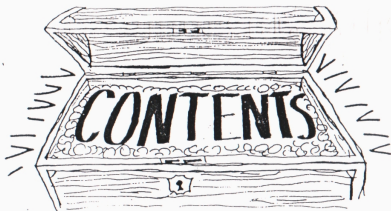


# Generals, Dragons and Dice





COVER ART IN WATERCOLOUR AND INK BY A NAMELESS CONTRIBUTOR

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Hi, everyone and welcome to Issue #21! Do you all realise that this is GDD's Second Anniversary Issue? That's right, two years ago to the... okay, month, Steve Martin decided to type up a newsletter for the WRPBGF (Wellington's Forum), and, well, here we are. I won't, however, try to tell you that we haven't looked back.

As subeditor, accounts manager and proofreader in chief, I'm the one that gets to deal with all the rotten depressing stuff that Steves B and M normally are lucky enough to avoid. I'm the one that counts up the unsold issues, and notes the dismal number of subscriptions on the list, and gets to hack people's articles to bits under the spellchecker. It all gets a bit depressing when the shops that stock us send back the issues they can't sell.

Every couple of months, we ask ourselves if it's worth carrying on - GDD certainly doesn't make any money for us. We say to Steve M that it wouldn't be so bad if we went bi-monthly.

Then we look back at the old issues, and remember the comments of people who bought issues, saying "Wow! I love the cover!" or who come in to Mind Games and ask for the issue (which one did it end up in at the end?) with "The House in the Swamp Part 4", 'cause their players want to finish playing it.

We remember getting the first contribution from a young writer in rural parts, who has since become one of our more regular contributors, which made us roll around on the floor laughing. We remember the buzz of finally trimming the last edge of the last copy of an issue, and throwing it in disgust into the box, then hooning off to (what used to be) Hatters on Courtenay Place for the post-production burger (normally at 2am or so), and turning quietly into vegetables telling each other that it really is a neat feeling having another issue ready to amaze the world.

Then we look at each other and say "Well, we could go on a subscription drive... and while we're not making money, we're sure not losing it... bi-monthly bi schmonthly!" Then we set up and put together another issue, and you end up reading it. That's looking back.

Looking forward - well, what can we do but wait for the subscription chits, wait for the new articles, pray for advertisements, wait for something appropriate to appear on a Bulletin Board for Steve B. to download. We hold our breath, we make plans, and we put out issue #21.

Enjoy it. There's a lotta luv in these A5 pages, dudes and dudettes - so if you wanna be in on the act of making a real-life decent Kiwi magazine for gamers, don't just sit there on your asses and call us dreamers. GDD certainly ain't White Dwarf or Dragon, but it's not gonna be anything more than it is now without *YOU* telling your mates, buying your copy, buying a subscription for a gift, making sure that when someone says "GDD?", you tell them we're here, and we're not just writing this stuff to stroke our egos, we're here to make a connection for Kiwi gamers.

What is it they say? "Don't dream it, be it!"

Tru O



# GMING WITH GODS

## *A Comment on Fantasy Religious Systems*

by Craig Barkle

In most fantasy roleplaying games, there are gods. Whether they are unseen beings, who grant their clerics powers from on high, leaving the mortal world to deal with itself, or avatars that walk among the common folk. What is the best way to deal with this phenomenon of fantasy gaming? Do deities talk directly with the characters? Or do they stay blissfully unaware of their minion's dying screams for divine intervention? The secret, I believe as a GM, is to let your players decide.

In recent games I have run, there have been an interesting mix of religious followers. The most enjoyable of these is a dwarven cleric who actively tries to do everything possible in the name of his god, and to further his god's interests "as he perceives them". This ranges from asking other characters to utter "his god's" name upon healing, screaming his name in battle, and inviting communities who follow his god to move into areas made vacant through his group's adventuring. This means that the player is happy with his character following this god, and indeed, does more work determining the interests of his character's pantheon than I do!

Through such play, a god's religion and his followers flourish in an area previously void of his teachings. This in itself creates some interesting future adventures. There still have to be some constraints, such as subtle hints when the GM's aims and ideas do not quite follow with the player's of, this new god's emergence. This is handled through advice to the player, that what is happening is not exactly okay in the eyes of his god. If this falls on deaf ears, then powers may be withheld. If this still fails, then the character can be directly opposed by superiors of his Church.

The main thing to remember is: never punish a player for his character's actions. If a cleric of a peace-loving god wanders around killing things, don't limit experience or restrain his actions. Oppose him with the military arm of his god or pantheon, and let him kill them. (If he's nuking everything already he'll probably enjoy it). When he asks why he can still cast spells, tell him he must be getting his power from somewhere else: instant adventure!

Then again, there are those players who are not interested in "following a god", they just want to be a "cleric". Same rules apply, though this character may not benefit as much from the world around them as those who foster their god's ideals and beliefs. Again it is the player who has to enjoy himself. Don't place barriers in his path just because he wants to "play the game" slightly different. If the work isn't put in, don't give as many rewards.

In the end it is a fine balance and the players and GM's enjoyment is the most important factor.



# DRAGONS

## *After AD&D (First Edition)*

by Steve Martin and Steve Beeston

First, it should be said, we are apologists for the AD&D system in general, and Second Edition AD&D in particular - the reasons for which will not be gone into here, as it is probably a six-page article or debate in its own right, and we still wouldn't cover all the points. It occurred to Steve B that dragons were really one of the most underrated creatures in AD&D, even in Second Edition, and we felt even in other games.

There is a general feeling, within the circle in which we play, that dragons are the elite of all monsters. Even demons, (sorry, that's "fiends" now) should be easier to take out than dragons, and should have to gang up to take down a dragon. It must be admitted that First Edition dragons were wimps. In AD&D's defence, it must be said that the *Monster Manual I* came out in 1977 for the first time, and had been in the throes of design and development for over two years. Quite simply, the monsters in the book were being out-gunned even before the book came out. Many of the monsters had not been much modified since their first design and inception in the very early 70's. With rule additions from books like *Greyhawk* and *Blackmoor*, and then later with the options of Weapon Specialisation that were introduced in *Unearthed Arcana*, all of the monsters in that first *Monster Manual* were out-gunned. But none more so than the dragon.

Other game systems that came out after AD&D, inspired by a desire for more realism, magic or character development, learnt from AD&D's mistakes, and their dragons were generally tougher. Further, many people were put off AD&D, because it was that system in which they had outgrown the "Hack and Slash" syndrome or the "Monty Haul" games and made sure that the new games they took up discouraged this.

Second Edition has changed many of the imbalances (but not all). Dragons now are so much harder to kill than they ever were, and this is great. However, they are still so regularly badly misplayed.

We have both been roleplaying for well over ten years, and in that time only one of us has ever fought a dragon in the air. How many characters are able to take the battle to the dragon when it flies? Yes, we agree that it is possible, and you could probably make up a party out of your favourite characters who could do it, but only if given time. And rarely, in our experience, is such a group gathered.

Flying is normally something only one or two people in a party (at the most!) can do. Yes, your mages who could cast *Fly* spells can even the balance, but only if they are not affected by the dragon's Fear Aura, and the are not immediately crisped to a cinder by the dragon's fiery (/freezing, etc.) breath. Even in Rolemaster, a game where dragons are stupendously tough, I have normally seen the dragon land after breathing only once. In the system reknowned for its incredible criticals, this is the surest way for something otherwise invulnerable to get itself killed. As Terry Pratchett said "One-in-a-million chances happen nine times out of ten".

Surely a dragon, traditionally one of the smartest of creatures, is going to use all its advantages to greatest effect. In all systems I have seen, dragons are notoriously resistant to magic and missile fire, but very prone to Barbarians and Knights with huge choppers! Why let such a foe near you when you can defeat it from a distance? It is not dishonourable for a dragon to toast its opponents; after all, you show me the fantasy roleplaying party that acts honourably and fights the dragon one at a time!

