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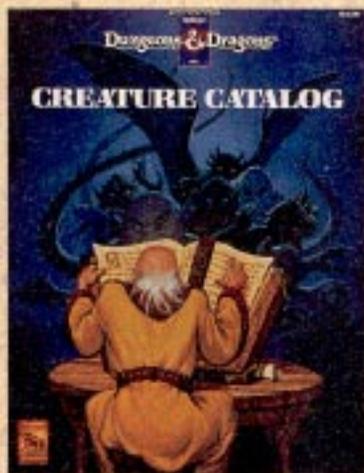
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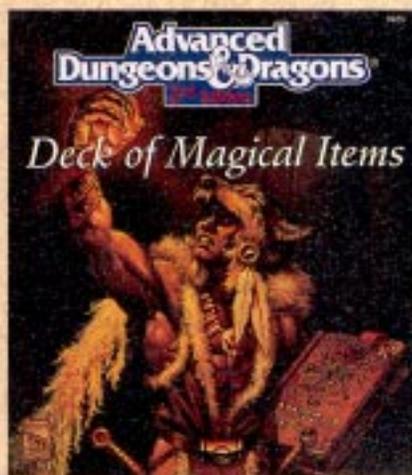
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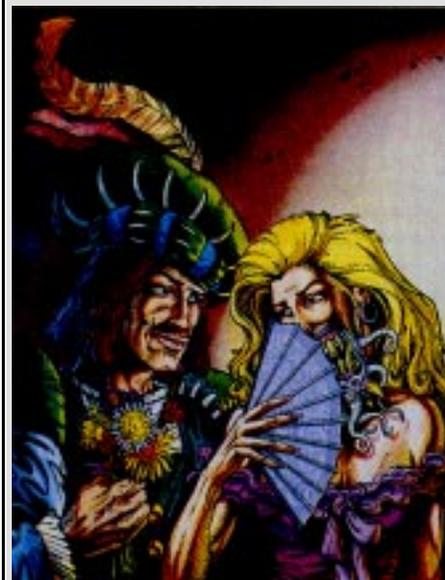
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COVER

Cover artist Tom Baxa provides us with a colorful visual demonstration that, in April, not everything is as it seems.

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What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

Roll for surprise

The following are short excerpts from letters and articles received by the editors of DRAGON Magazine. Except for minor editing, they appear as they were written.

[Received from Nigeria] Dear Editor,

Application letter to obtain one parcel of some of your (KING KONG) magazines and Ninjas magazines wrestling magazines with some American war films magazines from your Role playing Game's Association Network. I am very interested to joined your (R.P.G.A.) Network, because I enjoyed most of your subscriptions magazines when I red through them from the office of the commander in chief of the Naval Staff.

Further more, I am professor [name withheld by editors], the Sports Auditor General, Sport Complex from the University of Benin. Certainly I will want you to please enrol me to joined some of your Role playing Games Association membership, and I am ready to cooperate with you sir. Certainly every pictures of all your magazines tells a story, and they are many things to Write about the Role playing Game Association Network.

Finally, I will kindly want you to please sends me just one parcel of some of your (King Kong) magazines, wrestling magazines and Ninjas' magazines with an American war films magazines.

I shall be very happy with you. May the Almighty God crown all your efforts with good and Everlasting Success and Wisdom for long life and God's gards Amen.

The voyeur is a risque AD&D® character class intended for non-player use only. The voyeur (always male) more or less devotes his life to spying upon women in states of undress. Voyeurs can be human half-orc, elven, or half-elven. Dwarves are too "dour and taciturn," gnomes too easy-going and halflings too goody-goody. [Manuscript continues for five pages before concluding with:] The DM may wish to create some magical items usable by voyeurs only. Then again, the DM may just decide to use this article for litter box liner.

When my June issue failed to arrive, I was naturally concerned. I phoned Dragon [and] was eventually connected with Roger Moore! I may under a false impression, but I was sure that Dragon Magazine was too large an organization to have the dead editor respond to things as trivial as subscription orders. ["Head" editor, perhaps?]

[From a flyer advertising a 1/32-scale miniature of a camel with a Gatling gun mounted on its back] A Unique Holiday Gift Idea!! Order Yours Today!! New Steadfast Camel with Gatling Gun!! In Stock Now Ready for Immediate Shipment!!

