been a hundred Knights there, more than I thought there to be in all Ansalon, let alone Gunthar. Some sat on stone-hewn benches in rows before the megalith, others squatted or knelt like Abanasinian savages in the open spaces to either side, and others still stood at the back of the glade. Wherever they were, the Knights were as hushed and attentively leaning as the stone itself.

My eyes returned to the Whitestone. The boulder looked old enough to have seen the creation of the gods. It was at this stone that Vinas Solamnus had had his revelation, and beside this stone that the Grand Circle of Knights had met, in dire times like these, since the Cataclysm.

Right now, to either side of the stone, were seated a regal company of Knights, the heads of each order and other such dignitaries. In front of the stone stood a black-haired, wise-looking Knight, his silvery armor draped with a velvet stole that was embroidered with the symbols of a three-thousand-year-old order. This was, I figured, the new Grand Master, Sir Ehrling, Knight of the Rose. He was addressing the Knights, his voice commanding and robust, his muscular hands raised as though he spoke to the black skies above.

I realized I was on my knees. I'd not meant to kneel, but sometimes your body knows better what you should do than you do. The soldier with me was not impressed. He helped me up and patted my back. "It's all right. Perhaps you should sit until the ceremony is done."

I remember intending to nod, but realized I was already sitting beside one of those sentry stones. The Knight stood there next to me.

I was stupefied — a pig in heaven. That's how I felt — dumb, dirty, unworthy. I thought again of my pigs, crowded into the barn back home, and I wondered whatever idiot impulse had sent me hiking out here as if these Knights would ever have me. You can wash a pig and shave him down and put him in armor, but still, what you've got is a pig.

I bit my lip and cursed myself. Here I was, at a meeting of the Grand Circle, and hadn't even enough sense to listen to what the Knight at the center of it all was saying. I cursed even my cursing, for having stolen from me the last few words he'd spoken. Then I finally settled down enough to listen:

"...Three decades past, a work was begun by Lord Gunthar and, I daresay, by Paladine and Kiri-Jolith and Habbakuk: To revise and reform the Measure of the Knighthood. I worked closely with Lord Gunthar in this endeavor. How ironic that the Second Cataclysm has accomplished a more radical revision of the very the world in less time than we could dutifully and carefully revise our own Measure! Our beloved Lord Knight Gunthar labored in both transformations — the rebirth of the world and the revision of the Measure. These monumental labors bore him to the grave.

"Lord Gunthar is dead. The gods are gone. The great library of Palanthas has been torn away. The old Measure has been parsed and redacted and distilled into nonsense. It is as though the wisdom of the past ages cannot be the wisdom of today.

"In this new age, then, how do we measure ourselves? In an age when elves and ogres fight side-by-side against the chaos armies of the dead, what measure remains? When Knights of Solamnia and Knights of Takhisis are buried like comrades at the Last Heroes' Tomb, what measure remains?"

I trembled at that. Knights of Takhisis buried beside Knights of Solamnia? Had I done a terrible thing on the road to reach this place? Had right and wrong, themselves, shifted around me?

"These are strange times, and all the world has changed. Can we measure our honor by an oblivious and unchanged code?"

"Est Sularus oth Mithas — My Honor is My Life. For ages, honor has been taken to mean cleaving to that which is right and good. Honor meant bravely and wisely championing justice in the lives of others, and practicing temperance in our own living. Honor meant battling evil in all its thousand manifestations. A Knight's life, quite simply, was the honest practice of these virtues and the valorous warfare against evil.

"But now, the gods of good and evil are gone. Anyone who fights for Paladine or Kiri-Jolith or Habbakuk fights for nothing, at all. . . ."

I was not the only one who groaned in amazed dismay at that pronouncement. (I had heard idlers in the granary speak of the departure of the gods but thought they knew less about gods than they did about grains.) It occurred to me that this disappearance must have been what the guard meant about Kiri-Jolith's unfaithfulness.

The black-haired man was not done. "So too, anyone who fights for Takhisis or Sargonnas or Chemosh fights for nothing, at all.

"And, we have seen it so. Chromatic dragons have fought beside metallic dragons. We have done it, ourselves. Solamnic Knights have fought side-by-side and arm-in-arm with followers of Takhisis. Mortals, the living — whomever they worshiped — have, across our globe, banded together to fight the immortal dead — frost-wights, shadow-wights, daemon warriors, and the forces of Chaos. All living creatures have found themselves in a battle in which the division of good and evil is too minute to matter, in which the foe is absolute dissolution — immortal and eternal death. Death for every creature, and for all. This is our true foe, now."

I was feeling sick right about then.

From the moment I'd fallen to my knees at the entrance to the glade, I'd felt my soul changing in me. First came those tormented despairing moments of waking when you realize just how long you've slept in a dead futile pointlessness of complaining and failing. Then, my soul came awake fully. My eyes were open at last, and my ears heard truth instead of the tolling carillon of dream. I could only breathe. I listened to the beautiful, golden sound of his voice — the voice of the Grand Master. It was breath in me.

My soul rose up on listening like a bird on warm spring air. I saw myself from above, this big, slumped-over pig farmer, a dirty and desperate brute hoping for Knighthood. I soared higher and saw the whole midnight glade, glowing with lanterns and moonlight, yes, but with souls more than anything else. We were all lights, all brilliant fires, even me, who'd been until that moment only dead dull coal. Higher still, and I saw the glowing hope of each of the sentries' souls, and the animals in that wood, and even the trees themselves. The whole place was luminous.

It was as if, before, we'd had a sun above to light the darkness, but now there was no sun, only us. So we were beginning to shine, we ourselves, and all our world around us.

The higher my soul flew on those words of his,

the more I saw: the farms around, lit with the shimmer-glow of nodding heads of wheat and the bright blaze of cows and chickens and pigs — pigs, like my own. Pigs. Living things. I knew then that when I looked into the eye of a pig and saw my equal, it was not because I was lowly or they exalted, but because we were both alive. We both stood against darkness and dissolution.

Up farther, and the sky above was black and empty, but the ground below was crowded with stars, with souls standing against the night. I saw, in time, all of Gunthar — the bright galaxy of my pigs, still in the barn, though Charla even now stalked up to the latch.

And then I saw the Ergoths, and Solamnia and all of Ansalon, all of Kryn. It was a heady height for any soul, especially that of a pig farmer.

Suddenly, though, I fell. It was as though the wind had quit my soul's wings, and I dropped like a pig from the sky. I guess that's just what had happened, because the Grand Master had reached the point in his talk where he was saying evil and good didn't matter anymore, and what we fought for was just plain life, just life pure and simple. No longer could I soar.

And, damned if I didn't come to ground in the worst possible place, the place next to that broken-down fence where lay those two Knights of Takhisis I'd bashed and left bleeding, dying. I realized just then that's what they were off there doing — dying!

And me, thinking I could be a Knight of Solamnia, fighting evil instead of fighting death. It was the sort of thing to shame a man more deeply than even being a pig farmer — than even being a bad pig farmer.

"I've got to go," I told the fellow beside me, who'd helped me sit, though I wasn't sitting any longer. He tried to help me sit again, but this time it was like he wasn't even there. I turned and plowed my way out between those two big stones. The fellow must've gotten scraped off in there somewhere, and I started running.

The trail wasn't very plain to me, especially since my eyes were used to the lanterns, but I knew which way I wanted to go and bulled along that direction. Maybe I was still partly seeing with my soul, because I could make out the thin gray ash boles all around me, and I ran among them like a pig fleeing the slaughter chute.

"I've got to go," I told myself as I ran, and then told it, too, to the guards standing there on duty. They'd been watching the trail the other way, and nearly jumped from their armor to hear a bull moose charging them from behind. Maybe that's

why they didn't shoot me, but just let me run past. "I've got to go."

I ran and ran. I fell down a lot. It was different running back on that dark track than it had been hiking up during the day and dusk. I was descending, from the highlands down to the coastal plains, and it was like one long irregular black staircase. My feet often caught short and jolted on nothing and let me plunge forward enough times I figured my brain'd be jarred near uselessness by the time I'd get there.

But I'd get there. I had to. It wasn't just a matter of honor. It was a matter of life and death.

I couldn't've said who was more hurt, the Knights of Takhisis or me, by the time I got there. Rips all over my tunic and jerkin, cold knees from mud and blood both, wounded arm, scratched face and throbbing bruises, breath that tore into and out of me like from a forge bellows. But I'd made it. Time to see if they would.

Puggins was cold, though still breathing pretty good. He'd dragged himself about a stone's throw away, and I smelled blood in the dewy grass. I figured he'd been trying to crawl over a short hedge row, but it'd defeated him as surely as I had. I picked him up — heavier than he'd looked, all in black — slung him over my shoulder, and hauled him to his buddy's side. There I put him down and turned to check the other.

Blondy wasn't quite as good. He'd not moved at all from the bloody rock that'd pillowed him when he went down, and now the rock was dry and crusted. I felt for breath and found none. There was only a faint drub-drub going on in his chest.

I sat back on my heels. He'd be gone soon, and nothing short of a paladin could save him now. I was no paladin.

I'd killed him, sure. I'd killed him with less thought than even killing a pig, because then at least you try to make it quick and painless. Of course, I don't know if a man should ever die quick and painless. Its too big a thing — to die. Death shouldn't be inconspicuous.

A little rattle from behind me made me think that though I'd killed one, I needn't have killed two. I turned around and started checking the man again, feeling for spots that were wet with warm blood, and stanching them first. My filthy, bloody tunic would not make the best bandage material, except that it was already in ready-made strips. I tried to use just clean, dry cloth, but when there weren't any left and there was more blood, I went ahead. I guess those mingled cloths made us, on some level, blood brothers.

I was near done, hunched shirtless over him,

when the dawn approached. Dew dotted the dry blood on my shoulders.

Before the celestial sun arose in the east, there came, tiny and manifold, a string of terrestrial suns moving through the glades and grasslands beneath the gloaming. Lanterns.

I didn't watch them come, the mounted Knights of Solamnia. It would've been a glorious sight to see, sure, the kind of thing that yesterday I'd've sold the whole farm just to see, but I wasn't feeling too glorious.

Dawn was showing up my butcher's work. It hadn't looked so bad when I had left them here. It had felt even justified, even ironically fitting, that the waylayers had been waylaid and the evil-hearted Knights'd been undone by a good-hearted pig farmer.

This morning, though, it was just a sickening shame of blood-ruined grass, lips cracked and brown-specked, arms clenched in tight coma against the cold, fists knotted as though if they let go of the thin air they held, body and soul and all would slide away into the netherworld. It all was my work, my butchery, and I was ashamed of it.

So, I kept working until the gray horse hooves of the lead rider wuffed to a stop in the dust ahead of me. Other hooves, behind, made their last, reluctant impacts and fell silent in the humming dawn. I looked up, past the steed's gray-haired fetlocks, deep-sculpted chestnuts, shoulders, neck, and dappled cheeks to its eyes. The horse returned my blinking stare, neither approving nor reproving. Above the old, wise equine face hovered the black-haired visage of the Solamnic Grand Master. His face was robust and red, his eyes like swords standing out of his skull.

He spoke. It was the same forceful voice from the glade, only quiet. "Are these the Knights of Takhisis you reported?"

Without looking away, I said, "Yes."

He nodded grimly. "How do they fare?"

"I didn't mean to kill either of them," I blurted. "I just wanted past, so I could go to the gathering and join the Knighthood, not that that's how you do it or that I ended up even trying, because when I heard your speech about there was no longer good and evil but only life and death, I realized that hitting them so hard with my stick had been just the wrong thing to do to become a Knight, so I rushed back here and found them —"

"How do they fare?" he asked again, with that same level voice.

"Not good," I confessed. "This one's not bleeding anymore, but he won't wake up and won't get warmer, even with my fur cape over him. The other

one's . . . well — I think he was gone before I even got back. If there's anything you can do to... I just. . . if, if they lived. . ."

The man didn't move a muscle, not even his lips, when he asked, "And how do you fare?"

I was kind of surprised by that. I figured there wasn't any use worrying about me at the moment. "I'm all right."

He shifted in his saddle. "You left an easy trail to follow, bloodier and bloodier as it went."

"I just wanted to get back here and put to rights what I did wrong."

He swung from the saddle and stepped down. "Son, war is war. After every treaty is signed, there are casualties. The word is slow in reaching all the battlefields. You did not know the war was over."

I looked up at him and implored. "Please, if you can do anything for —" My words stopped, because he'd touched his hands to me, and all of a sudden I was warm and whole again. I looked down at myself, and not a scratch remained on me. The sun rose just then and struck me and shone warm and welcoming on my new flesh, like I was a baby born at dawn. All nervy and weepy, I dropped to my knees in front of the man. "Thank you. Thank you."

There were others, now, those beautiful silver Knights stepping regally over the crimson grass and laying hands on the other two. Like breath blown over coals, their touch awakened the dying fires in the men, and they, soon, were whole again, blinking into wakefulness.

"Thank you," I repeated. "Thank you."

The Grand Master asked me my name, and I told it to him. Then, he said, "Jarrad Borfson, you've shown yourself worthy of the Knighthood, whether old or new. You have fought first evil, and now death. I will find, among the Crown Knights, a warrior in need of a worthy squire."

I looked tearily up at him. The Grand Master himself, addressing me, accepting me into the Knighthood. . . No other man in Markennan had been so honored, not for a thousand years, and certainly no pig farmer.

Pig farmer. I suddenly thought of my pigs and how I should be letting them out into the sunlight and how they'd be huddled up there in the dark, smelling the dawn through the loose slats in the barn but not out in it.

I still can't believe my answer, can't imagine where that rebel impulse came from, but I said it, and have always afterward been glad I did.

"No, Sir Knight. Thanks, all the same, but I won't need such arrangements. I'm going back to my farm and my pigs," I heard myself saying.

He only looked at me, his eyes piercing.

I went on. "See, I had a kind of a vision while you were talking, a vision about souls and life and death, and I think I've been fighting the good fight all along, there on my farm. That place is my life, see? I didn't even know it until you were talking about the new Measure. It is my honor and my life, that farm.

"Did I tell you my dad's buried there? He is, and on the best piece of land. I should make a garden around his grave — flowers and such. He was always a dreamer, but just couldn't make things work. That was my job, and darn it if I don't want to go right on back there to that place and make it work.

"I know it sounds stupid for a man to give up glory and battle for pigs and peas, but I guess they're just in my blood."

The Grand Master looked a little wistful at that. "It doesn't sound stupid at all. I wish I'd thought of it."

Another Knight came up, and he had the two Knights of Takhisis in shackles. "What do we do with these, Sir?"

"I'd like to have a talk with them. They seem to be under the misguided impression that we are foes. They also seem to think they can bully prospective knights away from the orders. We've much to talk about." His eyes grew keen, and his face reddened as though he would savor the coming exchange. "If they listen, I'll let them go. There's precious little harm they can do, hereabouts."

Then the Grand Master looked at me one last time before getting up on that wise old steed of his. He said, "The likes of such dark knights won't be causing any more trouble around here, not if they've taken the true measure of the home guard."



J. Robert King is a pudgy fellow who writes between diaper changes — his son's diapers, not his own. He is a cigar-smoking, squid-eating member of the Alliterates, a group of literary troglodytes. When not penning high-fantasy adventures and composing unfinished symphonies, he dreams of being a pig farmer — in the tradition of his forbears, the infamous Moffet hog-rustlers of Kansas.

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



July Conventions

Origins

July 4-7

OH

Greater Columbus Convention Center, Columbus. Special guests: Phil Foglio, Doug Niles, Jeff Grubb, and Kate Novak. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, the *Magic: the Gathering* national championship, and an auction. Registration: \$34.95 preregistered. Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 1740, Renton, WA 98057-1740, or e-mail: Andon@aol.com.