So, next time as Gamemaster, you go to put your players up against The Biggest of Beasts, decide why it isn't going to be flying? And if it is, roll up a whole lot of new characters so your players can start again quickly.



## ROLEMASTER

### *The Good, the Bad and the Options*

by Dave Harris

A quick look through the first "Rolemaster" Book, *Character Law Campaign Law*, provides an indication of what you will encounter throughout the whole system, and that is: choice. Rule options abound, requiring playing decisions which must be made before any game commences.

This article seeks to outline and examine this central feature of *Rolemaster*, and the other aspects that make this game unique, using some utterly vague and contentious points.

#### *Choice*

A player can choose from over seventy character professions, from the three Realms of: Pure Magic-User, Semi-Magic-User, or Non-Magic-User. The character may be one of twenty-seven races including humans, elves, halflings, dwarves. Spells will come from the system's list of over four thousand individual spells. Of equal importance is the number of skills available to characters. Hundreds of options for expertise are on offer. An effect of this is that any two characters of the same class will not be the same, as the below example of two Fighters shows.

(a) The first relies on light armour, a small melee weapon and some proficiency in movement (such as Climbing and Tumbling). They may expand into Tracking for outdoor skills, and Picking Locks as an urban stealth skill, then adding to this, the ability to Stalk and Hide. The Fighter has a good "all round" approach, with the ability to not get lost in the first forest they walk into, and to be able to get to places the fighter in heavy armour can't get to by climbing and stalking.

(b) The second fighter might forgo many movement, stealth or outdoor skills to center on heavy armour and weapons with "concentration" skills such as Adrenal Speed and Strength to make their attacks more deadly. They might also learn Martial Arts to have an unarmed combat skill. This Fighter does one thing very well and relies on the rest of the party to: get through the door, not get lost, provide healing/lore/information.

Furthermore, both of the above may or may not add thrown or missile weapons from the extensive weapon range. The lighter Fighter is more likely to, as the ability to move fast over obstacles makes them able to get into better firing positions. The skills likely to be common to both - that is, Perception, (your ability to notice things) and Body Development (your ability to compensate for hurts) - will be at different levels on the 1-to-100+ scale that *Rolemaster* uses. The final result is that the two Fighters have their own areas of expertise which differ so that no-one will ever get mixed up as to which

Fighter is which, treat both fighters the same, or expect them to perform the same job or role in the campaign.

Choice even extends to several characters doing exactly the same thing, but by different methods, or to different extents. A Rogue character may use the Stalk and Hide skill to move unseen through darkened city streets. The Death Mage or Necromancer character would cast a *Shadows* spell on any members of the party who couldn't sneak. Should a Druid be among the party, they can be not only unseen but also unheard, by the same method.

Another example is combat, where a character's skill with a weapon, called Offensive Bonus, or OB, may be split up, in whatever proportion is desired, to meet both attack and defense requirements. Such a choice requires a decision on behalf of the player: "All attack", "Full parry", "Half-and-half" or "Mostly defense and only a little jab for an attack". The more comprehensive example set out below illustrates how one character decides which particular option best meets their immediate tactical requirement:

Korbaz Goblinbane (a Dwarven Mentalist Warrior-Mage) is in a melee with a particularly big, nasty Orc. Korbaz is, at best, a reluctant hero, always looking to the defense before checking the attack option, so in this fight, the player runs through the two main options available:

- (1) Cast a *Shield* spell (which acts like a shield, giving +25 to defense). This will take 10% of the round to cast, as it is termed an instantaneous spell (a round is ten seconds; usually spell-casting takes 75% of a round). After casting the *Shield*, Korbaz can swing at the Orc with Zharenzak - his Battleaxe - which takes 75% of the round.

This totals 85% of the round, effectively equal to a full round. This option has a strong purely defensive element, and a large amount of "the really best defense is to hit first it so that it can't hit me!".

- (2) Forget about the spell, still take an attacking swing at the Orc (75% of round), and after the attack use 20% of the round (thus total 95% used) to prepare an attempt at an Adrenal Speed move. If successful, this would mean that next round he moves twice as fast and effectively has 200% of action in that second round, enabling two attacks, the casting of a *Shield* spell and even some movement. This is a more aggressive move, giving the possibility of attacking twice in the next round.

The end decision is to go with Option 1 as it is not only the better defensive move, and in character, it also has a much better chance of working. This is due to the relative chance of failure each special move has:

The *Shield* spell will fail only on an unmodified 01 or 02 on d100, so the Dwarf is very likely to get the protection so sorely needed. Option 2's Adrenal Move - Speed attempt has a 68% chance of failing, due to the Dwarf's 32% skill level. (Most skills require a modified throw of 101 or greater to succeed). I would consider this chance of

failure worth the risk only if Korbaz thought he had nothing to fear from his opponent or if he thought he was clearly winning.

While *all* this choice may at first appear bewildering, especially when looking at all the books, once the initial agreement between referee and players is reached over option mechanics, it may be a satisfactory system. Unfortunately the operative word is *may*: after 5 years of *Rolemaster*, the players I know still discuss, argue and debate exactly how unusual things will be done.

### *Detail*

The first thing to be said about detail is that there is rather a lot of it. This will please some and displease others. This aspect may well be the cause of dispute between so called "realism" systems and "playable" systems, although I personally think it simply reflects what you like about roleplaying.

A fine example of detail is Locks. The lock may be anywhere from Easy to Extremely Hard to pick, which modifies up or down the chance of success, but this is just the first factor of dealing with locks. When the subtle character approaches, say, a locked door, the following procedure may take place:

- (a) try to find a secret opening [skill: Locate Secret Opening];
- (b) look for traps on the lock and door [Detect Traps];
- (c) if a trap is found, attempt a disarm [Disarm Traps];
- (d) study the lock [General Perception if successful gives a bonus to the picking attempt];
- (e) analyse what you might know [Lock Lore - the skill or the spell (which gives the same knowledge) - again success here helps the picking]
- (f) pick the lock [Pick Locks].

A Magic User with some stealth spells may have the "Lock Lore" spell; a Thief, Rogue, Assassin or Nightblade may have the skill. Only one may apply - you may not use the skill *and* the spell to get a double bonus, but if the skill attempt fails, it's nice to have the much more reliable spell as a back-up.

Here you see a dilemma: is the duplication needed? Is the cost of learning both the spell and the skill justified by certainty of success? Or would you rather spend the precious Development Points on other skills to broaden your range of abilities?

Many skill areas are not as detailed as locks, but do have a *set* of skills nonetheless to achieve complete mastery over a topic. Tracking, for example, is broken up into General Perception to find the tracks, Tracking to follow them, and Read Tracks to interpret who or what made them.

Combat is one area where many, or only a few skills need be developed by characters. Accordingly, it may be made as complex or as straightforward as the player desires. The principle determinant of this will be whether or not the PC wants to be a specialist combatant with a variety of options, or one who only fights when the need is urgent, who only has one tactic available.

To illustrate: a PC who does not take combat as a preferred solution will nevertheless probably have three or more skills that are applied in combat which will be:

- (a) General Perception to see what's coming, and at least get the chance to react (as illustrated above, this skill has many other uses);
- (b) Body Development to adjust essentially how many "hits" the PC has (not wanting to fight is fine, but you're not much good to the party if you get knocked unconscious every time a little goblin hits you over the head with a club!)
- (c) Weapon Skill so you can hold up a shortsword with the right end facing forward, which might help you parry and defend yourself, even if you don't actually try to hit anything. (Note this tactic is not so silly: many a Mage makes it to past first level without going against the principal tactic of "when attacked, bring out the target shield and broadsword, then parry like heck, and yell for the Paladin (nice guy that he is) to sort out the disturbance".)
- (d) First Aid, the skill advisable for everyone, but especially for adventurers, who are presented with so many of the fantasy world's unstoppable treats.

A character who wants to specialize in combat will likely add some of the following:

- (e) Manoeuvre in Armour, required not to merely wear any armour, but to wear it *and* move around normally while doing so;
- (f) Weapon Skill (thrown or missile) - you know, to hit them while they're a long way off or when they're right up close;
- (g) Martial Arts or Brawling (just because I lost my weapons, doesn't mean I'm helpless!);
- (h) Reverse Strike to hit them when they don't expect it (ie, when you've got your back to them!);
- (i) Ambush (using the same principle, but this time *they* have their back to *you*!);
- (j) Quick draw to give you the edge;
- (k) Tumbling Evasion (you can't hit me if you can't reach me!);
- (l) Tumbling Attack, to give yourself the better attack position;
- (m) Adrenal moves - Strength (**SMACK!**);
- (n) Adrenal moves - Speed (**Smack!-Smack!**);

...and so on - I've just picked the popular ones. For players who go further, what most frequently results is a lengthy argument about how a fairly unusual combat skill should go (at least the first time it appears).

A final point to note in *Rolemaster* combat is that, even if the Mage and the Paladin both had broadswords, the way characters learn skills ensures that the latter Fighter-class type will be better at using it.

Once all these skills are added together, the combat takes the same sequence for the good and poor fighters. The method is: the attacker's weapon skill with modifiers (OB), plus the dice roll, minus the defender's protection and modifiers (DB for Defensive Bonus) [ie,  $OB + d100 - DB$ ]. The result is cross indexed on a table for that weapon

against the defender's armour. The result indicates a hit or miss, or a critical hit code, if the result is high enough.

The biggest problem with this system is the bookkeeping of these results. The "realistic" critical system, as it is sometimes erroneously called, describes in graphic, comic and heroic detail what has happened, how well you are doing, and describes what needs recording:

- (a) how many hits have been taken
- (b) any minuses due to this
- (c) what and where the wound is
- (d) any minuses or penalties due to the wound
- (e) if there's bleeding, and how much
- (f) if the defender is stunned
- (g) if they can parry, or can *only* parry
- (h) if they're knocked over
- (i) if they've fumbled or are juggling their weapon

For the player, it needs some work. For the GM, a lot more effort is required to manage this. Thus combat may be lengthy, but it shows the sway of winning and losing, and shows the balance of the conflict in clear and exiting terms.

I've explained how *Rolemaster* offers a lot of choice and is very detailed. A few more aspects of the game are also important, but remember that what follows is always surrounded by many choices and varying levels of detail.

### **Precision**

The *Rolemaster* round is ten seconds, not unusual in a game system. What does stand out is what may be done in that ten-second round. The varying activities that can be attempted all take up different percentages as mentioned earlier, for example, Hiding takes 20% of a round, a Perception check 90%, Detecting a Trap 75%. It is therefore possible to attempt two, or even three, actions in a round.

The order of events, including results of success or failure of each action, require the player to be precise when declaring action for the round, to be sure that it can all be squeezed in

### **Complexity**

I should point out that although the options may make *RM* as complex as almost anyone could desire, these same options may be disregarded or ignored to make the game as simple or straightforward as wanted.

The players and referee must make an effort to agree on a comfortable level of detail. Playability should always be attainable, yielding a satisfactory set of rules to cover all situations. It is to playability that I now turn: no game should be considered by rules alone - how they go on the night is all-important.

### *Magic*

Rolemaster is magic-heavy. All four classes of character may be classified by their relationship to magic:

- Pure Magic-User - uses one of the three Realms of magic
- Hybrid Magic-User - two of the three Realms of magic
- Semi-Magic-User - the "part-timer" of magic
- Non-Magic-User - speaks for itself

Consequently, parties of characters I am familiar with are routinely full of Magic-Users to the point that they normally comprise 65 to 80% of the party membership. On odd occasions, no-one is *not* a magic user, but normally when the referee asks "Who's doing spell preparation or casting?", the question is addressed to four or five players. Should any player (or referee) actively dislike magic, *Rolemaster* is clearly not for you. But for those of us who consider magic very appropriate for any occasion, *Rolemaster* very well may suit.

Magic items are prolific, with a variety of functions, including adding to abilities and skills I've described above. Items are even more varied than individual spells, and powerful items in *Rolemaster* are strong indeed, capable of doubling or even trebling character expertise in two or three areas. Not surprisingly, such artifacts are rarely introduced into a game - in the interest of maintaining balance I suppose, as this may lead to "power-gaming" (see below).

If you really like magic, *Rolemaster* offers a lot to play with.

### *Power-Gaming*

In *Rolemaster*, one item may add the abilities of three extra "levels" in a favoured or core skill of a character.

A more powerful item may do five times normal damage in combat, and be an artifact of legend which was the personal weapon of a past Lord. Additionally, it may have seven spells usable one to three times a day which aid combat and perception. The item may also have combat healing spells (which never get used, as the user never gets hurt in combat due to the item's other powers) - true story!

Stat's can be very high, special abilities can be astounding. Power leaks from the Super-PC! All this is possible - but so, too, is your Level One Fighter who knows the proper end of a sword, but has a hard job winning a fight.

Overall the GM really controls the power level of the game, the situation in any game. *Rolemaster* doesn't differ, it just makes power-gaming easy to do.

### *Ideal Number of Players*

(Potentially the most subjective point so far!) Considering the record-keeping and paperwork required to run a conflict, and the detailing of all the players' actions, and then fitting in roleplaying as well, the GM and four or five players seems to be the ideal number for play, in my experience.

### **What do I Need for Play?**

Surprise! Surprise! Iron Crown Enterprises has the goblins running the printing press at full speed all night, and now there are thirteen or fourteen parts to the game, each at the cost of roughly 50% of the weekly Unemployment Benefit. Needless to say, you *don't* need everything to play: the essence of the game is the first three books, which are sold as a boxed set or separately:

*Character Law Campaign Law* - generating characters, basic rules, and an excellent guide to GMing a campaign;

*Arms Law Claw Law* - all the combat stuff, lots of well used tables;

*Spell Law* - a "how to" with all the spell lists

A group can get by on this, however I would add three more books to fully utilize the full breadth of what is available. Of these most useful expansions, the *Rolemaster Companions I and II* are the best. The first, *Rolemaster Companion*, offers more character classes, spells, background options, magical languages and "much, much more". *Rolemaster Companion II* is the next-most-useful contribution to player character options, with master generation tables for creating a character. The third addition I would make as a GM is *Creatures and Treasures* (No. 1, **not** No. 2) for description and statistics, in *Rolemaster* terms, of creatures, monsters, treasure and items.

The rest of the material really can be considered as optional. [*Also required are d100's, preferably a set for each player, and the comprehensive character sheets from the rulebooks. -Ed.*]

### **Conclusion**

A great deal of flexibility combines with a pressing need to select what rules you are going to use for your game. This requires effort, allows room for disagreement, but, if successfully negotiated, results in a fairly well-articulated rules set. These can be used to accurately determine how best to play a character: if you select the skills you want your character to be good at, and develop appropriate tactics and patterns of approach to problems with the character generation system, then you might just find that "Rolemaster" is the best game for you characters to be playing in.



# THE MARTIAN RAT

Welcome to my new column for GDD in 1992. I will be discussing various things related to gaming and detailing various things for a variety of RPG systems.

To start with things have been heating up at **Game Designers Workshop** (GDW). Firstly, Marc Miller, the brains behind many of the RPG products such as the original *Traveller* has left GDW. The reason for this is unknown at the moment, but it can be guessed that he may have gotten fed up with the company's lack of success with it's RPG systems in the market place over the last few years.

It seems that GDW will be dropping *Space 1889*, *2300AD* and *Megatraveller* in favour of a new release of *Traveller*, a modern edition of the popular original game. **Digest Group Publications** (DGP) has halted it's development of the *Solomani Alien Module* for *Megatraveller* because of GDW's actions. In my opinion, GDW needs to get a good product together that appeals to today's market. A good marketing strategy is also required such as used by **FASA** for *Shadowrun*. Anyway the new release of *Traveller* has been planned for Fall this year State side.