Gamefest

July 6

IL

Holy Innocents Church, Chicago. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games, and tournaments. Registration: \$5. John Kavain, 857 North Hermitage, Chicago, IL 60622

Dexcon 5

July 10-14

NJ

Atrium Park, Somerset. Guests: Scott Douglas, Robert Wiese, Dori Hein, and Bill Olmesdahl. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games, and tournaments. Registration: varies. Vinny Salzillo, Double Exposure, Inc., P.O. Box

3594, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Hexacon

July 12-14

AZ

Arizona State University Memorial Union, Tempe. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, tournaments, an auction, a miniatures painting contest, and a computer room. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$20 on site. Hexacon 6, P.O. Box 62613, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2613.

Skirmishes '96

July 12-14

MO

Holiday Inn, Kansas City. Events: role-playing, card, board, computer, and miniatures games. Other activities: a masquerade ball, tournaments, dealers, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$25 on site. Skirmishes, c/o John Duda, 812 NE 100th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64155.

VII-Khan

July 12-14

CO

Holiday Inn North, Colorado Springs. Guests: Wil McCarthy. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an art show, dealers, panels, and a miniatures painting

contest. Registration: \$15 preregistered. VII-Khan, 1025 Garner St. 10B, Colorado Springs, CO 80905, <http://www.uccs.edu/~dafauson>.

Dark Con III

July 19-21

OK

Central Plaza Hotel, Oklahoma City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, computer gaming, and RPGA® Network events. Darkmore Inc., 624 SW 24th, Moore, OK 73160.

Quincon XI

July 19-21

IL

The Signature Room in the Franklin Square, Quincy. Events: role-playing, card, board, miniatures games, RPGA events, demos, and an auction. Registration: \$15/weekend, \$5/day. Quincon XI, P.O. Box 3892, Quincy, IL 62305-3892.

Action 2

July 20

IA

Plaza Lanes, Des Moines. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games, and RPGA tournaments. Tammy Jones, 1304 Boyd St., Des Moines, IA 50316.

Important:

DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

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

- ✦ Australian convention
- ✧ Canadian convention
- European convention

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Online XXII

July 27-28

GENie

TSR online roundtable, GENie. RPGA tournaments, LIVING CITY™ and LIVING JUNGLE™ tournaments, Virtual Seattle, and guest speakers. E-mail: the.minstrel@genie.com.

August Conventions

Gamefest XVII

August 6-10

CA

Old Towne, San Diego. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$20 pre-registered, \$30 on site. Camefest, 3954 Harney St., San Diego, CA 92110.

Dragonflight '96

August 23-25

WA

Bellarmino Hall on the Seattle University Campus, Seattle. Events: role-playing, card, board, miniatures, and network computer games. Other activities: seminars, dealers, and an auction. Registration: varies. Dragonflight, P.O. Box 417, Seattle, WA 98111-0417

Migscon XVII

August 23-25

*

The Royal Connaught Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel, Hamilton, Ontario. Events: miniature gaming, dealers, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: varies. MIGS, P.O. Box 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Hamilton, ON L8L 8E9, Canada.

Bubonicon 28

August 23-25

NM

Howard Johnson East, Albuquerque. Guests: Dennis McKiernan, Gordan Garb, and Lisa Scott. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, panels, an art show, a costume contest, movies, and more. Registration: \$25 on site. NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque, NM 87178.

Organized Kahn Fusion P.E.W.

August 24-25

PA

Newberry Town Fire Hall in Etters. Events: political, economic, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers. Registration: varies. M. Forner's Games Only Emporium, 230 S. 8th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043.

LA Con III

August 29-Sept. 3

CA

Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim. Guests: James White, Roger Corman, and Connie Willis. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: exhibits and a charity raffle. LA Con III, 4557 Rueda Drive, San Diego, CA 92124.

Emperor's Birthday Con

August 30-Sept. 1

IL

Arlington Park Hilton Hotel in Arlington Heights. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA Network tournaments. Registration: varies. Randy Giesey, 1775 Ashford Circle, Wheeling, IL 60090-5100.

Gateway 16

August 30-Sept. 2

CA

LA Airport Wyndham Hotel, Los Angeles. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, seminars, and an auction. Registration: \$25 pre-registered, \$30 on site. Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502.

Campbellford Scottish & Medieval Festival

August 31-Sept. 1

*

Campbellford Fair Grounds in Campbellford, Ontario. Events: role-playing games and a medieval feast. Registration: \$6 pre-registered, \$8 on site. Harry Heydon, 81 Ranney St. S., Campbellford, Ontario, K0L 1L0, Canada.

Gen Con® Game Fair

August 8-11

WI

The Wisconsin Center (MECCA), Milwaukee. Experience the biggest and best game fair in the Western Hemisphere. The Gen Con Game fair offers over 1,200 gaming events, more than 200 exhibitors, celebrity guests including Garret Wang, Stephen R. Donaldson, Walter Koenig, the cast of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*, and more! Other activities include an art show, games auction, a vast dealers hall, Starbase 1, anime, workshops, and seminars. Registration: \$45/4 day pass pre-registered, \$50 on site, daily rates available. Contact: Sandy Kinney, Gen Con Fair, TSR Inc., 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

Mage Con South XI

August 31-Sept. 2

IA

Sioux City Hilton, Sioux City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and an art show. Registration: varies. M.A.G.E., P.O. 114, Sioux City, IA 51250.

September Conventions

Wincon

September 13-15

*

Ramada Marlborough, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction. Registration: varies. GITS, P.O. Box 28073, 1453 Henderson Hwy, Winnipeg, MB, R2G 4E9, Canada.

Falcon '96

September 14

*

Lord Nelson Hotel, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Guests: Robert Sawyer, Peter Francis, Michael Gallant, and Luisa Nadalini. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: cabaret, a costume contest, and an art show and auction. Registration: varies. Falcon, P.O. Box 36123, Halifax, NS, B3J 3S9, Canada, or email: gtucker@fox.nstn.ns.ca.

Bogglecon 4

September 21

PA

Wind Gap Legion Hall on Broadway, Wind Gap. Events: LIVING CITY tournaments, card, board, and role-playing

games, and free games demonstrations. Other activities: dealer tables, games auction and raffle, and canned food drive. Registration: \$3, or \$5 at the door. Most game events cost \$1. For more information, send SASE to M. Griffith, 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap, PA 18091.

Civic Con

September 22

IN

Hammond Civic Center, Hammond. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a comic show. Registration: \$2. Atlantis Productions, 2654 Forest Park Dr., Dyer, IN 46311, or email: atlantis@tsrcom.com.

Cog Con

September 27-29

MO

The Miner Recreation Building at the University of Missouri, Rolla. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$10 pre-registered, \$12 on site. CogCon, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla, MO 65402, or email: CogConIV@aol.com.

Hostile Aircraft Aces Tournament

September 27-29

NY

Travel Lodge, Kingston. Events: open gaming, and a hostile aircraft tournament. Registration: \$20 pre-registered, \$25 on site. Goblin-

Continued on page 86



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by Sue Weinlein Cook

illustrated by Jeff Easley

Introducing the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ game



In letter after letter, online and at game conventions, fans all want to know the same thing: "Why did TSR kill the DRAGONLANCE® world?" They've read *Dragons of Summer Flame* — the latest novel by the Saga's foremost writing team, Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman — and can't believe that the stories about Krynn have truly ended.

Take heart — *they haven't.*

Indeed, things certainly didn't look good for the world of Krynn at the end of the fourth volume in the **DRAGONLANCE** Chronicles. The land of Ansalon has fought two wars: one against the dread Knights of Takhisis, intent on conquering the world, and the other against the all-powerful Chaos god, intent on destroying it. Through enormous sacrifice during this Summer of Chaos, the forces of Good prevail; however, the cataclysmic Chaos War has altered their world irrevocably: the land suffered mass devastation, many heroes died in battle, new monsters arrived to threaten the people, and the entire pantheon of gods withdrew to ensure the departure of Chaos. Worst of all, the magic of Krynn seemed to have fled with them.

But hope never dies for true heroes. At the end of the book, Fizban the Fabulous, wizard-avatar of the god Paladine, heralds a new Age of Mortals and encourages the young mage Palin Majere to seek the new magic. Throughout the land, all remember the valiant words Dark Knight Steel Brightblade spoke as he prepared to do battle with Chaos: "Whatever else happens, the people of Krynn still have each other."

Thirty years later...

The new tales of this Age of Mortals shape the **DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE** game and the new **FIFTH AGE** novels. The campaign setting picks up three decades after the close of *Dragons of Summer Flame*, using that book as a foundation for subsequent events.

During that intervening 30 years, Palin, nephew of Raistlin Majere, has discovered that the new magic actually springs from the most ancient arcane source of all. Meanwhile, the priestess Goldmoon has awakened to a mystic power within her own heart, fueled by the essence of life and the purity of emotion. These legendary figures begin to teach their newfound magic far and wide, renewing faith throughout the land.

However, the Fifth Age brings its own set of challenges to beleaguered Krynn. The Dark Knights begin rebuilding their evil order. Elven strife continues to strike at the heart of the land. And, worst of all, great dragons from far across the sea discover Ansalon. These dragons — larger and fiercer than anyone has ever seen — consider it a land ripe for conquest.

The fierce wyrms fight a terrible Dragon Purge, battling each other to the death for territory and power. This conflict sends the good dragons scurrying into hiding and creates casualties all across the continent:

!The mighty red dragon Malystrixx teaches the innocent kender the meaning of fear when she burns their homeland to a cinder, turning once bright Kendermore into The Desolation.

!The white dragon Gellidus transforms his chosen domain, the temperate island of Southern Ergoth, into a great glacier.

!The green dragon Beryllintranox steals the life spirits of her Qualinesti elf subjects to fashion powerful items of magic.

!The black dragon Onysablet turns much of the New Sea and central Ansalon into a foul swampy dominion, using human slaves as subjects for her dark experiments.

!One native dragon, Khellendros the Blue — whom men know as Skie, once Highlord Kitiara's mount — seizes the city of Palanthas and much of northern Solamnia as his realm, employing the Knights of Takhisis to govern the populace as they did during the Summer of Chaos.

The Fifth Age calls upon heroes to wield might and magic against the men-

ace of the great dragons. New characters join familiar ones against these enemies shadowing their land.

With all the changes sweeping across the face of Ansalon, the time has never been better to introduce a new game system to the setting. The publication of the **DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE** game unveils the new Saga rules system, tailor-made to enhance the experience of telling tales in Krynn. This narrative game of dramatic fantasy adventure marks a break from the **DRAGONLANCE** world as a setting for the AD&D® game.

The **FIFTH AGE** game contains the tragedy, irony, humor, and romance that first attracted them to the Saga.

A narrative game

The Saga's rich literary heritage — more than 60 novels published in the series to date — lends itself to a more freeform, narrative style of game. To create such a game was the primary goal of lead designer, William W. Connors.

What's the difference between a narrative game and any other role-playing system?

It was vital that Connors minimize conventional role-playing mechanics for

the **FIFTH AGE** game. He draws a parallel to the first role-playing many of us ever enjoyed — the ones we played in our backyards as kids. "No one ever stopped a Cowboys-and-Indians game and said, 'Your arrow flew only fifty feet, not fifty-five!' At least, not in my neighborhood."

The most difficult part was "deciding which rules were important enough to bolster the structure of the game and which didn't need to be there. It was a tough decision to make, but some things had to be streamlined or cut out entirely." For instance, the Saga rules minimize the importance of movement rules and timekeeping systems: Such concepts have to serve the needs of the story. "Trying to make a game that strikes a balance between rules and drama and adventure — that's always a challenge."

One of the first concepts to go was the idea that tables or charts could dictate the flow of an adventure. The referee is free to determine what's most dramatic for the plot, not bound by the results of random die rolls.

In order to put more game control in the hands of the players rather than the game master — or "Narrator," — the Saga

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rules consider every action in the game from the hero's viewpoint.

It doesn't sound unusual at first. If a hero wants to hit a draconian with his sword, he attempts an attack action. But if the draconian wants to attack him, the hero makes a defense action; his success or failure at defending himself dictates whether the draconian hits him.

This approach relieves the Narrator of having to act for every character or monster in the game. "It leaves the Narrator free to handle the role-playing, Connors explains, "free to focus on the acting side of things, not be a technical consultant."

The immense volume of lore to research for every **DRAGONLANCE** product also proved quite a challenge. "Weaving the novels into the ongoing tapestry — that goes beyond game mechanics," Williams says.

But such challenges are to be expected when designing a new game, especially a freeform system like the **FIFTH AGE**. Such a system is long overdue, in Connors's opinion.

"This sort of game should have been done a long time ago," he says, pointing out that freeform role-playing is becoming more and more evident today — many corporations even use role-playing techniques to train new employees. "And they don't have charts or movement rates. I think this is the next logical step."

The fate deck

Early in the design phase, the group decided that the new game would use a deck of cards, rather than the more traditional dice, to resolve the outcome of actions of the heroes in the game.

The **FIFTH AGE** box comes with a deck of 82 **DRAGONLANCE** playing cards that is divided into nine suits: shields, arrows, helms, swords, moons, orbs, hearts, crowns, and dragons. Each card carries a value of one through nine (and one 10 card in the dragons suit) and bears a portrait of an important character in the **DRAGONLANCE** Saga, past, present and future. Each card also contains a couple of words describing the pictured character's personality. For instance, the Sturm Brightblade card, the one of swords, contains the legend: "Courageous and inspiring." Not only do these words describe Sturm, they also have a function in play.

Under the Saga rules, every action a hero might take and each challenge he might face carries an assigned difficulty score. All players hold their own hand of Fate cards, which they play strategically

to resolve their heroes' actions. If you play your cards in such a way that you beat the action's target score, you succeed at the action.

"We have a very elegant system of allowing you to succeed when it's dramatically important to the story," Connors says. "It lets you decide when you're going to 'roll the critical hit.' It lets you decide what events in the story are most important to the adventure's success" and play cards accordingly.

The system gives players this control over their <heroes and game events by removing the randomness dice inject in a game. The player decides which card to play for each action his hero attempts, but he only has so many high cards in his hand. Is this the time to play the two or the seven?

This system of action resolution through card play is at the root of every Saga rule. "The system was designed to be very flexible," says Johnson, "Create one resolution rule that can be applied to every situation." That includes everything from reasoning to chases to magic use to combat. "All of this comes down to the same system."

Of course, it wouldn't be a game without some element of chance. Players never know what card they will draw next. "You're still stuck with the hand Fate dealt you," Johnson says.

Players use the Fate cards even before game play begins to generate their **FIFTH AGE** heroes. "I think one of the sparkling uses of cards is in character creation," Connors says.

Character creation

To create a hero, a player receives a hand of 12 cards, which he assigns to various attributes (such as Strength, Agility, Reason, etc.) and other characteristics, like wealth, personality, and reputation. The number on the card gives each attribute a score, while its suit, character, or legend offers additional background on the evolving hero.

The process of creating heroes introduces players to important game concepts and familiarizes them with using the cards. "Because we do this, people understand almost instantly what it's going to be like to play that character," Connors says.

This system has worked well in playtests, both in the TSR office and at the **WINTER FANTASY™** game convention in Milwaukee earlier this year. "In half an hour, people who weren't gamers had a clear idea of who these characters

were," Connors says. "Novices can sit down and create a character, have a good understanding of the game, and be joking about what it will be like to play him or her."