*Star Viking*, a minatures combat system, which will replace *Striker* was planned to be released by GDW at some time in the future. The Rebellion in *Megatraveller* will come to an end in 1125 as the participants become exhausted. A new supplement titled *Hard Times* will come out to cover this. But don't despair fellow Travellers, this all means that our breed of people will be needed by governments and corporations alike in order to find new ways of making money, or at least using us as a cheaper alternative to their people.

I ran into an interesting viewpoint on Vargr philosophy by Dillon Burke while communicating by letter during a PBM game. This is his viewpoint on Vargr philosophy.

- 1 A simple brain operation will solve the problem!
- 2 Kill them all. Those stars are ours!
- 3 As above but kill the K'kree first.
- 4 Enslave them all, etc.....

All I can say is thank GOD that the Vargr can't get organised enough to carry out their universal conquest.

I suggest roleplayers have a look at **Palladium's RIFTS** RPG system. It integrates all of **Palladium's** past works into one system that is very nice. It also has all the conversion information for their other RPG systems. For those people who have been putting down **Palladium's** games, what's wrong with setting up the game components before starting? This does allow you to customize the system to the tastes of your group. That generic type quality is quite succesful as can be evidenced in the high popularity of **GURPS**.

I did enjoy Cassandra's article on Homebake Roleplaying Systems in the last issue. If part of this article was aimed at my ranting and raving about my own **FED RPG**. As to my own system I've stopped GMing it at the forum because of time commitments. The game however is being run by mail with various groups in Australia.

Oh well, I'll leave it at that. Feel free to send a letter of comment. Who knows maybe someone out there wants a discussion with me within these pages. See you next issue.

Martin Rait



# RATFINK'S "NEW" CLOTHES

by Scott Abel

## *Episode #1: Once Upon an Icecream Cone*

Picture this: a great, expansive, mind-blowingly boring void. Then: envisage a smaller, though no less impressive, icecream cone. This single monolith drifts inverted (ie, upside down) quite contentedly through the void, hoping for the day when it will meet other huge icecream cones and they shall live in eternal harmony...

Anyway, this colossal contented confection (chocolate flavoured, no less) supports life. If we approach the pointed tip of the cone, the first memorable displeasure is a sulphurous assault on the nasal organs (for reasons which will be explained later). This nauseous stench emanates from a vile city/slum that bears an incredible resemblance to an inflamed boil.

Many years ago, the gods in the heavens above, in their infinite wisdom, created the spiffy-looking icecream cone, and all the neighbours thought it looked very nice. Then the city appeared like an unsightly pimple on the otherwise charming knicknack, and thoroughly ruined the look of the entire thing. So, before it caused them any embarrassment, the gods pummeled the offending wart with a cataclysmic meteorite (which drew much praise from the neighbours).

## *Episode #2: Down and Out in Otsk*

But the inhabitants of the abysmal assemblance, possibly the most despicable creatures on the cone, are infuriatingly resilient. The city, which sits much like a half-set jelly in the middle of an immense crater (created by the impressive, if not functional, meteorite), is a chillibeian red colour (again, the meteorite) with many of its buildings collapsing as they feel like it, and (once more, because of the meteorite) everything - the ruins, the buildings, the people and the streets - smells of sulphur.

Down the main street of the city (which is called, among other obscene superlatives, Otsk) we find the normal dregs associated with a large population. The beggars lie and bask in the midday sun. (Otskites are not renowned for their generosity and the wiser beggars gave up this occupation years ago. The unfortunate fools who aren't so wise continue to sit in the street, day in day out, until all they can do is lie in the midday sun and attract more flies than usual. There is one account of Regiin the Bearded Mongrel who expired in the street and attracted so many bees that they made a hive in his expansive facial growth - but that's another story!) Then, of course, there are the drunks, prostitutes, and cutthroats, but there isn't room here to cover them...

*... to be continued!*



Recently released from Moonshire's darkest dungeons, where he was for kinky crimes (involving a Ring of Animal Friendship) is the Grey Mage...

"Coming to you live from a deep pit filled with hordes of trolls and goblins (known simply as Orc-chasms) is the immortal..."



# The Page from the Grey Mage

Hello, goblins! It is I, The Grey Mage. Please read this letter for a moment, as there is a group of 20-Hit-Dice Wombles stealing my cauldren...

Dear S T Mage,  
I play Fighting Fantasy. I read them because nobody likes me. Nobody likes me because I don't change my undies

Er... thank you, goblin. Oooh, look everyone! It's a second level Rolemaster character!

Are you tired of rusty metal suits? Imitation leather? Then try the Grey Mage's ...

## PLATE MAIL (Bone China)

AC: 20

Cost: 18, 000, 650 pp (Well it's hand painted!)

Now, let's have a look in the crystal ball, goblins...

"Greetings, comrades," spoke the little man. Gathering around him were several others of equal stature.

"Comrade Boris, I have laced his vegimite with Janola."

"And I have planted mines in his toilet cistern."

"Very good," announced the leader. "Soon with Michael Colao gone, the communist pixies can insert a puppet leader, and control the WRPBGF!"

And then I get to wear the daft hat, he thought darkly to himself.

# AUTOCANNONS

## for Battletech

by The Grey Mage

The original *Battletech* never really went into much detail about the weapons used in it. *Mechwarrior* provided in-depth discussions on everything **but**, and *3050*, while being very clear, never talked about the weapon itself, preferring to describe its effects. So, what I hope to achieve here is to provide 'hard' data on the most intriguing weapon in the game: the AutoCannon. This can be used for a variety of purposes, ranging from simply enhancing descriptions (for *Mechwarrior*) or for solving life's little problems: "Say, our 'mechs are out of ammo, and we were wondering if we could knock up some..."

AC	RoF /rnd	RPM	Cal' (.mm)	Barrels	Slug	Cycle
2	249	1494	20	6	1.5	AP,AP,KE,KE,KE
5	150	896	35	4	2.5	AP,KE,HE,KE,HE
10	94	560	74	4	4	AP,AP,HE,HE,HE
20	62	374	100	3	6	AP,AP,HE,HE,HE

- AC:** Autocannon, the rating of the autocannon.
- RoF/rnd:** Rate of fire, the number of slugs fired per combat round (10 seconds).
- RPM:** No of Rounds fired per minute.
- Cal.:** expressed in millimetres, this is the diameter of the slug.
- Barrels:** Stabilising an autocannon is difficult (as is the RoF), and so, internally, the AC is divided into this number of barrels, as are today's high calibre, high rate-of-fire weapons.
- Slug:** Weight of a single round, expressed in pounds.
- Cycle:** Different 'cannons use different "cycles" of varying types of ammunition - Armour Piercing (AP) rounds open holes in the armour, Kinetic Energy (KE) adds trauma to the metal, and High Explosive (HE) blasts weak areas and inflicts severe damage to internal systems.

It is with **Cycle** that changes may be made. What if, for example, only AP, or only HE rounds were fired?

### Glossary

**AP** (Armour Piercing) flat-nosed for the two higher-calibre weapons, and shaped for the latter. All are constructed of depleted Uranium (for weight) and use large amounts of propellant.

**KE** (Kinetic Energy) densely-packed lead, strengthened with titanium bonds. "Typical bullet", it causes trauma to the metal it impacts with.

**HE** (High Explosive) detonates on contact. Used for 'soft' targets, it inflicts damage on a wide area, and is capable of gutting entire sections of a 'mech.

In the original *Battletech*, only dual purpose ADR was used. With the *3050 Technical Readout*, Cluster and Ultra-Compatable were introduced. The latter two are explained adequately, and so below I present specifications and rules for ADR and others.

#### DUAL-PURPOSE ADR

If you've been playing *Battletech* for years, this is what you've been firing. It is used in the "old" autocannons. It uses high levels of propellant, delivering approximately 4000 lbs/foot, to despatch combinations of AP,HE and KE. Its "Dual-Purpose" is destroying hard and soft targets.

#### TRACER

Compatible with all autocannons, but interchangeable with no other ammunition, is tracer fire. Effective only at night (for game purposes), it fires bullets that glow brightly (it is, in fact, every 7th bullet). This negates any darkness penalty and the attacker is allowed a beneficial -1 to hit. It does not reveal the position of the attacker as a searchlight does.

#### ARMOUR PIERCING

This is particularly effective against light 'mechs and hardened structures. Against the latter, it inflicts double damage. Against vehicles and 'mechs, it will pierce the armour of the piece in question (ie, apply damage directly to the internal structure, ignoring any armour) when the rating of the autocannon is equal to or greater than the armour remaining on the affected location. Thus, armour may be bypassed, allowing more damage to occur to the internal structure. However, because of the reduction in HE rounds in the weapon's cycle, critical hits are assessed with a -2 penalty, due to the rounds's "in one side out the other" nature. Thus, a 'mech could have areas gutted, and consequently useless, without sever damage. Only the AC/2, AC/5 and AC/10 are capable of packing rounds to this effect.

#### INCENDIARY

Incendiary rounds burn on contact and are useful for very little else. If a woods hex or building is attacked with these, it will be set alight on a roll of 5+ vs 'Mechs, it inflicts no damage, but builds up heat for the target on a 1/1 heat/damage ratio. It inflicts normal damage on infantry, but is completely ineffective on elementals. However, if exposed internal structure is hit with this, any ammunition in the affected location explodes, as per normal ammo' explosion rules. Compatible with all but the AC/20.

#### HIGH-EXPLOSIVE

Against buildings rating up to and including Heavy, these inflict double damage. Any hits to internal structure receive a beneficial +2 critical hit modifier. Its main drawback is that, against targets that have armour (eg. mechs, vehicles, and elementals), it inflicts 2 points less damage. Incompatible with AC/2.



# THE EX-GOVERNMENT AGENT ARCHETYPE

## *For Shadowrun*

Rodger Donaldson

This archetype was created by my own non-standard character creation system, so you may wish to modify it slightly to put it in line with the standard Third Edition creation rules. If so, leave "Cyberware/Tech" at its current level and either

- (a) increase stats by a total of 6 points, removing 6 from skills; or
- (b) decrease stats by 4 points, and increase skills by 10 points.

For anyone interested, I'll reproduce my system after the archetype listing. I use it in the interests of flexibility and fairness to metahumans.

### THE EX-GOVERNMENT AGENT ARCHETYPE

*"When I joined the Agency, I actually swallowed all that drek they feed ya - that we were a force to protect our country and our people from our enemies. What a fool! It didn't take long for me to discover the truth - the Agency was a tool of the politicians: ninety nine percent of them are on the take from someone - the Corps, the Policlubs, the Yaks, the Mafia, it doesn't matter who, the end result was the same. The ones who weren't on the take were either newbies, who hadn't been around long enough to be corrupted, or the really sincere ones, who were so outnumbered they couldn't do a fragging thing.*

*A tool of the politicians, and through them, and tool of all those fraggers that have been screwing the country for the last fifty years. I found that out the hard way, and when it finally got through my skull, I cut and run. I work for myself now. Or, if the price is right, for you."*

### Commentary:

The former government agent can be seen in one of two ways: the embittered idealist, or the embittered cynic. The Idealist still believes they can make a difference, that by hitting the Corps, the Yaks, the Mafia, and the "Enemy Governments", they can hurt them and help prevent them from taking over. Those with this approach will make runs against corrupt politicians, and the groups mentioned above (for minimal remuneration if they have to).

The Cynic, on the other hand, believes in only one thing - the Cynic. They have given up fighting for causes, idealism, whatever; the corruption is too widespread, the enemy too strong to ever defeat. They are shadowrunners for themselves only. While they enjoy hurting "the enemy", at the same time they believe that it is futile: it will make no significant difference, so why bother, unless the money makes it worthwhile?

<u>Attributes</u>		<u>Skills</u>	
Bod	: 3	Armed combat	: 3
Qui	: 5	Car	: 3
Str	: 3	Computer	: 2
Cha	: 3	Electronics	: 3
Int	: 5	Etiquette (Corporate)	: 1
Wil	: 4	Etiquette (Government)	: 2
Ess	: 0.6	Etiquette (Agency)	: 3
Rea	: 5 (9)	Firearms	: 5
		Interrogation	: 5
		Stealth	: 3
		Unarmed combat	: 2

### Cyberware

Chipjack	<b>Skills</b>	Japanese	: 5
Cybereyes w/electronic mag' x 2		Negotiation	: 3
Flare suppressors		Throwing	: 3
Rangefinder		Biotech	: 3
Thermographic Vision		Bike	: 3
Datajack			
Skillwires x 3			
Smartgun link			
Wired Reflexes x 2			

### Contacts

- Any Agency type
- Any Military type
- Government fixer
- May select an additional 2 contacts for a total of 4.
- Has a buddy still in the Agency.

### Gear

#### *Ammunition:*

- 300 Rounds SMG (APDS)
- 100 Rounds HP (Firepower)
- 100 Rounds Hold-out (lechette)
- 50 Rounds Sniper (Explosive)

Berretta Model 70 SMG w/integral Smartgun & Lyco Gas-vent 2  
 Bug Scanner (5)  
 Colt Manhunter (FirePower modified)  
 Dataline Scanner (10)  
 Ford Americar  
 Grapple Gun w/Rappelling gear, stealth Line (100m) and catalyst stick  
 Laser microphone (4)  
 Micro-camcorder  
 Micro-transceiver

Microtronics shop  
Monofilament whip  
Signal Locator  
Portable phone (Earplug & booster pack)  
Sniper Rifle (MA-2100)  
Tracking Signals (5) x2  
White noise generator (4)

### Notes

One month Average living expenses prepaid  
DocWagon contract (Platinum)

Permits obtained through Agency buddy for:

- Automatic weapons
- Military weapons
- Military Armour
- Military Ammunition
- Class A & B Cybware
- For transport and possession of all of the above.

### *CHARACTER CREATION SYSTEM*

Mundane humans start out with 9 points to allocate to their priorities as they wish (4-3-2-0-0, 3-3-3-0-0, etc). This allows the player flexibility in creating a character. The above was created with a 3-3-3 split of skills, stats, and tech. This assumes players will probably assign 4-3-2 to the important, and 1 and 0 to magic and race anyway, unless they want to lose some points for a special concept, under the regular system. Here you get a little flexibility. Human mages have 10 points to spend; after allocating a 4 for magic, this leaves them with 6 for tech, skill, and stat Categories.

Mundane metas have 7 points: 10 minus 3 for being a meta. Here, I reduced the penalty for playing a meta' as I consider they are all reasonably well-balanced anyway. The penalty represents the scarcity of meta's, relively speaking, as a game mechanic.

Magic-using meta's have 4 points: 7 minus 3 (the point cost of being a meta' mage). Again it means meta's are less crippled by a game mechanic to preserve their scarcity.

Note: adepts all have one extra point to spend over their fully-capable peers, whether human (7 points) or meta' (5 points)



# Previews & Reviews

## HERO QUEST

### A Review

by The Grey Mage

Hero Quest comes attractively-packaged in a large box with a barbarian in the foreground and all manner of beasts behind. This high level of presentation is maintained within, utilising scores of miniatures, props, model doors, well-illustrated cards and a dungeon map.

I was suprised to learn that it was designed by GDW, and as a result, it feels more like an RPG than a boardgame. It's like a subtle introduction, visualised and simplified. This should not be confused with "low mentality" but rather as a "roleplaying game sold in a board-game format".

The scenario involves the players (up to four) taking the role of any one of the heroes: barbarian, wizard, dwarf and elf. One person must be the Evil Wizard, which is a fancy name for Gameaster.