Next to the process of hero creation, Connors is most proud of the new Saga magic system. "You don't use spell lists and pages of spell descriptions — you decide what the spell will do, then figure out how hard it is to cast." This system reflects the spirit of how magic has always worked in the **DRAGONLANCE** novels: The heroes usually have the spell they need to save the day. "You never see Raistlin pull up and say, 'Sorry, guys, I didn't memorize the right spell today.'"

The world of the Fifth Age

A narrative game also needs a fully fleshed-out setting to draw from, "the link to a dramatic format like books or movies," Connors says, "anything that has a long tradition of storytelling and drama. We were fortunate enough to be able to do this with **DRAGONLANCE**."

The major new element in the world of Krynn in the Fifth Age is the presence of the great dragons.

The dragons of Krynn

"It started out when [vice president of Creative Services] Jim Ward said, 'Put really big, mean dragons in this game,'" Connors recalls.

To begin with, Connors looked at the role dragons have played recently in the **DRAGONLANCE** Saga: a great menace, true, but also strong allies and companions. Dragons had become too familiar on Krynn. "Dragons had to be moved beyond the level of men," he says.

In their conquest of Ansalon, these dragons have swept whole nations out of existence and forever altered vast portions of the continent. They hold a position "sort of halfway between gods and men," Connors says. "Now that the gods have left, they're the closest thing to it."

With a major new threat like the great dragons, it seems only right to introduce a new force to oppose them. That force is the Legion of Steel.

The Legion, founded by Dark Knight Steel Brightblade's adoptive mother in his name, is a new order of freedom fighters committed to the struggle against the great dragons and to the importance of people working together, free of outdated knightly codes. Williams considers the new Legion of Steel story thread "exciting and challenging to pick up, filling out the back story from the time of the founding and

carrying it through the events we already have in place."

Of course, the rise of the Legion of Steel and other events of the Fifth Age have had a profound effect on Ansalon's two Knightly orders. In the case of the Knights of Solamnia, Williams says, "They've had this bitter-sweet realization that the best of their traditions have carried them along, but in the process they have strayed considerably from their path."

The Knights continue to dedicate themselves to their divine sponsors but, now that these gods have withdrawn, "they're also dealing with the fact that they will succeed or fail on their own efforts," Williams says.

The Dark Knights seem to be getting around the problem of the absence of their patron goddess by more or less denying it. The new leader of the Dark Knights, Mirielle Abrena, seems to lack some of the honorable convictions of her esteemed predecessor, Ariakan. "The Knights of Takhisis, as I see them now, are based on a deception," says Williams. "You're really talking about a group of people who've been seduced by their leaders. Abrena has convinced her followers that Takhisis is coming back, that this is only temporary. They're promised big things in the very near future if they work hard enough — and ignore little things like ethics."

The magic of Krynn

In addition to expanding the treatments of the Knighthoods, Williams has been working on expanding the new system of magic on Krynn. This new magic, he assures readers, "is drawn from the lore of the setting. It's not something that's created brand-new. We've gone back and picked up a bit of the Saga." This thread, something only hinted at in the final scene of *Dragons of Summer Flame*, will be explored thoroughly in Williams's forthcoming game supplement *The Last Tower: The legacy of Raistlin*.

Also receiving the spotlight in *The Last Tower* are the three most important wielders of magic in the Fifth Age. After decades of struggling to find the new magic, as Fizban instructed him, Palin Majere finally succeeded in resurrecting almost forgotten arcane methods. Now, along with the mysterious Master of the Tower of Wayreth and the equally enigmatic Shadow Sorcerer, he remains one of the most powerful figures in all of Ansalon today.

And just who is this Master of the

Tower? This cloaked figure presumably appeared in Wayreth Forest just after the Chaos War and the subsequent destruction of the Tower of High Sorcery in Palanthas. The Master still administers tests of magic to worthy sorcerers, awards magical items from past ages, and decides how the Last Tower will affect the world in the Fifth Age.

Connors has his favorite characters too, including the Shadow Sorcerer, who walked out of the Desolation one day and helped the Last Conclave of Wizards rediscover magic. Connors also created the afflicted kender Belladonna, leader of Hylo. She lived through the Kender Flight that followed Malystrix's arrival in her original homeland — but not without scars, both literal and emotional, "The idea of a kender who wakes up screaming every night is kind of neat," Connors remarks, "but maybe I've been working in the RAVENLOFT® world too long."

Of course, he realizes that the readers' response is what really determines which characters will become important in the future of the Fifth Age. "If people thought Raistlin was just some goofy wizard, somebody'd have killed him off."

Adventuring in the Fifth Age

Considering the importance of story and character to the DRAGONLANCE Saga, the design team felt it important to structure the new FIFTH AGE adventures around those primary factors.

"These are not map-keyed adventures," Connors says. "We don't say, 'Here's a map of the Tomb of Huma — have an adventure.'"

Instead, the adventures are story-driven and scene-based, "just like a play or a movie would be," Connors explains. A FIFTH AGE adventure is divided into acts, each of which features action rising through a series of scenes to a climax, the nature of which depends on heroes' choices along the way. A story might open with a role-playing scene, progress to a combat scene, followed by one that involves puzzle-solving. "The adventure becomes a series of linked scenes, not a series of linked rooms," he says.

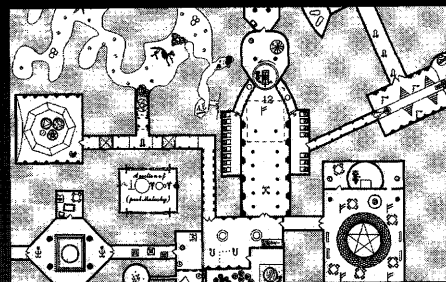
Inside and out, the FIFTH AGE is clearly a game that knows its roots. The game's box is designed to resemble an old-fashioned book, and literary terms are used throughout the text. "We've tried to give people the information they need in a

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format that feels like a book," Connors says. "That's why we call [GMs] 'Narrators' — they're not in charge of a dungeon or a map, they're in charge of a story,

Appropriately, the first story arc in the **FIFTH AGE** line — a five-part series of accessory-adventures called *Dragons of a New Age* — features important links with the forthcoming novel, *Dawning of a New Age*, by Jean Rabe.

Great expectations?

Many lovers of the **DRAGONLANCE** Saga are eagerly awaiting the **FIFTH AGE** game's August release. Talk continues on-line and at conventions about the new game system and the unfolding events of the Fifth Age.

"We are producing this game for every fan of **DRAGONLANCE**, whether they just read the books or play the computer game," Johnson stresses. "It is an opportunity for them to experience the adventures for themselves."

How will **DRAGONLANCE** fans react to the switch from AD&D mechanics to the Saga rules?

"AD&D fans who've really been caught up in the storyline will be pretty excited about it," Williams predicts.

Johnson agrees. "If you were a fan of the AD&D game, you will be an even bigger fan of this game."

However, this isn't necessarily the Krynn they remember. After all, the Chaos War changed the world in many ways. Players can experience those changes though the new game system.

"The underpinnings of the world have changed," Williams points out, "everything from the way your character looks to the way magic works. [Players] are definitely going to feel the effects of the new reality, just the way residents of Krynn would."

In addition, as fans will see when they use the AD&D character and translation rules (included in the **FIFTH AGE** box) to bring their heroes forward, a few other things have changed as well. The Saga rules alter the balance of power a bit, making certain monsters even stronger, compared to heroes, than ever before.

"It may be the Age of Mortals," Williams says, "but the monsters that are left are lean, mean fighting machines. Ogres deserve some respect now." But then again, heroes are often measured by the power of the foes they combat.

Connors predicts that the **FIFTH AGE** will surprise gamers who "are used to rolling dice. I think its going to be unfam-

iliar to a lot of people — some people will embrace it for that: 'It's different; that's cool.'"

Johnson agrees that the game will attract those who love to try new systems. "Fans of games will find this a refreshing new direction. This goes back to the core of what drew us all to role-playing in the first place: the ability to experience a story, be part of a tale of wonder, and to make a difference in the outcome through one's personal decisions."

And the game's streamlined rules system is great for those who love **DRAGONLANCE** but may never have role-played before. "Certainly the game's uncluttered nature lends itself real well to people who are familiar only with the fiction," Williams says. "A brand-new player is not confronted with rows and rows of numbers and formulas to derive their character."

In fact, **DRAGONLANCE** readers have an advantage over experienced gamers less familiar with the world. "We've written this game so that your knowledge of the setting is an asset from the beginning," says Williams. "They [new players] encounter familiar terms and characters

and begin to see why characters in the books can do the things that they do." For instance, a hero's attributes are described in terms of the well-known Heroes of the Lance who exemplify these traits. Each card in one's Hand of Fate (the hand of cards a player uses to play the game) portrays a famous — or infamous — character of the Saga. Your knowledge of the world relates directly to what you see.

With the publication of the **FIFTH AGE**, Johnson sees the **DRAGONLANCE** game coming full circle. "[**DRAGONLANCE**] was a new path for role-playing games back in the 1980s, and it continues to be."

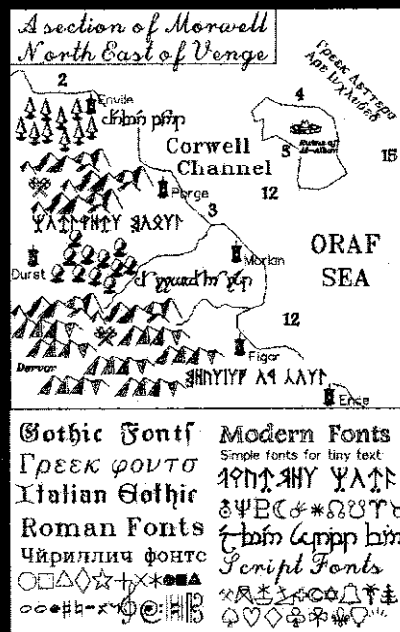
Clearly, **DRAGONLANCE** is far from dead. On the contrary — the legends of the Fifth Age have only just begun!



*Sue Weinlein Cook began at TSR as the editorial assistant for the book department. In addition to her work in the **FIFTH AGE** game, she has also edited games in the **BIRTHRIGHT™** line.*

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I would like to add to Rick Maffei's comments in issue #228's Forum column. Therein he reports on several problems concerning the Muscle subability score.

I agree that starting a character with a Strength of 20 is possible under the rules stated on page 13 of the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book. This undoubtedly presents the DM with many difficulties if he is running a standard campaign. However, we must remember that 18/00 is the maximum Strength for human fighters as well as most other races.

Why is it possible to get such a Strength if it is not allowed? The rules in this tome were written taking into account the possibility that a party might consist wholly or partially of non-human and non-demihuman PCs. Turning to page 37 of the same book, under the heading *Other Races*, we find this option clarified. It states that, at the DM's option, Players may choose any manner of being as a PC. The examples of incorporating a *DARK SUN®* campaign character is given. Those characters have ability scores ranging from 5-20.

There is still the possibility that a fighter with a 16 Strength score could achieve and 18/xx Muscle score. The

only penalty would be that his Stamina of 14 would allow him to carry only 55 lbs. before being encumbered. Since the encumbrance rules in the *PHB* are listed as optional, there well could be no penalty for a low Stamina.

This underscores a problem with all subabilities. Allowing a character with a modest ability score to choose to make one subability exceptional at the cost of the other creates and unbalancing factor. We've discussed the problems with Strength subabilities. Let's look at the other abilities. For this discussion, let's assume that the ability score is high enough to make a difference in the subabilities, say 16. A 10 in an ability score, for instance, does virtually nothing, as the subabilities could be only as high as 12 or as low as 8, where there are generally few or no adjustments.

The subabilities of Dexterity are Aim and Balance. The properties of Aim are missile adjustment, Pick Pockets, and Open Locks. The properties of Balance are reaction adjustment, defense adjustment, Move Silently, and Climb Walls. If the character is not a thief or archer, this choice is a no-brainer. A +4 on saves vs. dodging something and -4 on Armor Class can be gained with no penalties to any Aim property. A thief or archer character would just have to choose in which properties he wanted bonuses. Once again, the properties of the other subability would suffer no penalties.

The subabilities of Constitution are Health and Fitness. The properties of Health are System Shock and the poison save. The properties of Fitness are hit point adjustment and Resurrection Survival. This is an easy choice for any class. All classes, except fighter, need only a 16 in Fitness to gain maximum bonus hit points of +2. Thus they need only a 14 in Constitution. A fighter would, of course, attempt to get an 18 for the full bonus. The differences this would make in the properties of Health would not be appreciable.

The subabilities of Intelligence are Reason and Knowledge. The properties of Reason are spell level, maximum number of spells, and spell immunity. The properties of Knowledge are bonus proficiencies and percentage to learn spell. All classes except wizard would maximize Knowledge because Reason deals mostly with spell ability. These subabilities do present the wizard with some tough choices. Personally, I would sacrifice my percentage to learn spell for higher spell level and number of spells

The subabilities of Wisdom are Intuition and Willpower. The properties of Intuition are bonus spells and percentage for spell failure. The properties of Willpower are magic defense adjustment and spell immunity. Cleric PCs would mostly choose to increase Intuition because its properties could give them a considerable bonus. Other classes would boost Willpower as it is the subability that would give them a bonus.

The subabilities of Charisma are Leadership and Appearance. The properties of Leadership are loyalty base and number of henchmen. The property of Appearance is reaction adjustment. These subabilities are perhaps the most balanced, although I suspect that reaction rolls would occur more frequently during the game.

Throughout, I have mostly considered only single-classed human PCs. Obviously, multi-class PCs would have tougher choices.

How would I fix these problems? I wouldn't. These rules are purely optional, and I don't plan on using them. Each DM must make his own decision to use them or not, based on his campaign. In making the choice, the DM should keep in mind how these rules can be used or abused.

Tim Merrett
Logansport, IN

I'd like to respond to Gary Stahl's letter in issue #229. I agree that NPCs in published game material should follow previously established rules. His example of the chaotic psionics in the *DARK SUN®* supplement, *The Will and the Way*, clearly violates the rule that psionics can't be chaotic. Of course, if some rationale had been given as to why these particular psionics were chaotic, then that faux pas would have been mitigated.

While such consistency is desirable, it isn't always possible. In the upcoming *FORGOTTEN REALMS®* supplement, *Heroes' Lorebook*, many of the heroes of the setting's novels are codified or updated for use in the AD&D game. More than a few of these characters, when considered strictly as formalized game characters, break AD&D game rules left and right.

And in some cases, game rules just don't exist for what is described in the novels. Alias, the tattooed swordswoman from the Kate Novak and Jeff Grubb novels, for example, is an artificial life form. The Seven Sisters (plus Elminster and Khelben) are all the Chosen of Mystra, with effective immortality and a slew of magical abilities. No

rules exist in the game for creating such a life form or becoming the favored of a deity. Drizzt Do'Urden, probably the most popular FR character of all, broke all sorts of game rules when he first appeared, and his popularity even spawned new rules to "allow" him to do in the game what he does in the novels. Strictly following all the game rules for these NPCs would have genericized them and they probably wouldn't be half as appealing because of it. The fact that they're different is part of what makes them so popular.

Also, speaking as a DM, I've always believed in the maxim that NPCs needn't follow all the same rules as PCs all the time. (Situation #1: "Oh look, an evil wizard. He just cast a *cone of cold*, so he's at least 9th level, maybe higher. Okay, you guys know the routine. Stay back and pepper him with arrows first, 'cause he's probably got a stonewall on himself, and spread out and find some cover so his fireballs and *lightning bolts* can't get all of us. And watch for a *hold person* on our own spell-casters.") A nonstandard villain can be more exciting for everyone in the game. Plus, throwing the players a curve every once in a while keeps them on their toes. (Situation #2: "Look, his *magic missile* fires only two bolts! Hah! That means he's less than 5th level; c'mon, let's get him! Whoa, what do you mean each bolt caused 12 hp damage?!")

One of my personal NPC rules (and this goes for monsters and creatures as well) is, "Anything the PCs can do, my NPCs can do too." If the PCs use kits from the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Skills & Powers* book, the fighting-style specializations or the critical-hits system from *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* book, so do my NPCs. If the PCs start developing set tactics in certain situations, pretty soon some NPC villains develop ways to upset the PCs' pre-planned tactics. All this prevents the game from becoming routine. I'm forced to come up with ways to handle the players' latest tricks and schemes, and once I've done that, the players must develop new gimmicks and tactics for their PCs to use.

Of course, this sort of occurrence must be handled carefully. If this is overdone, power escalation and player/DM rivalry could become a problem. I'm not saying that DMs should be out to defeat the heroic PCs, but they should throw just enough monkey wrenches into the PCs' plans to keep the players challenged and avoid the dreaded complacency. When done properly and with a

regard toward game balance, "bending" the game's rules for the occasional NPC isn't a bad thing. It's just one of the DM's tools for insuring continued interest in the game campaign. The AD&D game is about heroes, and heroes should win out in the end; however, that doesn't mean I'm obligated as a DM to make it easy for them. A hard-won victory where the players had to out-think and not just out-dice their foes is much more heroic and much more likely to be remembered years after the adventure itself has ended.

Dale Donovan
TSR, Inc.

I would like to voice my complaint about level restrictions on demi-humans.

In most every racial description, the race is adept in at least one area: elven wizards, dwarven fighters, gnomish illusionists, and halfling thieves. I fully realize that a 15th level character is quite powerful, but what about the halfling thief? After a few short years of adventuring, he's reached his limit and might as well retire.

How about the elven wizard? He could live his whole life adventuring and

never be able to cast 8th- or 9th-level spells if his DM doesn't allow the slow advancement option. In almost every fantasy realm that I've ever heard of, elven wizards were at one time or another the most powerful that ever existed. How come all of a sudden they became weaklings compared to humans? Elves have more patience and are more careful with their spells than are humans, but because of that they should be able to become at least as powerful as any human wizard.

I believe every demi-human race should be allowed unlimited advancement in at least one class, if for no other reason than a natural affinity for that class.

I personally don't believe that such a rule would disrupt the flow of a game. I don't know about the rest of you DMs, but I'm pretty sick of all the human parties that keep turning up. Whatever your opinion, I'd like to hear it.

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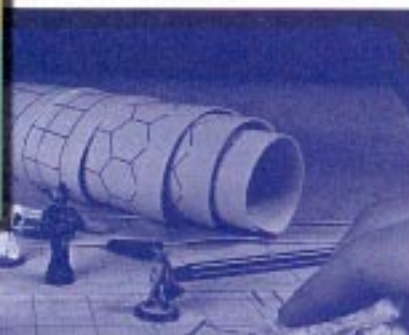
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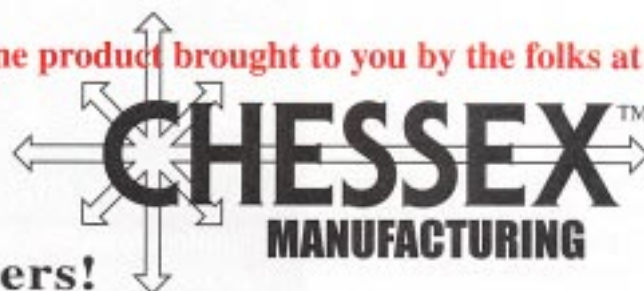
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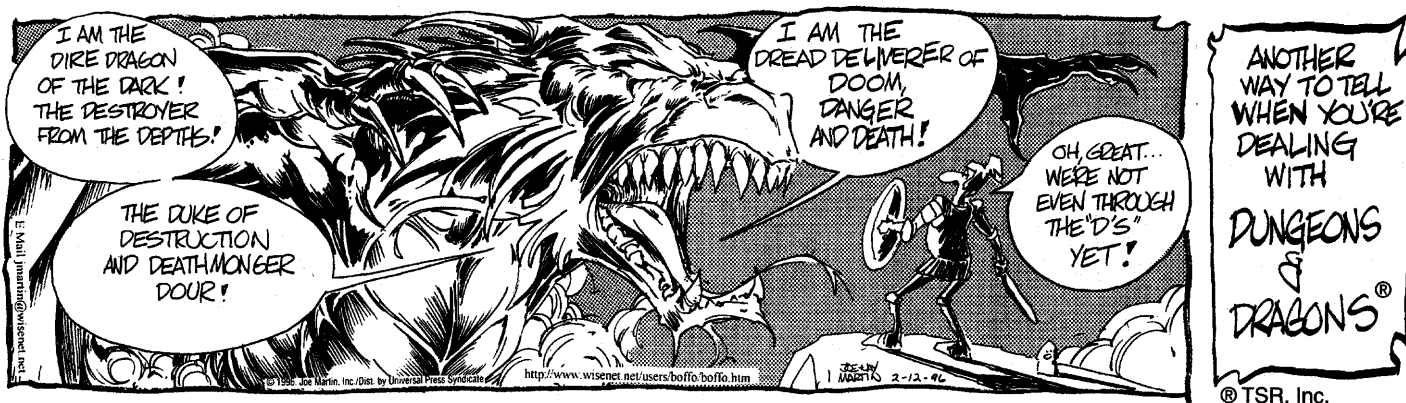
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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

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*Join the Sage this month as he reveals a method for creating psionicist PCs with the rules presented in the **PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers** book and considers a few magical oddities from the AD&D® game.*

I'm sure you've been asked these questions dozens of times, so how about some answers? How do you create psionicist PCs using the rules in the *Skills & Powers* book? How do the subabilities from Chapter 2 affect psionicists and wild talents? Can non-psionicists buy wild talents with character points?

Well, not exactly dozens of times, but often enough (three times in the past month). Here's an unofficial method for building psionicists with character points, largely based on some excellent suggestions from reader Emery Wilson:

A psionicist receives 35 character points to spend on class abilities. Abilities cost 5-15 points. Any unspent points can be saved to buy proficiencies or saved for use in the game.

All psionicists use the saving throw and MTHACO tables on page 149 of the *Skills & Powers* book.

Psionicists use the THACO table on page 149 of the *Skills & Powers* book unless they purchase better combat abilities during character creation.

All psionicists use the experience level table on page 154 of the *Skills & Powers* book.

Psionicists use the Psionic Progression table on page 154 *Skills & Powers* book unless they purchase better psychic abilities during character creation.

Psionicist roll six-sided dice to determine hit points unless they purchase larger hit dice.

Unless stated otherwise, a character can take each ability only once and only when the character is first created.

Armor Use (5/10): The psionicist can employ small shields and padded, leather, studded leather, or hide armor. As a 10-point ability the psionicist can use small or medium shields, any of the armor types listed above, plus brigandine, chain mail, ring mail, scale mail, or metal lamellar armor. If the psionicist does not take this ability, he can wear no armor and cannot employ shields.

Attack Mode of Choice (10): The psionicist develops extra skill in using one particular psionic attack mode and gains a +1 bonus to mental attack rolls when using that attack mode. This ability is useless without the contact ability.

Combat Bonus (10): The psionicist uses the priest THACO chart.

Contact (5/10): The psionicist receives the contact proficiency and gains attack modes as shown on the Psionic Progression table in the *Skills & Powers* book. As a 10-point ability, the psionicist receives extra attack modes as though he were two levels higher than his actual level. For example, a 1st-level psionicist would receive two attack modes. The character can never have more than five attack modes. If the psionicist does not take this power, he can purchase the contact proficiency any time he has five character points available.

Followers (5/10): The psionicist become a contemplative master at 9th level. A 1st-level psionicist arrives each month to study with the master. Students serve without pay if they receive at least 10 hours of training each week (they leave to seek new masters if

they do not receive sufficient training). The maximum number of students the master attracts is equal to one half the master's Charisma score, rounded down. If the master builds a sanctuary, he can attract a number of students equal to his Charisma score. As a 10-point ability, the psionicist becomes a renowned teacher and can attract students at any level, subject to the limits noted above. If the psionicist does not choose this ability, he never attracts followers, but can hire servants and henchmen for pay just as any other character can.

Guarded Mind (5/10): The psionicist can block or resist attempts to usurp his will and gains a +1 bonus to all saving throws against spells from the enchantment/charm school. As a 10-point ability, the psionicist gains a +2 bonus to all saving throws against spells from the enchantment/charm school.

Hit Point Bonus (10): Psionicists with this ability roll eight-sided dice for hit points rather than six-sided dice. The psionicist still gains only two extra hit points per level at 10th level and beyond.

MAC Bonus (10): The psionicist's Mental Armor Class improves by -1. Note that no MAC value can fall below -10.

Mental Defense (5/10): The psionicist can close his mind to psychic contact and gains defense modes as shown on the Psionic progression table in the *Skills & Powers* book. As a 10-point ability, the psionicist receives extra defense modes as though he was two levels higher than his actual level. For example, a 1st-level psionicist receives two defense modes. The character can never have more than five defense modes. If the psionicist does not take this power, he has an open mind, just as if he were a non-psionic character. If the psionicist does not choose this ability at the beginning of play, he can purchase the five-point version whenever he has five character points to spend. The 10-point version is available only at the beginning of play.

Penetrating Mind (10): The psionicist can penetrate physical barriers with his mind more readily than other psionicists can. It takes two inches of lead or iron, four inches of obsidian, or two feet of rock to block the psionicist's clairsentient and telepathic powers. Note that most psionic powers require line of sight; this ability does not negate a blocked line of sight (see *Skills & Powers*, page 150). This ability has no effect on psionic combat and does not allow the psionicist to ignore magical or psychic barriers that block psionic powers.

PSP bonus: The psionicist has a potent mind and rolls eight-sided dice for psionic strength points instead of six-sided dice. The psionicist still gains only three extra PSPs plus his Wisdom bonus per level at 10th level and beyond.

Psychic Adept (10): The psionicist receives extra powers according to the table below instead of the Psionic Progression table in the Skills & Powers book. The two disciplines the psionicist chooses at first level count as primary disciplines (see *Skills & Powers*, page 154).

Psychic Adept Power Progression

Exp* level	Total Disciplines	Total Sciences	Total Devotions
1	2	2	4
2	3	2	6
3	3	3	8
4	3	3	10
5	3	4	11
6	4	4	12
7	4	5	13
8	4	5	14
9	4	6	15
10	5	6	16
11	5	7	17
12	5	7	18
13	5	8	19
14	5	8	20
15	5	9	21
16	5	9	22
17	5	10	23
18	5	10	24
19	5	11	25
20	5	11	26

Range Boost (5/10): The ranges of all powers within the psionicist's primary discipline increase by 25%. If the psionicist is a psychic adept, he has two primary disciplines. At base cost (5), the ranges of only one discipline's powers increase. For a cost of 10 character points, the ranges of powers for both disciplines increase. All powers with ranges of 0, self, or touch remain unaffected by this ability.

Warrior Hit Point Bonus (5): The psionicist gains bonus hit points from a high Constitution score as if he were a warrior.

Weapon Specialization (15): The psionicist can specialize in the use of a particular weapon. This ability is useless unless the character also chooses the weapon use ability (below), even if the psionicist specializes in a martial art or nonlethal combat. The character-point cost for gaining proficiency and specialization in the weapon must be met when the character chooses weapon proficiencies.

Weapon Use (5/10): The psionicist can employ the following small weapons: hand crossbow, dagger, dart, dirk, knife, scourge, sickle, and short sword. As a 10-point ability the psionicist can use any of the weapons above, plus the following slightly larger weapons: short bow, club, light crossbow, hand/throwing axe, javelin, quarterstaff, sling, spear, and war club. If the psionicist does not take this ability, he can employ no weapons at all, relying instead on his mental powers in combat.

Psionics and subabilities: If the rules for subabilities are in play, then Constitution/Fitness, Intelligence/Reason, and Wisdom/Intuition determine a psionicist's PSP total. Wild talent checks use the same set of scores.

Wisdom/Willpower determines a character's base MAC, and Intelligence/Reason determines a character's MAC modifier.

Buying Wild Talents: A character can purchase a wild talent as a trait for 9 character points. The character need not make a wild talent check, but must roll randomly to determine what the wild talent is (see *Skills & Powers*, page 156). Note that a character could make a normal wild talent check and use a character point to reroll if the check fails.

Does a *scarab of protection* allow saving throws against spells such as *dispel magic* and *Mordenkainen's disjunction*? If a character has one of the rare *scarabs of protection +2*, how do you calculate the saving throw bonus against effects that normally allow no saving throws? For example, a character has a *scarab of protection +2*, a *ring of protection +2*, and a *cloak of protection +2*. What is the character's saving throw number against a *magic missile* spell?

A *scarab of protection* sometimes allows a saving throw against dispel magic and similar spells, depending on how the spell is used. If a the *dispel* is cast directly on the scarab wearer or his items, the wearer has a saving throw and the scarab's bonus applies. (Technically, the items gets the saving throw, but its exactly the same as the wearer's, see the *dispel magic* spell description). If a spell such as *dispel magic*, *Mordenkainen's disjunction*, or *continual darkness* is cast on the area containing the scarab wearer, the wearer gains no saving throw because the spell is not directed at him. The scarab wearer might find it inconvenient — or even fatal — to have spells affecting him *dispelled* or *disjoined*, but

that's just a consequence of the spell being there. The situation is similar to what happens when a magic-resistant creature finds itself in one of these spell's areas of effect, there is no magic resistance roll because the spell in question is not working directly against the creature.

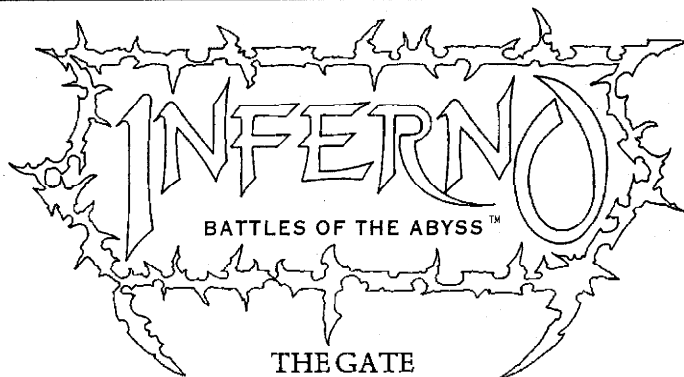
According to the *scarab of protection* description, when the wearer is subjected to a spell attack that allows no saving throw, such as *magic missile*, the wearer gains a saving throw of 20 plus any other magical saving throw bonuses he might have; the character in your example would get a saving throw of 16 against the *magic missile* spell no matter what kind of scarab he was wearing. I know of some referees who rule that the base saving throw of 20 accounts for the scarab's first plus (and who give a base saving throw of 19 to characters wearing a *scarab of protection +2*). This seems a reasonable house rule to me.

My group has found a lich's *phylactery*. The problem is we have not found the lich yet. Will we destroy the lich if we destroy the *phylactery*? The rules say that if you destroy the lich and the *phylactery* the lich is forever gone. What happen if we destroy the *phylactery* and not the lich?

A lich uses its *phylactery* as a bolt hole for its spirit; if it's body is destroyed, it survives by fleeing to the *phylactery*, and from there it can inhabit a new body (*Van Richten's Guide to the Lich* explores the process in some detail). If someone destroys the *phylactery* without destroying the lich first, the lich is deprived of its bolt hole, but remains otherwise unharmed (though it probably gets pretty angry). Note that lich *phylacteries* usually aren't just left lying around, so what your party has might not be the real thing. It might also contain a lich's spirit that's just biding its time until it can seize control of a player character.