These characters must "prove themselves worthy of the title, Champion" by stomping through the dungeon (which changes all the time) and completing a quest ranging from "kill so and so" to "Rescue so and so". The game comes with twenty such quests, each taking roughly an hour to complete.

Players' movement is regulated by rolling two dice, but direction is up to the player. Individual characters have strengths and weaknesses. The Barbarian, for example, is the best at attack, the Wizard casts the most spells, etc.

Combat is a simple matter, resolved by rolling your attack dice [*which have groovy little skulls or shields on them Ed.*]. Each 'shield' the player rolls eliminates one skull. Any remaining skull is the amount of damage inflicted.

Magic takes the form of spell cards, distributed at the beginning of each dungeon. They cover a wide range, such as Sleep, Djinni, and numerous others.

Plastic miniatures are used to good effect (but they could do with a paint!).

Equipment and treasure is found along the way, although some of it can only be used by certain xharacters. This is where my biggest complaint arises. I strongly doubt whether there will be enough "novelties" to sustain players for very long, as we had all but the most powerful items by the end of the third scenario. However, it is readily expandable if you are prepared to put in the work. Lead miniatures would be a must (rust monsters would be essential) and your own missions can be devised.

Overall, it is an excellent game that requires very little preperation time. I can see why it is selling so well so far. If nothing else, the props used in the dungeon (doors, bookcases etc.) could be of use elsewhere, but, if you do buy it, shop around a little. Standard retail price is \$59.95, but there are several shops offering it for a little under \$48.



# TO HIT CHANCES, WITH MODERN FIREARMS

by Euan Ritchie

This is a suggested idea for the construction of rules for deciding odds to hit in modern gun combat. It could be used, if suitably modified for combat in more broader circumstances, but I was thinking of particular irritations that I have with modern game systems when I planned it.

I get annoyed when rules tell me that such-and-such a modifier will change my odds by  $x$ . And I have to read through a list of modifiers to find each minor consideration to account for, and go off and check for exceptions. Much better if all I need to refer to is on one accessible, easy-to-use, quick-to-reference table that accurately reflects reality in broad terms.

Following this is a suggested system of calculating a chance to hit, given that a character has a base chance, assumed to be the odds of hitting a person with their weapon at optimum ranges and conditions while in combat.

This table is an example. I have not completed it to my satisfaction and modifications may be recommended.

## Modification to base chance to hit

<i>x 1/2 first</i> <i>-10% subsequent</i>	Snap shooting, Bad visibility, Movement, Outside effective range, Wounded -----
<i>x1 1/2 first</i> <i>+10% subsequent</i>	Within point blank range, Precise sights

A: The table is used top down. If the first box of modifiers contains an appropriate modifier - half the chance. Each subsequent negative modifier reduces the chance by 10%. If the second box contains the first relevant modifier then increase the chance by half again. But any modifiers that are subsequent to any others, including modifiers from the first box, increase the chance by 10%.

B: Snap shooting - refers to any shots fired at a target in the first action of aiming. The target was not in your sights the previous turn.

C: Bad visibility - refers to any situation where the target's outline or exact location is obscured.

D: Movement - refers to any movement of either the shooter or target excepting slow, exactly-predictable movement.

E: Outside effective range - target is beyond the weapon's specified effective range.

F: Wounded - the shooter is wounded as specified in the rules.

G: Within point blank range - the target is within the weapon's specified point blank range.

H: Precise sights - the shooter has the benefit of sights that pinpoint fall of shot (e.g. laser designator).

Example: Everyn rolls across the floor from cover to cover. His assailant is at half chance for snap shot (Everyn was only acquired coming out of cover) and less 10% for movement. So if his chance was 12 or less on D20, then it becomes 4 or less.

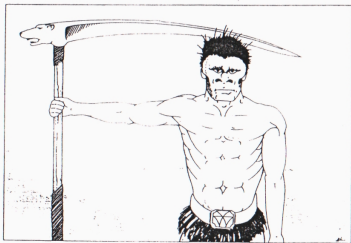
The reasoning behind this table, and purpose for its construction is so that we can easily and broadly define the circumstances of combat, and encompass them in such terms as I've used, without enmeshing ourselves in details. An ability to work in broad terms relates a game better to reality, which we all experience and can express ourselves in terms of.

The reason for its method of beginning with large modifiers then not so large modifiers for each subsequent condition is that, in my opinion and experience, the first hindrance to your chance drastically reduces your odds, and each subsequent condition is almost beside the point. The first modifiers are, in relative terms, because I feel that is an accurate reflection of real effects. Further modifications are defined as simple additions for simplicity.

Remember that, as the table is used in order, any hindrances will first half your chance, and then any other modifications are in terms of 10%. Ideally, I might have made successive modifiers proportions as well, but that becomes unwieldy in use.

A sniper with laser sights snap shooting at a VIP that is exposed only briefly by his bodyguards suffers halved chance, plus ten percent instead of halved chance times one and a half because the times one and a half is only relevant if other conditions are optimum, and in this case they aren't.

I like this type of system because it is fast to use, quick to reference, and widely applicable. I also feel it encourages a realistic feel for circumstances.



# HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM WORKING GROUP

by Paul Ridgeway (HIWG New Zealand Co-Ordinator)

The main purpose of the **HIWG** is to help to flesh out the *MegaTraveller* Universe. People who have an interest in a particular area can be given the responsibility of developing it. This may be done either on their own, or in conjunction with others, depending on the scope of the project.

Some members concentrate on detailing sectors, systems or worlds. Others have more interest in detailing technology, alien lifeforms, interesting artifacts, adventure situations, faction or world politics, military items, etc.

*MegaTraveller* is so wideranging that whatever you want to do could, more than likely, be catered for. The author, Marc Miller, and the HIWG Chairsophon, Ed Edwards, have the final say of course on what becomes "official" material.

If you would like to see some of your SciFi material distributed around the HIWG, and possibly published in future *MegaTraveller* releases, then consider joining up with the HIWG.

## HIWG Membership

The cost is US\$12 p.a., which goes towards the cost of sending you Tiffany Star, the HIWG newsletter. Benefits include: access to all the heaps of HIWG material in both printed and electronic form, access to a list of members from around the world with whom you may discuss your pet theories, etc.

You also hear up-to-date news of what is happening with **GDW**, **DGP** and other producers of *MegaTraveller* materials, including advance news of what is about to happen in the *MT* Universe - very handy for referees!

At present the HIWG has over 100 active members around the world, mainly in the US, Canada and the UK. There are other members in Finland, Germany and Norway. Australia and NZ (**HIWG Downunder**) currently have around a dozen members between them.

Most members are active *MT* referees or players, but if you feel you would like to contribute - in any way, large or small - please feel free to do so.

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HIWG - International Service for the *Traveller* Community!



# AN OUTLINE FOR A SCIENCE-FICTION ADVENTURE *Suitable for Traveller*

by Euan Ritchie

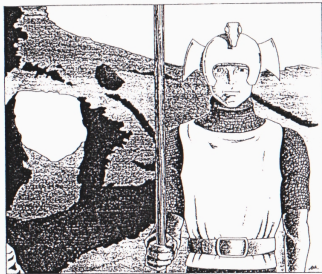
This is an idea for GMs only and is not intended as a full adventure. It is my recollection of a game my friends and I played some time ago, and enjoyed immensely.

We had used ill-gotten funds to begin a colony on the planet Dawnworld in District 268 of the Spinward Marches. It was our intention to create a warrior culture, dedicated to military service and supply of the mercenary market. As it was going to take some time for us to actually create a population, in the meantime, for light relief in our colonising game, we contracted out for small-scale operations.

The Empire was having a little trouble, and its resources were spread thin (this was the period of the Fifth Frontier war - why didn't I kill that Admiral when I had the chance? Too damn soft, that's my problem). One of the Sword worlds was in rebellion against its central authority, and a hidden giant meson gun was interdicting the planet. Now, I forget the exact political whys-and-wherefores but the Imperial forces hired us to get to the planet (we had to figure out how to get past the Meson gun, which was wasting anything that got close) and disable the gun, thus allowing conventional forces to take control.

Now, here's the kick to that scenario: once we players had figured out how to get on planet, then spent a month trying to track down the gun (we found out where it was built) we finally sorted it out that the bloody thing was hidden in the orbital space station. We'd landed in jump capsules and were now stuck without transport - our mission uncompleted!

I'm not thoroughly detailing anything here, but can't you just imagine the possibilities of this game? (We totalled the whole installation in the end but I'm not giving you any hints how!)



# MEGATRAVELLER

by Paul Ridgeway

Over 3,500 years into the future, a human-dominated empire of over 11,000 worlds is crumbling after a thousand year reign. The Emperor has been assassinated, and with no clear successor, the Imperium has shattered into many factions. Besides fighting amongst themselves, these factions also have to deal with the incursions of alien races who see the opportunity for plunder. This is the backdrop to *MegaTraveller*.

When *Traveller* (the first Sci-Fi RPG) was first published in 1977, there was no background material available at all. This soon changed, with many companies such as **FASA**, starting up and producing a wealth of adventures and new material, in addition to the goodies produced by **GDW** themselves.

By the mid-eighties, the authors realised that roleplaying game systems had improved considerably since 1977, so with some ten years of experience to call on, *Traveller* was completely revamped and modernised. However, to prevent the existing background material becoming redundant, the game-time was moved forward, and the new game was called *MegaTraveller*.

The game has 18 general career types for players to choose their characters from: Army, Barbarian, Belter, Bureaucrat, Diplomat, Doctor, Flyer, Hunter, Law Enforcer, Marines, Merchant, Navy (Space), Noble, Pirate, Rogue, Sailor (Wet Navy), Scientist, and Scout.

While these careers cover most areas, if players wish to have a different background, this is fairly simple to do, using one of the existing types as a model. These careers provide the characters with the skills they will need in the game.

The *MT* rules come in three comprehensive books, either singly or in a boxed set (Players' Manual, Referee's Manual, and Imperial Encyclopedia). Besides character generation, they cover such things as combat (personal and space), psionics, generating worlds, animals, encounters, vehicle design (from bikes to battle cruisers), equipment and trading. For those using the *Traveller* universe for their games, there is also a large amount of history and other background information.

It is the Task System, however, that has improved *MegaTraveller* so much over its predecessor. A Task is something the characters want to do, such as negotiate to buy goods, open a locked door, fix a damaged vehicle, sneak past a guard, fire a weapon, defuse a bomb, etc. Just about everything in *MT* is resolved the same way - by a Task Roll.

The Universal Task Profile (UTP) provides a way to classify and resolve a task. The UTP classifies the difficulty of the task, what skills and/or characteristics are helpful or required to accomplish it, duration of the task, and any special risks involved if the Task Roll fails. This means that the referee does not have to constantly refer to

mountains of rules every time a player wants to do something. Once the referee and players are familiar with the task system, then tasks can be invented (or negotiated) on the fly to meet any situation that may arise.

Due to this flexibility, an *MT* game could be Gothic horror on a low-tech world, cyberpunk-style on a higher-tech world, the traditional science fiction universe, or in fact anything the referee and players desire...



# THE LEGEND OF WALDO THE DRAGON-SLAYER

## A Hero's Tale—*continued*

by Waldo

On the way back to camp, Waldo and his merry men were ambushed by a band of ghouls. Waldo fought them off single-handed, allowing the others to flee to safety. By the time that Waldo had staged his well-executed tactical withdrawal, one of the people in the group (a silly elf hardly worth a mention) had managed to panic the rest of the group. Waldo tried to calm them down, but they only wanted to fight. Our mighty hero went along reluctantly to make sure that nobody got hurt. He felt it was his duty to protect them.

Though the elf had upset everybody, Waldo managed to get them back under control at last. He set up extra watches, as he could sense trouble approaching. Perhaps it was the sound of drums, or possibly the constant chanting of "WIKKA! WIKKA! WIKKA!" that was making him uneasy. Then again, it could have been the approaching band of five hundred ghouls that had put him on edge.

The ghouls dropped like flies in front of Waldo's and Saijex's swords. Danjiarra turned hundreds into jelly. By the end of the fight, the all ghouls were dead or routed, but the Elf had been fried. No-one knew exactly what happened: one minute there was an elf, the next minute there was crispy chicken! It wasn't a matter of burying him, more a case of sweeping him up. Waldo decided that he didn't like elves anyway. They were a pain when they were alive, and quite boring when they were toast.

One good thing: at least the food would go further now that the eighty survivors now numbered about twenty.

The next morning, after cleaning up, a set of tracks were found that headed off into the desert. Waldo and the rest of his party decided to follow them, while the rest of the survivors moved camp up to the ruined castle (where Waldo had suggested they go to in the first place, sort of).

Waldo and his merry band followed the tracks heading into the desert. This was a good opportunity for Waldo to train Saijax the Ranger in the art of tracking. Under our hero's watchful eye, Saijax managed to lead the party to a strange-looking hill sitting in the middle of the desert. None of them had ever seen a hill that had such smooth sides. Waldo was not sure whether it was the three statues on top of the hill, or the open door in the side of the hill that gave him the suspicion that perhaps this was not a natural occurrence. Vyke suggested that it was a pyramid, and Waldo congratulated him on noticing what was obvious only to Waldo.

Looking through the door, our hero noticed a crossbow bolt, covered in blood. Waldo smelled a rat! Quick as a flash, Waldo called the thief, Han Swallow, up to the front of the party to search for traps. Of course, our hero could have done it himself, but he realised that it was good for morale if everyone thought that they were pulling their

own weight. Also, he was never one to want to hog the limelight. He realised that it was far better to lose a thief to a trap, rather than someone important like a fighter.

The end of the corridor opened out into a large room with three pillars in the centre. Everybody examined the pillars while Waldo kept vigilant watch. The party discovered a door in each of the pillars, leading to a ladders heading both up and down. Nothing of interest was found by going up, so Waldo led the party down.

At the bottom of the ladders was a large room. The party was attacked by a bunch of evil humans. Though heavily outnumbered, the party fought well. Before long the only two members still standing were Danjiarra and Waldo, both badly wounded. In a desperate attempt to save her beloved Waldo, Danjiarra threw all of her explosive oil into the middle of the fight. This gave Waldo the chance to despatch the rest of his foes, but the cost had been high. Han Swallow was dead. There was no point in going outside to bury him: he had been cremated by the oil. Vyke said a quick prayer, and Waldo swept up the ashes into a neat little pile. Just because you were ransacking a place was no excuse to be a litterbug.

Waldo and the survivors hardly had a chance to bandage their wounds before the were attacked by more of the hill-dwellers. This time they set their pet dragon on him. Waldo killed the dragon single-handedly, while the rest of his merry men took care of the owners.

After killing the dragon, the rest of the dungeon was easy. Waldo left the vampires to Saijax. The chaos demon was a doddle: only two party members got barbequed. Waldo collected all of the treasure and used the Ring of Wishes that he had cunningly discovered to get them back to civilisation. The ordeal had been so bad that Sudan, an ex-pirate who had joined Waldo's expedition, lost his memory.

The party swore blood-brotherhood on Waldo's advice and became known as the Brotherhood of the Dragon, and Waldo let Saijax be the leader. This meant that our hero could wander around behind Saijax and pick him up every time he fell over. Later in life, Waldo set up a pub named "Waldo's Drag-Inn". It was the place to be seen for uppercrust adventurers. There were sixteen different types of beers and Waldo set up two dead Iron Golems, which he had killed himself, as statues at the door. His first idea of setting up a fish-and-chip-shop had fallen through after he realised that fish were a lot harder to catch in the desert.