Skip Williams recently appeared as gaming guest at the Wizard's Challenge convention in Regina, Saskatchewan where he answered this month's questions in person.



*Through me the road to the city of desolation,
Through me the road to sorrows durtural,
Through me the road among the lost creation*

*Justice moved my great maker; God Eternal
Wrought me: The Power, and the unsearchable
High wisdom, and the Prime Love Supernal.*

*Nothing ere I was made to be
save things eterne, and eterne abide;
Abandon all hope, all ye that enter here.*

Don Dante--Inferno III:I-9

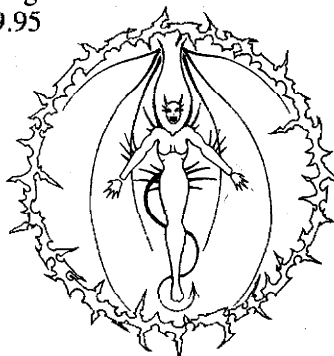
In the Hollows of the Abyss, the great Lords make war. Vast armies clash endlessly over the tortured landscape battling for power and that most precious commodity, souls. Striding like giants among the Hordes, mighty Archfiends and their terrible Lieutenants reap great ruin, slaughtering their foes over and over again, in bloody practice to storm the Heights from which they had Fallen so long ago...

Based on Dante Alighieri's classic work, Inferno is a fast-paced fantasy miniatures game. It features an elegantly simple rules system that is easy to learn, but with plenty of tactical flexibility. Players take the roles of the Generals of the Abyss, commanding armies composed of Archfiends, Lieutenants and Hordes. Each unit has a unique range of abilities, and armies can be tailored to a player's tastes by choosing the appropriate combination of forces. A wide range of figures are available, in 3 size ranges: Archfiends (55-65mm), Lieutenants (25-35mm), and Hordes ("stands" of 7mm figures).

The basic game comes as a boxed set, and contains 2 map boards (each 17x23"), rule book, 2 dice, plastic bases, full colour counters and stand-ups, as well as full colour terrain features and templates. As an additional bonus, the Tome of the Abyss is also included (featuring additional artwork and background). MSRP: \$29.95

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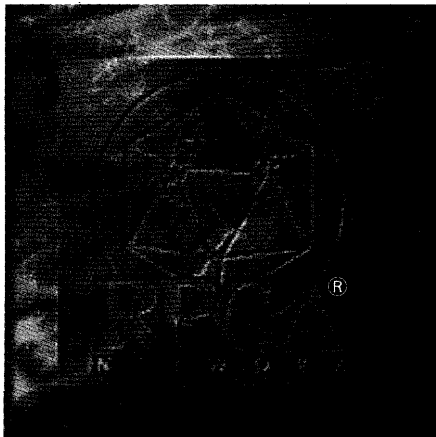
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Network NEWS

by Jean Rabe

An interview with Lou Prosperi, the Network Guest of Honor at the 1996 GEN CON® Game Fair

Gaming fans frequently ask Lou Prosperi how to break into the industry — how to take that first step from role-playing devotee to author, editor, or artist. He gives them all the same answer — be professional, be persistent, and don't expect to start at the top of the game designer pyramid.

Prosperi's advice is sound. By following it, he rose from stocking shelves in Mayfair Game's warehouse to being the *Earthdawn* Line Developer for the FASA Corporation, responsible for a myriad of products and a stable of freelancers. He still relies on his warehouse experience, however, as he has a game collection just shy of nine hundred items, all precisely cataloged. "Of course," he adds, "There's a lot of BattleTech stuff I haven't categorized yet. One of our big closets is filled with games. My comic book collection is at my parent's house."

Prosperi is the **ROLE PLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION™** Network's guest of honor at the upcoming **GEN CON®** Game Fair, scheduled for August 8-11 at the Mecca Center in Milwaukee. He will be on hand to participate in seminars, workshops, and to host a special tournament for the Network where player slots will be auctioned for charity.

"*Earthdawn* is a role-playing game of high fantasy," says Prosperi, who is the author of numerous *Earthdawn* products — including a short story in the *Talisman Earthdawn* anthology. "It takes a number of the traditional elements of fantasy, but it deals with them in a new way. For

instance, it sometimes seems impossible there'd be all these dungeons out in the wilderness. In *Earthdawn*, we came up with an explanation. We had an event called The Scourge, where creatures from astral space came and ravaged the planet for 400 years. They lived in underground cities — dungeons." When they left, the world's eight different races — elves, dwarves, humans, orcs, trolls, t'skrang, windlings, and obsidmen — started exploring the ruins.

This **GEN CON** Game Fair marks the second year for the Threads of Legend campaign. Following an approach similar to the Networks **LIVING CITY™** program, participants play their own characters in sanctioned tournaments.

"I review and approve the tournaments for Threads of Legend," Prosperi said. "In fact, I approve all the **RPGA®** Network tournaments for FASA games. And I act as sort of a liaison between the Network and Drew Caldwell, who runs Threads of Legend. My involvement isn't heavy, but I do stay involved. I think the tournament campaign's a wonderful idea." He says the players think so, too. He receives e-mail feedback after conventions at which Threads of Legend runs, and nearly all of it is positive. "I've heard very few negative comments, and those were about scenario balance. I think you'd hear that regardless. I just wish I could play in it. I wish I had the time and the freedom to participate in it."

Prosperi has been a member of the **RPGA** Network since 1989. "I joined

because of the wide variety of games the Network offers at the **GEN CON** Game Fair. If you're a Network member you can get into lots of different games — and they're good games." He said the Network is important to the industry, and that programs like Threads of Legend and Virtual Seattle, the *Shadowrun** Tournament setting, are helping to broaden its scope. Coverage of different topics and games in the Networks **POLYHEDRON Newszine** is also a plus. Prosperi compiled an article to appear in the Newszine sometime in the next several months. "It's in the World Under Construction column," he explained. "It's about changes to *Shadowrun*. I would like to do something for *Earthdawn*, too. Maybe about Prelude to War, an upcoming *Earthdawn* product — without giving everything away."

Prosperi hinted that there are changes in store for the line. "The *Earthdawn* universe groundwork has been established. Now we're going to shake it up a little bit. Important things will happen to important people. It's kind of exciting to coordinate and orchestrate the changes. And we're really going to get player characters involved in events that will change the universe. In a lot of the preestablished universes, a lot of the big changes occur in novels. The characters rarely get to play a pivotal part. But what we're planning is a product that describes large-scale events. What the characters do will help determine what happens with their world."

Prosperi thinks the players will enjoy getting their characters more involved in the world. He understands players because he's one of them. He games practically every week, whether it's *Earthdawn*, *Warhammer 40K**, or *Feng Shui*: the *Shadowfist** role-playing game.

He says he's happy in the game industry. "It's become a job at one level. But my job involves games." He considers it more fun and rewarding that what he used to do for a living.

"I worked for the Harvard University Library System at a place called the Harvard Depository." Harvard owned a large climate-control warehouse for books and other materials, and Prosperi worked there bar-coding items and logging them in a computer database — while he continued to pester game companies for work. "It was a pretty intense job. Libraries in the system would call with their orders every day. I did troubleshooting stuff, lifting and grunt work, too. I thought it was a fun job, but it wasn't a career."

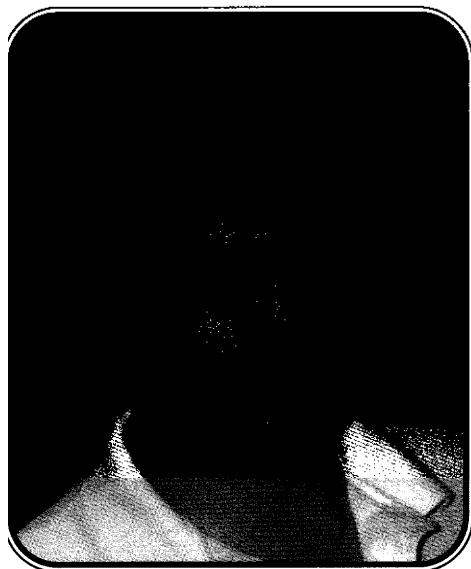
Prior to that, Prosperi attended the University of Lowell in Massachusetts. "I majored in music composition. I got into music because I was a drummer from elementary school to high school, and when I left high school, music was the only thing I could think of pursuing. But in college I learned that you shouldn't go to college because you think you're supposed to. You should go because you have something you want to do." It was during college that Prosperi discovered what he truly wanted to pursue. That's where he developed a taste for gaming

to be polite. "I talked to a couple of the editors and designers, and that lead me into doing some playtesting for them. I also used to contribute to a one-page newsletter for them, called the *Daily Planet* — for free. I did it just to get my name known, and it ended up as ads in places like *DRAGON® Magazine*."

After building up playtesting credits, Prosperi found that his contacts in the game industry mushroomed. "I got to know Darwin Bromley (Mayfair's president) pretty well, and a couple of other people. They invited me to help them with the International Superman Expo in Ohio in 1988. I ran demos and such for them. Then they asked I was interested in going to the GEN CON Game Fair to run demos." Prosperi said he quickly agreed.

couple of adventures in a book called *Treasures of Greyhawk*. I was doing all of this at night, after work. It was pretty tough," he recalls. "I started to get into playtesting for *Earthdawn* at about the same time I landed the project *A Killing Glare*, a *Shadowrun* adventure. When I was contacting Tom Dowd at FASA about the specifics of the *Shadowrun* product, he mentioned an *Earthdawn* opening. I put together a resume, sent it to then-president Sam Lewis, and in October, 1992, I flew out to Chicago for an interview." Two months later he was named the *Earthdawn* Line Developer.

The position involves coordinating art, editorial, and marketing for the *Earthdawn* product line, planning what types of products to put on the schedule,



— spurred by his love of comic books.

"I first got into gaming in 1986. Wow. Ten years. The time has gone real fast," Prosperi said, adding he was 22 at the time. "I was big into comic books years ago, particularly DC Comics, and the *DC Heroes* game caught my attention. I bought it and ended up being the game master. It was rough at first. The first couple of games I ran, I tried to keep within the context of the comic books, but my players coerced me to go farther." He recalls that he had to expand the world and let the players go beyond the plot-lines running in the numerous DC books. "I bought all the supplements that came out with the game. And then I noticed there were different authors' names on all of them. That intrigued me. So I got the number to Mayfair Games, called, and found out the supplements were mostly written by freelance authors."

Prosperi decided he wanted to be one of those authors, too. "I put together a couple of proposals — that got rejected. Between proposals I took a trip to the Chicago area to visit relatives. One day I went to the Mayfair Office." He quickly added that he called ahead

"That was my first Game Fair — in 1988. It was quite an eyeopening experience to see the rest of the industry."

Shortly after that, he discovered Mayfair Games had an opening its warehousing department. He applied, and he started work two months after the Game Fair. "I was the warehouse manager. I was the shipping person, and I managed the inventory. I still kept involved in playtesting, and I started to write games a little later."

After a year Prosperi left Mayfair Games. Relying on his experience with playtesting, he contacted West End Games, and soon after he was playtesting for the *Torg** system. "At the GEN CON Game Fair in 1990 I was asked to write a short adventure for *Torg*. That was the first real thing I wrote, and I got it done early so they offered me a second piece."

Prosperi's West End Games credits include a section of *Pixaud's Practical Grimoir*, a book of spells for the *Torg* magic system. His first major project was *The Storm Knight's Guide to the Possibility Wars*, a player's book about creating backgrounds for characters. And he had some material published in *Wanted by Cracken* for the *Star Wars** game.

"Later I designed a section of TSR's *DARK SUN® MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* tome. That was in 1991. And then I also did a

and creating outlines for those products for freelance writers. When the freelance writers submit a finished manuscript, Prosperi reviews it to make sure it fits the *Earthdawn* storyline and that the "game mechanics" work.

"In the first year or two I found myself writing 20 to 30 percent of any product. That's because sometimes we wanted to make the products bigger than we initially planned. Sometimes the author didn't hit everything we wanted covered. And sometimes we decided that we needed to add stuff — mostly because we were still establishing the game." Now Prosperi finds himself doing little such supplemental writing — though he has many other tasks to keep him busy.

"I also represent the company at conventions around the country by running seminars and game demos. I go to the GEN CON Game Fair — of course. I occasionally go to Origins. This year I went to the *WINTER FANTASY™* Convention, too."

Prosperi considers the Game Fair pleasurable and painful. "It's this four-day extravaganza I look forward to with anticipation and dread. I started worrying about this Game Fair in January. I coordinate all the events FASA sponsors. I handle the seminars, the paperwork, scheduling — as well as all the booth demos. So once a week from January on I spend half a day on the Game Fair in some

It's work, but I love to run games.

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BIRTHRIGHT

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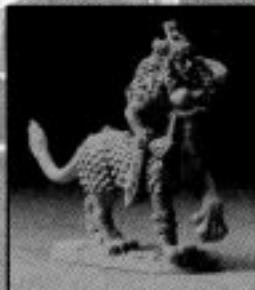


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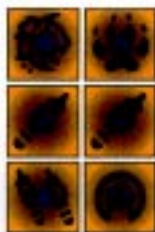
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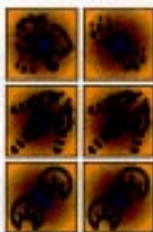
COMMON TROOPS

Lynx-folk



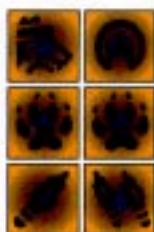
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Leopard-folk

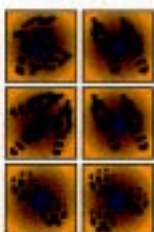


Hunters

Hound-folk



Fox-folk



Stalkers

Antelope-folk

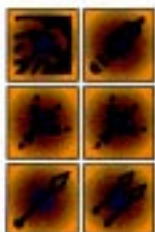


Horse-folk

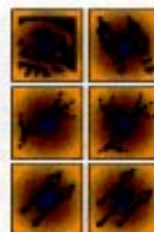


Racers

Falcon-folk

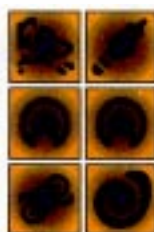


Hawk-folk



Fliers

Weasel-folk



Badger-folk



Shamans



by Dori Hein & Bill Olmesdahl

The battle for good or evil rages on in Esfah. Nature's fury clashes with the foul corruption of Death, and no one knows who will win this bitter war. But Nature has a new trick: The Feral!

Kicker Pack #4 introduces the newest good race in the DRAGON DICE™ game. The Feral are savage man-beasts, with an awesome special ability and powerful new spells. Here is an introduction to the untamed world of the Feral and some ideas for unleashing them in battle.

Flexible and Fearsome

The Feral follow the same basic rules as do other races in the DRAGON DICE game, but their special ability makes them unique and formidable. They are so strongly tied to Nature (and thus the forces of life and goodness) that new Feral are constantly created. Because Feral young mature more quickly than the children of other races, more of their kind are produced naturally.

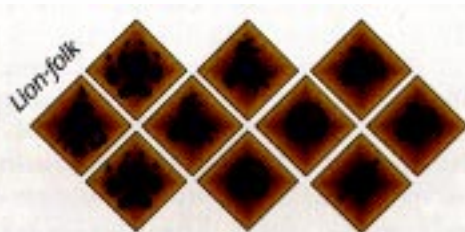
In game terms, this means that at the start of a player's turn, every terrain occupied by one of his armies that contains at least one Feral unit attracts a one-health Feral unit from the dead unit area. (If no one-health units are available, no generation occurs.) This ability works extremely well in either all one-health Feral armies or armies with a large percentage of one-health units. Whenever an army containing Feral is injured in an attack, discard a common Feral unit first. At the start of your next turn, you'll get it back.

This special ability means that the Feral are unlikely to be destroyed outright. While this alone makes them a valuable addition to any army, the Feral are also well rounded in their action abilities. Unlike some races, who have feast or famine when rolling (like the Lava Elves), the Feral have their abilities spread evenly across the dice. When you roll an army of Feral melee troops (called Hunters and Stalkers, by the way), you can count on getting about the same number of melee hits, saves, and moves each time. For players who like to play by statistical odds rather than chance, this is a big advantage. The Feral makes a good, solid race to play against almost any opponent.

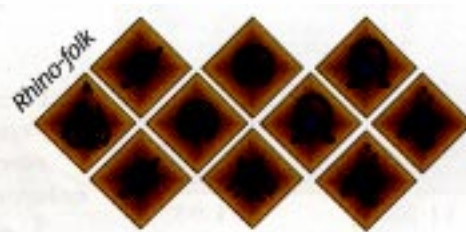
Nature's Magicians

Favored children of Nature, the Feral are also powerful spellcasters. Their mix of blue (air) and gold (earth) gives them a great selection of basic spells — including *stoneskin* (a fine defensive spell) as well as *hailstorm* and *lightning strike* (two of the most powerful offensive spells yet introduced to the game). Moreover, a Feral magician with enough points of magic can virtually guarantee an army a successful maneuver by using either *transmute rock to mud* or *windwalk*.

Like other recently introduced new races, the Feral have several spells that only they *can use*. *Hide* allows their owner to hide a one-health unit in the target army until the end of his next turn. Hidden units can't be affected by



Lion-folk



Rhino-folk

RARE TROOPS



spells until the spell ends. (The downside is that they also can't make any rolls.) Savage causes a one-health unit of the target army (your choice) to make a melee attack against its own forces. It's just the thing to throw at those annoying Goblin leopard riders or Undead that have been plaguing you.

Even more powerful is the gold *backlash* spell, which targets one terrain. If an army at that terrain casts magic, that army must then save against an amount of damage equal to the number of magic points it spent. What an incentive for your opponent finally to move the terrain die off of magic!

Beastly New Powers

The Feral have several special action icons unique to their race. These icons allow you to specialize your Feral army, helping you focus on melee, missile, or magic as you desire. The new special action icons are as follows:

Double Strike: During melee, double strike counts as three or four normal hits (depending on the die) and allows the Feral to roll again, counting the new result as well. There's no limit on the number of melee hits that can be generated in this way. (Of course, that would be pretty spectacular rolling!)

Gore: Found only on the rhino-folk, gore counts as two hits on a single target during melee. The unit gets to save, but if it's killed, it is immediately buried as well. With this power, you can slowly remove an opponent's one- and two-health units from the game completely.

Hug: If an army's got a lot of bear-folk in it, look out! During melee, the hug counts as four hits on a single target. The unit doesn't get to save, but it

does get to strike back before it's removed. (The downside is that the bear-folk doesn't get to roll any saves against this damage.) Between gore and hug, a Feral army quickly shreds its opponent.

Trumpet: When rolling for melee hits or save, trumpet rallies all Feral at the terrain and doubles their results. The icon's only found on the elephant-folk, but it's a tremendous boost.

In addition to these new special action icons, the Feral have a good mix of the old. They have a dispel ability, which negates all spells targeting a terrain or army; cantrip, which gives them immediate points of magic; and rend, which causes three points of damage and allows the die to be rerolled.

Tactics of the Feral

The Feral are an excellent, all-around race. They don't have any special weaknesses (like the Undead, which can't charge), and they make good partners in any multiracial army. Here are some strategies to try when using the Feral.

Multiply and Conquer: Large armies composed of one-health Feral units are best when you have an army at every terrain in the game. It will take several turns of jumping in and out of reserve to achieve this position, but when you're done you'll be able to recruit a new Feral at every terrain. In a four-player game, this is five health-worth of Feral each turn for free. It will take a tremendous, combined effort on the part of your opponents to wipe you out.

Go to the Enemy: The Feral's special ability isn't tied to one terrain, and they are good at just about everything. They are one of the few races that can take

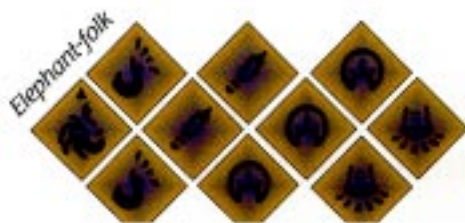
the fight to any terrain and thrive. They can even swap magic fire with the Coral Elves since the Feral also "se blue magic."

Maneuver Early and Often: The Feral are a quick race, good at maneuvering. You can't keep up with the Dwarves or Goblins in their home terrains, but you can with anyone else. Thus, you should be able to own the terrain die, wherever you are. Up against archers? Move the terrain quickly up to melee and crush them or move it back down to magic and *lightning strike* your opponent back into the Stone Age. Melee guerrillas? Jump the die up to the eighth face and start charging them, or drop it back to missile range and feather them with arrows.

When All Else Fails, Charge! Use your magicians to cast *stoneskin* spells on one of your armies. Once they're pumped up enough, have them charge an opposing army. The resulting damage should mash them into the ground while your own forces will escape relatively unscathed.

Fear Black Magic: Don't stand by while the death magicians bury your dead. Being able to bring new Feral into the game each turn is the race's main strength. Protect them. Co after the black magic casters whenever possible. And after they're dead, cast *dust to dust* on them to ensure that they don't come back. Anything that buries dice is a threat to you. Take that threat seriously.

Dori Hein's office at TSR is considered a "shrine to roadkill" for its many animai artifacts; Bill Olmesdahl closely resembles a shaved ape. It's only natural that these two worked on the Feral.





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Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn

AS YOU TRY TO EXPLAIN TO THE **CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD** WHY YOU ARE STANDING IN THE **KING'S PRIVATE CHAMBER** AT **TWO AM** LADEN WITH **SACKS OF GOLD** AND THE **PRICELESS TAPESTRY YOU RIPPED TO SHREDS** IN YOUR ATTEMPT **TO TEAR IT FROM THE WALL**, HE PROMPTLY ORDERS HIS MEN TO BEAT YOU SEVERELY. NO NEED TO ROLL - THE KING'S ELITE GUARD ARE SKILLFULLY TRAINED IN THE ART OF BEATING. THEY ADMINISTER BLOWS SO THAT YOU EACH HAVE ONLY ONE-HALF HIT POINT LEFT.

GOOD GOING, **MR. PERSONALITY!** I DON'T KNOW WHY WE LET YOU DO THE TALKING. YOUR **SOCIAL-INTERACTION** ATTRIBUTE **SUCKS!!**

HE'S RIGHT BRIAN. YOUR CHARACTER JUST ISN'T CUT OUT TO BE PARTY SPOKESMAN.

DARN IT ALL! THAT SOCIAL INTERACTION RULE HAS TO BE THE LAMEST THING SINCE **ELECTRONIC DICE!** IT'S HARD PLAYING A CHARACTER WHO LACKS MY OWN SKILLS. FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, MY STUPID BROWNIE FAMILIAR, **HODGY** HAS A HIGHER SOCIAL INTERACTION THAN I DO.

OH HOW NICE. I COULD **TELL** I WAS BEING BEATEN BY THE **BEST**. SHEESH!



HA HA! MAYBE YOU SHOULD LET YOUR **BROWNIE** DO ALL THE TALKING!

IT'S NOT FUNNY DAVE. TALKING AND PLAYING POLITICS HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY FAVORITE PART OF THE GAME. WELL... THAT AND **FIREBALL LOBBING!**

YEAH, MY HALF-WIT BROWNIE MIGHT AS WELL DO ALL THE TALKING IF I CAN'T... HAAAA... LET **HODGY** DO THE TALKING... NOT A BAD IDEA.

THE FOLLOWING WEEK...

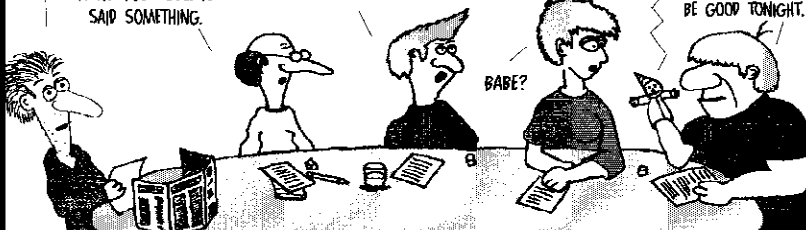
BRIAN? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH A **SALSA BOY** HAND PUPPET?

YOU MADE A **TIG-TAG TAGO** RUN? YOU COULDN'T SAID SOMETHING.

HA! LOOK AT THAT. HE'S REPLACED **SALSA BOY'S** SOMBRERO WITH A LITTLE BIDDY WIZARD'S CAP.

"HEY BRIAN! WHO'S THE **BABE?**"

COME ON, **HODGY**. I WARNED YOU TO BE GOOD TONIGHT.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. **I LIKE IT!** NOW THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN HARPING ABOUT ALL THESE YEARS. TAKING A LITTLE INITIATIVE! INSTEAD OF WHINING BRIAN SOUGHT A SOLUTION. NOT ONLY HAS HE SOLVED HIS OWN PROBLEM BUT THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN WILL BENEFIT.

IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE MORE INPUT FROM THE GROUP, I'M GRANTING BRIAN 1,000 EXPERIENCE POINTS. **GOOD JOB BRIAN!** NOW, LET'S GET ON WITH TONIGHT'S ADVENTURE!



LATER

SORRY BRIAN. YOUR FAMILIAR CAN'T POSSIBLY TURN THE RUSTY LOCK. HE'S A JUST A **BROWNIE**. REMEMBER?

"**JUST A BROWNIE??** WHAT THE HELL IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?"

I'M SIMPLY SAYING A BROWNIE WOULDN'T BE STRONG ENOUGH TO FREE THE LOCK.

"GO BACK TO GAM SCHOOL, **MONKEY BOY!** BROWNIES GET A +5 MODIFIER FOR FIXING MECHANICAL DEVICES.

I TOLD YOU TO STOP CALLING ME **MONKEY BOY!** NEXT TIME I'M DOCKING YOUR EXPERIENCE POINTS!

"**GEE!** I'M ONLY ZERO LEVEL. NOW I'LL NEVER MAKE FIRST LEVEL! THANKS FOR THE GUMBALL, MICKY!"

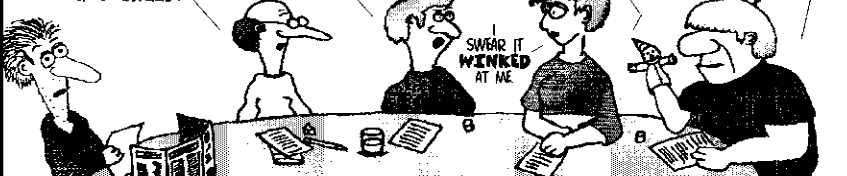
YOU KNOW, I NEVER REALIZED **HODGY** WAS SUCH AN OBNOXIOUS LITTLE **GREEP**.

GOT A LOT OF NERVE TOO. DID YOU HEAR HIM ASK FOR EQUAL SHARES OF THE TREASURE?

PSST, DAVE! IS THE BROWNIE STILL **STARING** AT ME?

"I WANT TO **TALK** ABOUT THAT!"

DARN IT. **HODGY**, PUT THE **DICE** DOWN! I MAKE THE ROLLS!



LATER STILL

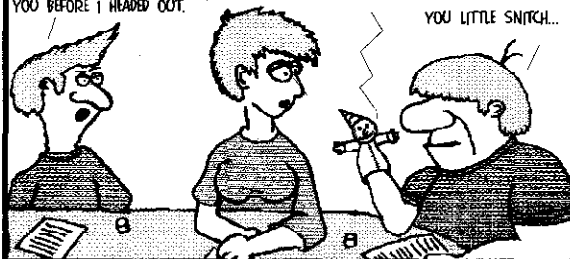
BRIAN, THE GAME'S OVER. YOU CAN PUT **HODGY** AWAY NOW.

WOW! I HAD A GREAT TIME. IT WAS LIKE PLAYING TWO CHARACTERS AT THE SAME TIME. ISN'T IT COOL HOW **HODGY'S** PERSONALITY **FLESHED OUT** SO QUICKLY? CAN'T WAIT TIL NEXT WEEK.

"OH YEAH, DAVE, IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS BUT YOU KNOW THAT **TEN-SIDER** YOU'RE MISSING? I SAW BOB SLIP IT IN HIS BOOK BAG!"

YOU LITTLE SNITCH...

OH, **HODGY?** YOU ASKED ME TO GET WITH YOU BEFORE I HEADED OUT.



NEXT WEEK

THE **TORCH BEARER?** YOU WANT TO ROLE-PLAY THE **TORCH BEARER?** I DUNNO, BOB. I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. AND DAVE, I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO HELP THE GAME FOR YOU TO ROLE-PLAY EVERY ONE OF YOUR NEIGHBORS.

I'M IN HELL.

OH YEAH. WE GOT KIND OF CHUNNY UP FRONT THERE TAKING THE POINT. WE'RE **BLOOD BROTHERS**. NOW!

BUT I SPENT ALL NIGHT WORKING OUT PERSONALITIES FOR ALL FIVE OF THEM. THEY'RE REALLY COOL. I BASED THEM ON THE MEMBERS OF THE BAND **THE BLIND MORTICIAN'S**.

"YOU TELLEM **BOB!** CAN I POLISH YOUR CROSSBOW?"

"DAVE, I THINK YOU'RE PAYING ME TOO MUCH. CUT MY PAY IN HALF - REALLY!"

YOU MUST FEEL LEFT OUT, SARA. **DARN**. FIRST I MISS THE **POG GRAZE** NOW THIS. I'LL SUFFER.



DragonMirth



By Mathew Guss



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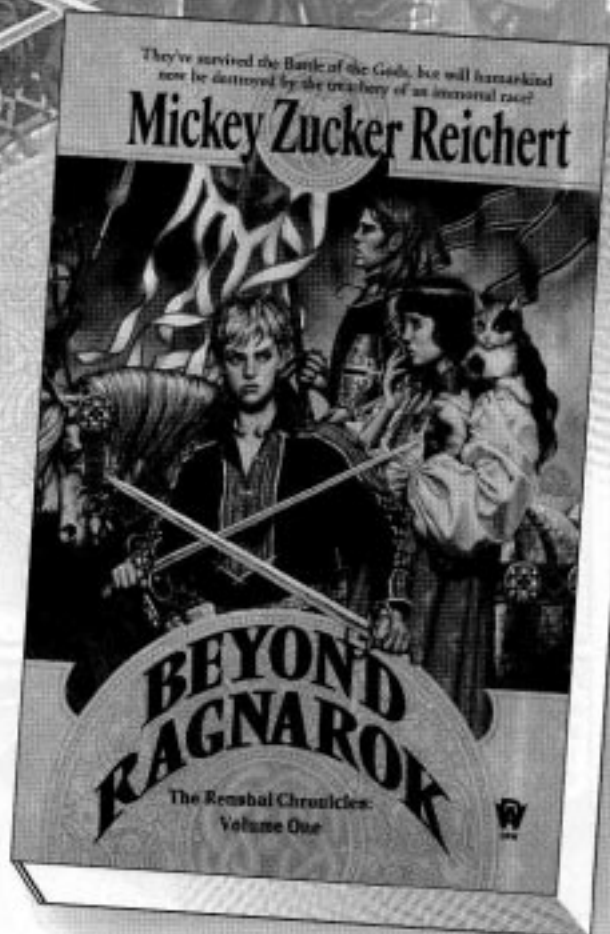
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Magic. Wouldn't it be great if it were real? No, not the card game, wise guy. I mean magic as in spells, like the kind lurking in the back of the *Player's Handbook*. I'd use *remove curse* to knock out my hay fever, *comprehend languages* to translate computer manuals, and *gust of wind* to clear the room when my cat passes gas.