Saijax became a great hero in his own right, thanks to Waldo not telling everyone the *real* story. Later on, Saijax was placed on the throne of a local barony through the herculean efforts of Waldo, who single-handedly slew the foul dragons, mind-flayers and a few other minor demon-like creatures (despite this gift Saijex didn't even make him a Knight). Saijax forgot about his love of camels and started to see a lot more of Danjiarra.

Waldo was happy with his Inn, as he preferred the quieter, less ostentatious life.

Danjarra found a magical stone pussy, this made her and Saijex very happy. Saijex didn't make her a knight either.

Vyke the Cleric managed to get a good job at the local temple, and Waldo was often there to give advice on religious matters. Just by way of a change Vyke wasn't made a knight by Saijex either.

Sudan spent many happy hours in Waldo's "Drag-Inn", where Waldo generously supplied him with free beer for as long as he wanted. Waldo was a little annoyed that, because Sudan lowered himself to greasing, he got made Saijex's Castellan. But not even he was made a knight.

Waldo's only disappointment in life was that Saijex had obviously, despite everything that Waldo had tried to teach him, forgotten his humble roots and the role his friends had played in his success.

...and everybody, except the people that the Brotherhood of the Dragon killed (and they weren't important anyway) lived happily ever after.



THE COMPLETE AND UTTERLY ENJOYABLE..  
**MUNCHKINS HANDBOOK**

*Chapter Four*  
**SCIENCE FICTION**

**Favourite Science Fiction Weapon**

*Real Men* use Laser Pistols/Blasters/Light Sabers

*Real Roleplayers* use Stun Guns/Tanglers

*Loonies* use Thermo-nuclear Hand Grenades/Tripod Flamers

*Munchkins* use whatever gives the most plusses

**Favourite Method of Handling Alien Monster**

*Real Men* drive off the Bug-Eyed Monsters invading the Earth

*Real Roleplayers* negotiate with the refugees from the evil Empire

*Loonies* hitch a ride with Vogons

*Munchkins* invade the BEMs' home planet and enslave them all

**Favourite Science Fiction Movie**

*Real Men* watch the Star Wars films

*Real Roleplayers* watch "2001: A Space Odyssey/2010: Odyssey Two"

*Loonies* watch "The Three Stooges Go To Mars"

*Munchkins* watch the Star Trek films

**Favourite Method of Space Travel**

*Real Men* use Hyperspace/Warp Drive

*Real Roleplayers* use suspended animation

*Loonies* use the Infinite Improbability Drive

*Munchkins* push the button and it goes

**Favourite Star to Put a Colony Around**

*Real Men* colonize Beta Lyrae

*Real Roleplayers* colonize Alpha Centauri

*Loonies* colonize Cygnus X-1

*Munchkins* colonize wherever gives the most plusses

**Favourite Science Fiction Author**

*Real Men* read Isaac Asimov

*Real Roleplayers* read Arthur C. Clarke

*Loonies* read Bored of the Rings/Doon/Hitchhiker

*Munchkins* read E. Gary Gyga

### **Favourite Monster**

*Real Men* like the Alien

*Real Roleplayers* like the Moties

*Loonies* like the beach ball from Dark Star

*Munchkins* like E.T

### **Favourite Variant Human**

*Real Men* play Heavy Worlders

*Real Roleplayers* play Light Worlders/Spacers

*Loonies* play Sex Androids

*Munchkins* play Enhanced Humans with all the advantages



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# Letters



## Mightier than the Sword

## ...T'isn't! T'is! T'isn't!

Dear Sir,

In his last letter to you in GDD#19, Scott Abel claims that Games Workshop's frequent supplements are merely expansions to the existing system. How then does he explain 2nd Edition *Space Marine*?

This new rule system renders obsolete all existing information on an "epic scale". By my rough calculation, I now own \$450 worth of colourful toilet paper (previously, useful supplements to 1st Edition *Space Marine*). Having had a quick read of the new rules, I can say that they are better (which does not say much for First Edition), but they are not yet completed. For example, most of the army lists have not yet been released, there are no advanced rules, and so on. There will be more supplements yet to come to cover these gaps. Also of interest is that many vehicles have had their game characteristics upgraded in order to increase their figure sales.

As for *White Dwarf* itself, I rather like what Greg Stafford (of *Runequest* fame) has to say about it: "I've a tremendous admiration and respect for *White Dwarf*, because it's the only catalogue I know of that people subscribe to and pay good money for in order to read nothing but advertisements".<sup>1</sup> *White Dwarf* is nothing like it used to be a few years ago. Since the Letters page was canned in late 1988, it has been very hard to find anything objectively reviewed in *White Dwarf*.

As for promoting the hobby overall, GW is doing very poorly. At the large, orchestrated GW propaganda and brain-washing conventions, you will not find other products advertised. Indeed, you are forbidden to use miniatures not produced by Citadel in the painted miniatures competition.<sup>2</sup>

Could gamers actually dislike diversity and free choice? Or is Citadel scared of the competition, which improves every day, especially considering Bob Naismith, the man who designed the original *Space Marine* figures, now works for Grenadier.<sup>3</sup> It was interesting to find out that Games Workshop threatened Games Master International with legal action for having a miniatures column entitled "Beyond the Citadel."<sup>4</sup> (In its first issue, BTC printed addresses for 38 English miniature manufacturers). I used to naively think that the use of such low tactics were the realm of TSR (interesting to note that the big boss of TSR went to the European GenCon flanked by bodyguards).

Now that I mention TSR, it is interesting to note that GW has followed suit in releasing Fantasy and Science Fiction novels. I am always amused to read independent reviews of these novels. "My award for the book I would least like to be seen reading on a train goes to Craig's Plague Demon..."<sup>5</sup> or "GW make a great fuss about protecting their original, copyrighted setting of Albion, Nippon, Araby and Cathy, peopled with innovated and no doubt trademarked creatures such as orcs, trolls, dwarves, elves, vampires and the norse..."<sup>6</sup> or "I tactfully asked the author how he regarded Inquisitor, and he evasively replied that it was very much the SF book he'd wanted to read when he was fifteen. If you're a doddering 16-year-old or even more senile than that, you've been warned."<sup>7</sup>

It is nice to see however that GW no longer dominates the Science Fiction market. GDW is working on a 25mm game called *Space Viking*, scheduled for release in 1993. Alternative Armies is working on *Ion Age* and Fantasy Forge's *Kyromek* has already come out in French, German and English editions selling over 15,000 advance copies before its release. "Nobody wants another 40K. Credible gamers want something different ...not the Dark Ages in Space!"<sup>8</sup> Until these games reach New Zealand, I'll stick to playing *Striker*: it may be a decade old, but it beats WH40K by miles for innovative thinking.

Yours sincerely  
Dillion Shiel Burke

- <sup>1</sup> GMI #4, page 39
- <sup>2</sup> WD 133
- <sup>3</sup> GMI #14, page 12
- <sup>4</sup> GMI #1, page 82
- <sup>5</sup> GMI #1, page 82
- <sup>6</sup> GMI #1, page 82
- <sup>7</sup> GMI #8, page 82
- <sup>8</sup> GMI #14, page 71



## Did`ya Notice?

Dear Editor,

With reference to The Munchkins Handbook, anybody notice how often Real Roleplayers are playing Chaosium's basic roleplaying system, in its many guises?

Euan Ritchie.

[Yeah, but we figured no-one would think that a Real Roleplayer would be taken seriously anyway!]



### GENERALS DRAGONS AND DICE

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A half-orc walks into the bar and orders a drink. When the barkeep brings him a beer, the half-orc asks "Hey bartender, want to hear an elf joke?"

"Well, I might," replied the barkeep, "but first let me tell you something. I myself am half-elven. If you look over in that corner, you'll see an elven mage of noted repute, and to your left you'll note the elven swordmaster who won the King's tourney last season. Now are you sure you want to tell that elf joke?"

"Naw," replies the half-orc. "I wouldn't wanna have to explain it three times."

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