And it'd be especially great for us role-players. Think of the spells we could cook up:

Silence the brain-dead. Muzzles players who insist on asking moronic questions. ("How come my horse can't use a sword?").

Dispel publisher. Any publisher who puts out the second edition of an RPG within one year of the first is sent screaming into the Abyss.

Transmute junk. Transforms bloated sourcebooks and pricey expansion sets into something useful, like pizzas.

Ah, well. I can dream, can't I? Meanwhile, here's a new batch of magic supplements — with (sigh) made-up spells — for your consideration.



Shaman

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game supplement

96-page softcover book
TSR, Inc.

\$13

Design: Kevin Hassall

Editing and development: Steve Miller

Illustrations: Randy Post, Mark Nelson,
Valerie Valusek, and Karl Waller

Cover: Alan Pollack

What say we all chip in and buy TSR a thesaurus? Designer Kevin Hassall admits that a number of shaman types are already running around the various AD&D® worlds, including those described in *The Complete Barbarian's Handbook* and *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. But since all the shamans are different, how come they're all stuck with the same moniker? As a service to the gaming industry in general and TSR in particular, I hereby donate the following synonyms: Mysterian, Wraithrunner, Thaumaturge, Hexist, Spellbinder, and — my personal favorite — Spirit Tweezer.

As it happens, the name is the least interesting aspect of this otherwise inventive supplement, which rethinks and reworks the AD&D priest class. Unlike standard priests, who operate more or less independently, shamans operate in a rigid partnership with the spirit world. A shaman must establish and maintain an intimate bond with his spirit patrons; no spirits, no spells. Because spirits have minds of their own — some cajole and punish, others comfort and reward — the shaman occupies a peculiar place in the AD&D cast of characters; simply put, he's half of a whole.

Specifically, **Shaman** introduces three new priest classes. The tribal shaman, a primitive religious functionary, serves as a conduit between his congregation and the spirit world. The solitary shaman is a self-sufficient recluse, rejecting the trappings of civilization for the simple comforts of the wilderness. The spiritualist, an outcast from a ravaged culture, is a grim vigilante who's one part crusader, one part creep. All three are presented as character kits, replete with ability requirements, racial restrictions, and background notes. Statistically, they don't vary much from standard priests; all shamans use eight-siders for Hit Dice and retain Wisdom as their prime requisite. Instead, they're distinguished by their special benefits. A solitary shaman, for instance, can engage in a telepathic conversation with a spirit by merely sitting still for a few rounds. A tribal shaman can befriend suspicious spirits by furnishing them with a day's worth of food and drink. The dream interpretation proficiency allows shamans to foretell the future; the trance proficiency enables them to tap the memories of dead tutors. Hassall's astute role-playing tips enable new players to get an immediate handle on their PCs' personalities; solitary shamans relish nature and avoid politics, spiritualists cultivate a

chilly indifference to life and death ("People die every day. So what?").

Hassall has also come up with a new approach to spellcasting which players accustomed the standard system may find both frustrating and liberating. Where a standard priest must pray for his spells, a shaman receives his spells as gifts from his spirits, a convenient arrangement as long as he and they remain on good terms. Unlike a standard priest, a shaman may cast each spell in his arsenal as often as he likes, providing he makes a successful Wisdom check after each casting; failure prevents him from casting the spell until he gets a full night's sleep. But when a shaman adds a particular spell to his repertoire, he's stuck with it; he can't replace it with a different spell, nor can he learn a new spell until he advances in level and acquires a new slot. Further, just because a shaman has access to a particular spell doesn't mean he can use it at will; a cranky spirit may decide to withhold a spell at a critical moment, leaving the shaman gesturing into empty air. And the new shaman spells, though imaginative, are fairly low-key. Samples: *cleanse hearth* (dispels spirits from a house or barn), *protection from serpents* (nonmagical snakes ignore the target), and *bind guardian* (affixes a protective spirit to particular site or object).

Overall, Hassall serves up with a clean, easy to assimilate set of rules, avoiding the temptation to ladle on a lot of extraneous glop; this is one of the few RPG supplements I understood completely the first time through. Occasionally, however, he skimps on details, resulting in maddening ambiguities. The *converse* spell allows the caster to ask questions of tree, bird, and stream spirits, who will "answer to the best of their abilities." Great, but what exactly does your average stream know, anyway? Hassall doesn't tell us. A solitary shaman loses one of his five senses when he reaches 8th level, a penalty associated with his character kit. But losing, say, the sense of sight has enormous consequences, while losing the sense of taste doesn't seem like much of a hardship at all. Hassall neglects to explore the ramifications of any type of sensory loss.

Then there's a good chunk of **Shaman** I can't even discuss, at least not without giving away the books best surprise. And that's too bad, because not only is the surprise pretty interesting, it's also pretty outrageous. I'm referring to

Chapter Five, where spirits are defined and their origins revealed. I like the idea of a big surprise (and I like the surprise itself). But this approach presents an aggravating logistical problem, namely, how do you keep this information out of the hands of the players? (It says in the introduction that "**Shaman** is designed to inspire players and DMs alike . . .") Unless you want to wreck the concept, access to **Shaman** will have to be restricted to DMs and to players with enough self-control not to look past page 44.

Evaluation: More reflective and intellectual than standard priests, shamans are best suited for adventures stressing investigation and problem-solving. With spells like *perfect perception* and *cleanse hearth*, shamans aren't much help in dungeon crawls, nor are they particularly effective on the battlefield; a shaman facing a horde of ogres is probably just a round or two away from joining the spirit world himself. But in the right campaign (light on violence, heavy on mysticism) and with the right players (thoughtful, seasoned, open-minded), **Shaman** can nudge AD&D in enticing new directions. And the interplay between the spirit world and the world of just plain folks is guaranteed to raise a few eyebrows; after all, these are spirits capable of inhabiting rocking chairs and (gulp) meat cleavers. Now if we could just do something about that name. . .

Arcane Companion

Rolemaster* game supplement

128-page softcover book

Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc. \$18

Design: Todd McGovern and John Curtis

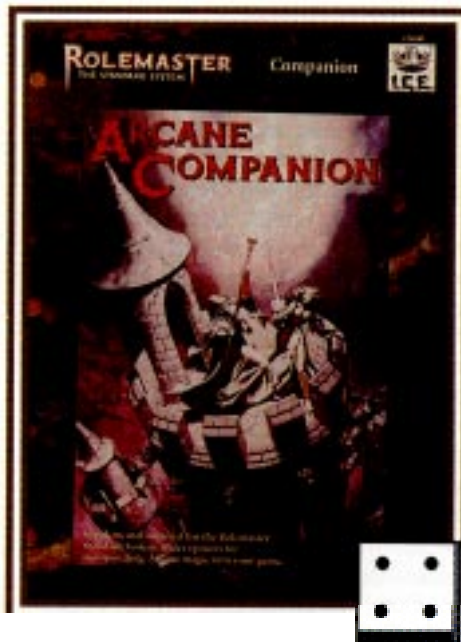
Editing: John W. Curtis III

Illustrations: Julie Baroh, Storn Cook, Dan Cruger, David Flora, Fredd Gorham, K.C. Lancaster, Wayne Reynolds, John Snyder, and Arnie Swekel

Cover: Angus McBride

If there's a fantasy RPG more complicated than *Rolemaster*, I've never seen it. Saturated with charts and numbers, it's for players who buy pocket calculators by the crate. Without question, *Rolemaster* is a design of impressive scope, but... well, let's put it this way: If you're the kind of guy who needs his fingers to do arithmetic, this ain't your kind of game.

Arcane Companion, the latest addition to the *Rolemaster* system, builds on the concept of magic laid out in the *Spell Law*



supplement back in the early '80s. Basically, *Rolemaster* sorts magical forces into three categories: Essence, Channeling, and Mentalism. Practitioners associated with each category have access to an array of related spells. Casting involves extensive die-rolling and chart-checking, simulating the effects of magic in mind-boggling detail. The **Companion** describes a super-powered version of standard magic, warning that it's "beyond the scope of many spellcasters to comprehend" and at best, "difficult to learn." Difficult to learn? Yikes! That's like the dentist warning that you might feel "a little pressure" before he shoves a needle through the roof of your mouth.

But surprise, surprise. Turns out that **Arcane Companion** is not only comprehensible but entertaining, thanks to the designers' efforts to infuse the facts and figures with vivid imagery. Here's a typical passage, explaining how a caster manipulates the forces of arcane magic:

Magic is the river. . . The caster makes his body the dam, the generators, and the entire power grid. . . If the river rises, he must make the dam bigger and stronger, or drown. . . The power to create the dam comes from both the mind and body of the arcane spell user and therefore, if he becomes weary, the dam cracks.

Nice, huh? In just a few sentences, an abstract concept is communicated simply and elegantly. The books pretty much all like that: thoughtful text buttressed by sharp metaphors. And, like **Shaman**, it's glop-free, making it the

most readable entry in the *Rolemaster* line — that is, assuming you're willing to overlook a bit of editorial laxity, such as the habitual substitution of "wierd" for "weird." As long as we're buying a thesaurus for TSR, what say we spring for a spell checker for Iron Crown?

The book opens with an engaging discussion of power sources, defined as pools of magical energy that wizards tap when casting spells. The gamemaster is encouraged to utilize as many of the sources as he likes, depending on the style and tone of his campaign. He might opt for Ley Lines, intangible ribbons of force that correspond to a planet's magnetic field. Or he might employ Essence Flows, energy streams of extradimensional origin. I prefer Earthnodes, bubbles of force that rise from the planetary core on convection currents. Spells cast within the radius of an exposed node require only 75% of their normal point cost (a terrific bargain). But there's a risk. Casters who persist in tapping powerful nodes may turn into compulsive users; in other words, they become tap addicts, physically dependent on Earthnodes. Tap addition is not only a clever idea, it's a springboard for an entire campaign.

The clever ideas don't end with Earthnodes. Players can tinker with Bladerunes, temporary enchantments that enhance every kind of weapon from a crossbow to a boomerang. The Artificial Life section tells how to construct incubator tanks necessary for the creation of Neng (acid-spitting fiends) and Kaeden (color-changing anthropoid insects). Spellcasters who abuse the power of the arcane may be subject to Burnout (which fries the caster's brain), Drain (which puts the caster into a coma), or Corruption (which turns the caster into a magnet for homicidal undead).

As for the rules, we're confronted with the usual firestorm of formulas, rife with Skill Rank Bonus Progressions and Racial Stat Bonus Modifications. The Revised Spell Casting Table, to pick a random example, contains bonuses and penalties for Power Points Used, Spell List Type, Use of Voice, Armor Status, and Number of Free Hands. Do the rules work? It'd take a Ph.D. in mathematics to verify every permutation, but as far as I can tell, they accomplish they what they're supposed to. Four new character types — Arcanist, Wizard, Chaotic, and Magehunter — are mainly defined by their skills and training packages; personality profiles are conspicuously absent.

The exhaustive spell list contains somewhere in the neighborhood of a thousand (!) entries. The sheer number of spells forced the designers to skimp on description, leaving it up to the gamemaster to decide whether *changing lungs* allows the caster to breathe in airless space as well as underwater, and if *see invisible* enables him to view invisible objects as well as invisible persons. Still, the list contains more wheat than chaff. Samples: *animate mana* (causes a power source to become sentient), *death's tale* (the caster experiences a vision of the events surrounding the death of a particular individual), and *rapid gravity shifts* (bounces the victim around like a rubber ball).

Evaluation: I'd like to tell you that the *Arcane Companion* material can be eased into other RPGs with minimal fuss. But alas, it's rock-solidly linked to the *Rolemaster* system; familiarity with previous products is mandatory, especially *Rolemaster Standard Rules* and *Spell law*. Because mastery of the magic system is essential to enjoying *Rolemaster*, experienced players should welcome this ambitious expansion with open arms. And if you're among those who've dismissed *Rolemaster* as not worth the effort, sneak a peak at *Arcane Companion*; it might tempt you to reconsider.

Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets

*Earthdawn** game supplement
144-page softcover book
FASA Corporation \$18
Design: Louis J. Prosperi, Steve Kenson, and Loren Coleman
Editing: Donna Ippolito
Illustrations: Janet Aulisio, Tom Baxa, Joel Biske, Kent Burles, John Dollar, Mike Nielsen, and R. K. Post
Cover: John Zeleznik

I can't say I'm the world's biggest *Earthdawn* fan. With its dwarves, dragons, and other fantasy archetypes — not to mention its polyhedral dice — *Earthdawn* always struck me as a throwback to earlier games. And the game mechanics still seem unnecessarily convoluted. But I admire — make that adore — the magic system, the most intelligent take on the mystic arts since the *Runequest** game. Because magic permeates every facet of the setting, characters, and culture, *Earthdawn* achieves a degree of authenticity to which many fantasy RPGs aspire but few achieve. In short, *Earthdawn* magic feels real.



Unfortunately, the magic rules are just as demanding as the rest of the game. Ideas like spell matrices and warping tests, though brilliant in conception, are tough on slackers like me who aren't motivated to delve into the nuances of magical theory; I just wanna toss some *fireballs* and be done with it. **So *Manual of Mystic Secrets***, which clarifies the original rules, is as welcome as an unexpected check from the IRS.

The *Munual* begins with a look at the primary types of Barsaive magic: blood, thread, and spell. We get a rundown of the history and utility of each (spell magic is underrepresented, although it's arguably the least interesting of the three) with care taken to integrate the information into *Earthdawn*'s rich, meticulous background. Thus, we learn of the importance of astral space to thread weavers, and the ties between blood initiates and the Great Library of Nehr'esha. We learn that although blood magic exists in both Life and Evil forms, player characters can use only the former (a critical detail). And we learn that blood oaths may involve no more than two characters at the same time; a PC wishing to swear an oath to three dwarves must complete the ceremony three times. Role-playing tips abound. Blood magicians, for example, are pariahs, victims of their association with Scourge. The color of a thread denotes the nature of the caster (a green thread indicates a reptilian magician). As his last act before he bites the dust, a dying magician can place a curse on his enemies. The original *Earthdawn* rule-

book presented wizards in two dimensions; the *Manual of Mystic Secrets* adds the third.

The *Manual* also adds a bundle of easy-on-the-brain options, enabling old-timers and newcomers alike to experiment with customized mages. The multi-discipline rules allow casters to combine the effects of two or more Disciplines — say, nethermancy and illusion — into a single spell. The half-magic system provides guidelines for translating a wizard's practical skills, such as geology and gardening, into spell-like effects. Would-be game inventors can check out the Spell Design chapter; the resulting incantations work surprisingly well.

Perhaps the most useful new concept is the *knack*, defined as a specialized variant of an existing spell. With guidance from the gamemaster, players are encouraged to concoct unique knacks for their characters. Just about any knack is acceptable, providing it arises from a talent the PC already has. For instance, a PC with the Abate Curse talent might acquire a knack for determining if an item is cursed without having to touch it. A PC with the Melee Weapons knack might come up with a knack that makes his weapons scream when they strike. Most of the *Manual's* new spells are presented in the form of knacks, and they're all pretty good. Samples: backbiter (enables an arrow to ricochet so that it hits a victim from behind), gaping wound (makes a wound appear to be far worse than it actually is) and *spell stacking* (allows a mage to cast a number of spells simultaneously at the same target).

Not every new concept passes muster. The section on creating magical objects is comprehensive but confusing; I read it three times and I'm still not sure how to make a decent thread item. Astral space doesn't amount to much; when it comes to combat and movement, astral space isn't all that much different from the physical world. And compared to its counterpart in the PLANESCAPE™ setting, *Earthdawn's* tour of the elemental planes is about as exciting as a wheelchair race at a rest home.

Evaluation: Two caveats: First, you can't use the *Manual of Mystic Secrets* by itself; you also need the *Earthdawn Companion*. Second, if you're looking for material to adapt to other games, you won't find much here; *Earthdawn* magic exists in its own quirky little world, and it doesn't travel well. That said, Barsaive veterans should consider this an essen-

tial purchase; the *Manual of Mystic Secrets* finds the holes in *Earthdawn* and fills them up.

Short and sweet

BLOOD WARS™ Warlord's Tactical Manual Reference Guide, by Kevin Melka. TSR, Inc., \$15.

There's something for everyone in this lavish guide to the BLOOD WARS card game. For slow-learners, there's a step-by-step rehash of the rules, with in-depth discussions of such key concepts as Alignment and Fate. Advanced players can ponder the strategy tips and fool around with the customized decks (like Factols' Revenge and Modrons 'R' Us). Best of all, the book features full-color reproductions of the complete set, boosters included, so collectors can drool over the Lady of Pain, the Floating Gods, and all the other ultra-rarities they're never gonna own.

Essential Fantasy Earth* game, by Michael C. Zody. Zody Games, \$9.

In DRAGON® Magazine issue #228, I brought to your attention an intriguing new small press RPG called the *Fantasy Earth** game. In conjunction with the first supplement, *The Book of Magic*, *Fantasy Earth* provides a set of sound, thoughtful rules, adaptable to your setting of choice. But at \$30, the entry fee is a little high. Now comes **Essential Fantasy Earth**, a compendium of the core rules from the original two volumes. It's not a new edition exactly, but rather an alternative version with a simplified system and all the bells and whistles — spell lists, sample characters, an introductory scenario — necessary to get a campaign off the ground. Even in its streamlined form, the game requires a fair amount of number-crunching, which may discourage the mathematically challenged. But at this price, what've you got to lose? I mean, you can barely buy dinner for \$9. (Information: Zody Games, One Kendall Sq. #178, P.O. Box 9171, Cambridge, MA 02139.)

Guildbook: Sundmen, by Beth Fischl. White Wolf Game Studio, \$12.

The second entry in the Guildbook series for the *Wraith: The Oblivion** game describes a cult of ancient spooks steeped in the traditions of classical theater. But the cult's idea of a Broadway play is shaping the psyche of an unwary sleeper into bizarre Dreamscapes, with nightmarish consequences for all con-

When we reached the
depths of space, they
were there,
waiting...



cerned. Despite the overwrought narration ("...the Gods are ailing. We immortals have fallen. Inspiration is dying."), *Sandmen* delivers a crypt-full of chills. Consider, for instance, the dead-eyed sociopath who shows up at the foot of its victim's bed wearing "a necklace hung with a demon's fangs...the soiled tatters of a plague victim's robe . . ." For experienced *Wraith* - ers, this is role-playing at its most unnerving.

GURPS Celtic Myth, by Ken and Jo Walton. Steve Jackson Games, \$18.

A treatise on Celtic folklore isn't my idea of page-turner. The first half of this *GURPS** game sourcebook, recounting the history and literature of the Celts, reads like a college text, expansive but a bit stuffy. However, **Celtic Myth** comes to life in part two, a provocative look at druidic magic featuring shapeshifter duels, enchanted beads called Snakestones, and "letter" spells derived from the Ogham alphabet. I'm not convinced a Celts campaign is worth the trouble, but incorporating the druidic material into another setting — say, *GURPS Camelot* or *GURPS Imperial Rome* — could be mighty interesting.

Between the Shadows, by Carlos J. Martijena-Carella with Kevin Siembieda. Palladium Books, \$17

The first supplement for the *Nightbane** game (previously known as *Nightspawn*) features a cluster of creepy settings. Groom Lake, a base of operations for the American Defense Agency, might be a front for extraterrestrials, a portal to the Astral Domain, or both. The Dreamstream, composed of the unconscious thoughts of all sentient beings, is home to Soul Leeches and Guilt Eaters. Adventurers on vacation might drop by Club Freak, a nightclub created by the infamous Earl of Hideous. Dazzling artwork — courtesy of R.K. Post, Vince Martin, Wayne Breaux Jr., and Heather McKinney — and Carella's nimble imagination make this an above-average effort. But I gotta wonder — with 144 pages to fill, couldn't they have found room for a couple of full-blown adventures?

MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendices I & II, by William W. Conners. TSR, Inc., \$20.

This softcover volume complies all of the creatures presented in the first two **MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM** appendices for the **RAVENLOFT®** setting, *Creatures of Dread* and *Children of the Night*. Among the

more memorable critters are the bus-sengeist (a gloomy spirit emanating an *aura of despair*), valpurgeist, (a ghost with a broken neck whose head flops when it walks), and vampire kender (a blood-sucking version of the cuties from the **DRAGONLANCE®** campaign). If you have the loose-leaf editions from 1991 and 1993, you won't need this. But if you've worn out the holes in the originals, snap it up — you can't stage a serious **RAVENLOFT** campaign without it.

Quest for the Grail* game, by Ian Hense, David F. Nalle, Paul Reeves, and Richard Trainham. Stone Ring Games, \$8.25 (54-card starter deck).

From the sludge pit of collectible card games emerges this gem, a stylish take on the legend of King Arthur. Each player begins by dividing his cards — which boast smart text and exquisite artwork — into two decks. The Court Deck consists of Kings, Knights, Rewards, Events, Domains, and Companions. The Quest Deck comprises a variety of missions and confrontations, such as the hunt for the Faerie Ring and a showdown with the Giant of Arroy. To complete a Quest, the player deploys Knights and Kings, augments them with power points generated by healthy Domains, and hustles for the spells and equipment necessary to thwart the opposition. Successful Quests earn Valor. A Knight whose Valor totals 12 or more may go for the Grail by attempting to overcome three Quests in the same turn; he who captures the Grail wins the game. Notably, **Quest for the Grail** stresses problem-solving over combat, a refreshing change from the smack-'em-in-the-head approach taken by virtually every other card game on the market. True, **Quest** requires an annoying number of die-rolls. And true, the card stock is a little thin. But these are incidental quibbles. Quest is a keeper. (Information: Stone Ring Games, Box 17936, Austin, TX 78760.

Killer Crosshairs, by Jeffrey Barber. Biohazard Games, \$10.

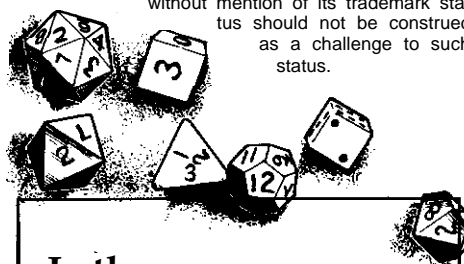
The Oddball of the Month Award goes to this curiosity from Missouri which consists of two transparent plastic grids, 14 pages of target silhouettes (men, women, horses, house cats), and about 10 pages of rules. Billed as a "visual targeting system" compatible with most RPGs, **Killer Crosshairs** enables you to determine with startling precision exactly which body part you hit with a successful attack. It works like this: After making an attack

roll, you place a grid on the silhouette that most closely resembles your target. Next, you consult the Systems Conversion section to determine a *Crosshairs* value that corresponds to your roll; each game system has its own formula (AD&D players use the formula for d20 rolls). You count off the indicated number of spaces on the grid and — ta da-a-a — hey, you shot that arrow right down his throat! It's quick, accurate, and disturbingly realistic; I, for one, could live without knowing whether my axe creased some sucker's skull or whacked him in the crotch. And the system seems to assume that the targets are standing still; wouldn't you need a smaller silhouette for, say, a target who's running away? (Or, more precisely, a series of decreasingly smaller silhouettes as the target recedes into the distance? This could get complicated.) But I'm nit-picking. If you're a marksman who absolutely, positively has to know if you skewered that pussy cat's paw or just nicked its whiskers, this is a must. (Information: Biohazard Games, 2607 Eastwood Drive #61, Columbia, MO 65202.)



Rick Swan, the author of *The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games* (St. Martin's Press), has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply.

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Clack

Continued from page 120

Sad news for fans of Musketeer-style fencing and swashbuckling: Nightshift Games (Fremont, CA) had planned a new edition of Paul Kidd's sharp and inventive *Lace & Steel** RPG, originally published in the late 1970s by the Australian company TAGG. But in early May, Nightshift president Paul Lidberg said, "With the changes in the market, added to our recent focus on [the *Hidden Invasion** RPG], *Lace&Steel* was no longer something we could do." Lidberg and Kidd are seeking a new publisher for the game. (Contact: froggod@aol.com)

Internet mailing lists

Many gamers on the Internet discuss their favorite RPGs through e-mail messages sent without charge to a list of fellow fans. If you have e-mail, you can subscribe to these free mailing lists and join the discussion.

Two warnings: Popular mailing lists can flood you with hundreds of messages a day, so be ready; and lists, like everything on the Internet, appear and vanish unpredictably. A current "list of lists" is available on the Web at www.mcs.com/~duff/rpg/list_of_lists.html.

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Austin freelancer Allen Varney has designed 15 role-playing supplements and contributed to 20 more, most recently the Feng Shui scenario collection *Marked for Death*.

Send news to APVarney@aol.com.

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By Michael Hearon

"There must be a better way to recharge this thing."



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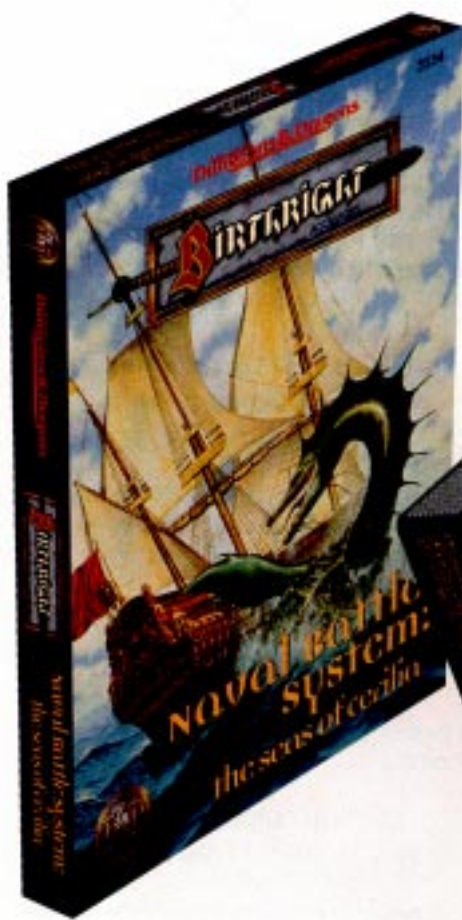
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the Current Clack

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Battletech* card game rescued

After a narrow brush with death, the long-planned *Battletech** trading card game from Wizards of the Coast (WotC; Seattle) is proceeding.

WotC licensed card-game rights to the popular board game from FASA Corporation (Chicago) in late 1993. After two years of indifferent progress, involving three different designs by half a dozen people at WotC and FASA, WotC informed FASA in March that it was cancelling the game. But then WotC designer Richard Garfield, who was not previously involved in the project, rescued it by taking on design duties himself. The game is now in beta testing, and the company hopes to publish it this fall.

Since Garfield has gotten involved, "Support for this project at all levels of the company is absolutely incredible, from the president's office to the guys in the mail room," says project leader Ron Richardson. Other than Jonathan Tweet's *Everway** game (now taken over by Pagan Publishing) and Peter Adkison's *Primal Order** game, Garfield has designed all of WotC's published games.

The *Battletech* license is a last holdover from WotC's earliest success. In fall 1993, when it released the *Magic: The Gathering** game, the company initially expected modest growth. WotC pursued licenses with other adventure gaming companies on the assumption that it would be one more publisher among peers. Thus it acquired card-game licenses for the *Vampire**, *Cyberpunk 2020: Middle-earth Role-Playing**, and *Ysgarth** RPGs as well as the *Battletech* game, and briefly pursued several similar licenses.

After M:TG's phenomenal success catapulted WotC to the top of the industry, the company refocused on a larger market and development of original properties. Only the *Vampire* and *Cyberpunk* game licenses reached publication (as the *Jyhad*/Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*

and *Netrunner** games). WotC eventually cancelled its other licenses. In December Iron Crown Enterprises released its own *Middle-Earth; The Wizards** card game with great success.

The rapid production schedule for the *Battletech* game — design in spring, publication in autumn — reflects WotC's new effort to produce games more efficiently. Aside from several foreign editions of the *Magic* game, six issues of *The Duelist*, and various newsletters, WotC (which employs well over 200 people) published 13 products in the last 12 months: three *Magic* expansions, the *Netrunner* and *Everway* games, new editions of the *Vampire** and *RoboRally** games plus one expansion for each, and four books. For the balance of 1996 WotC has announced the *Battletech* game, four card-game expansions, one book, and more *Magic* foreign editions, including Chinese and Korean.

SLA Industries*: In late April WotC sold its *SLA Industries* RPG (cancelled last December with the other WotC role-playing lines) to a startup company, Jageeda Publishing. Company principals include Matt Murray (dboy@wizards.com), Katherine Sifers, Brian "Chippy" Dugan, and *SLA Industries* designer Dave Allsop. WotC took over the game in 1994 with the purchase of its original publisher, Nightfall Games, but produced only three supplements.

(Contact: questions@wizards.com)

Hero/R. Talsorian publishing deal

Starting this fall, R. Talsorian Games (Berkeley, CA), publisher of the *Cyberpunk 2020*, *Mekton**, and *Castle Falkenstein** RPGs, will produce and publish Hero Games products. In June, Hero Games (Aptos, CA), publisher of the *Champions** super-hero RPG, ended its relationship with its previous producer and distributor, Iron Crown Enterprises (see *DRAGON® Magazine* #228).

Bruce Harlick remains as Hero line editor. The first Hero product from RTG, due this fall, will be a new edition of the *Champions* game. According to co-designer Steve Peterson, "The new edition of *Champions* will be primarily a campaign book; it will not include the full Hero System rules nor the genre book" of the current 4th edition. "The new *Champions* will mostly describe the history, characters, stories, and technology of the campaign; it will also include the basic Hero rules in extremely brief form." This form, nicknamed "Instant Hero," is a truncated introductory version of the Hero System rules. In contrast to the elaborate writeups of the full rules, an Instant Hero character's statistics fit on a trading card.

Peterson says, "The new campaign will have some familiar names from the past, but everything else is new: the history, the backgrounds, origins, powers, and costumes. The 5th Edition of the Hero System rules — the complete set of rules for creating characters, powers, running combat, etc. — will come out some time next year."

As announced in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #229, Gold Rush Games (Elk Grove, CA) retains its license to publish Hero sourcebooks and adventures.

(Contact: herogames@aol.com, rtg1@best.com; Web: www.herogames.com)

Notes from the field

Ronin Publishing, a new company in Boston, has acquired *The Whispering Vault** game, the 1994 RPG originally released by Pariah Press. Designed by Mike Nystul (immortalized in the AD&D® game as the creator of *Nystul's magic aura*), WV is an offbeat and stylish game of supernatural horror. Ronin comprises freelancer Chris Pramas (who worked on the original game), his brother Jason, and Neal Darcy. Ronin's support plans for WV include supplements called *Mortal Magic* and *Book of Hunts*. (Contact: RoninP@aol.com)

Continued on page 113

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