Dear Dragon,

In our party we have a fighter/cleric who wears boots that he lined the outside with rabbit fur But he left the heads of the rabbits (ears still intact) on the foot of his boots. I play a druid and was wondering if I should be offended by this Especially when he wiggles his toes to make the heads move, this to get a goblin to come closer to the bush so he can off the goblin.

[Received from England] While reading a national paper, I found an interesting article that basically says

VERSAILLES: A dwarf has won his fight to be flung across rooms for a living. Manuel Wackenheim appealed against the ban on the "sport" of dwarf throwing, which the government ruled degrading. Wackenheim, 25, who performs with a helmet and padded clothing, will make a comeback at a disco near Grenoble.

I don't remember ever having met a dwarf who was willing to be thrown around. We did want to throw a halfling over a pit at the European GEN CON® games fair last year, but she complained.

As there wasn't anything about dwarf throwing in the Dwarves Handbook, I think that Dragon should print the rules sometime.

I'm writing because I've been working on an idea for the DRAGON I had an idea for a very practical NPC which has yet to show up; and I wanted to see it all worked out right the first time. A character that can be found in any fantasy-adventure scenario a character of great versatility; who can belong to any alignment. . . Oh, who? The girls of "the worlds oldest profession." The Ladies of the Evening! [Cover letter for 50+ page typed manuscript, which included illustrations that caused the editor to drop the manuscript in shock]

To whom it may concern:

I would like to outlaw forceful barbarians. At one of my meetings I found a +1 pole arm that looked like a glaive but the DM called it something else. Well anyways I took it to a barbarian trader and he asked to see it but I said no so he pulled it away from me and attacked me with it but luckily I casted a magical armor spell on my mage/fighter and it left me with 2 hits left. I ran out of the tent and tossed a greek fire canister at it and it burned but he escaped and was taken into prison for illegal possession of weapons but my character couldn't get the weapon because the constable took it. I went back to the tent and found magic arrows with a 50% chance of breaking but for some reason it just doesn't make up for my magical +1 pole arm that I fought strong psychos for and dug into ashes to get.

Dear Dragon,

Having been an AD&D player and dungeon master for about a decade now. I've come to the point where I would like to make a lasting contribution to the game. Combining my knowledge of AD&D game mechanics with my education as a third-year law student, I am proud to present to you the barrister player character class. The barrister is essentially an expert in trials and negotiations. I know the length of the manuscript is a problem. [As a solution] the barrister class could be published in four DRAGON Magazine installments of less than 20 pages each.

[From a female gamer] Dear Dragon,

I am writing because I would very much liked to know if there is a Nymph character class. If there is please tell me where I can learn about it. If there isn't could you please design one. I think it would be fun and quite interesting to play.

[Opening lines from fiction submission] Sandulax was not your typical elven farmer. No, far from it. He was cruel; cruel beyond belief; especially to his pigs. He would torture them not only in body but in mind as well. Using his magic, and powerful magic it was, he would mentally degrade them simply for being pigs,

Dear Mr. Moore,

Enclosed is an article I'm sure your readers would enjoy. It's about how to play songs on the telephone. Though the topic doesn't have anything to do with RPGs, it is something that everyone in my role-playing group enjoyed.

[Cover letter for a 48-page manuscript typed on torn-out notebook paper] to whom it may concern; this book is about led zeppelins fantasy i would greatly appreciate if this book gets published robert plant would have wanted me to write a fantasy ab out them in honor of john bonham. if this gets published i would like a copy sent to robert plant and jimmy page. if you deny this book i will understand

[From a monster description, with an illustration showing the monster to have the upper body of a nude woman with giant pincers for hands and the lower body of a huge crab] With the advantage of a Comeliness of +25, her great beauty has a stunning effect on all males with a Wisdom less than 16.

[Letter from reader whose submission was rejected] Why did you idiots send the sheets back, were they ever looked at and how come you never wrote a reply to me also do have enough monsters for your conpendium if so what did think of the monsters I created, you will getting a lot more sheets with many more newly generated creatures or have had grown tired of people sending them to you.

Dear Dragon,

When a human and a halfling "get to know each other a little better," what do you come out with?

- a seventy-five percentling.
- a three-quarterling
- a dwarf.
- a horrible ugly blob of pure evil that sucks the souls of men into a vortex of sin and degradation.

Thank you for listening.

[From a 10-page article—with illustrations] The seducer is an unofficial class that has been created for DMs and players alike who always wished to have some sensual and pleasure-giving girl to be a part of their campaign. A fair warning, though: A seducer character is not recommended to players who enjoy playing evil characters, for a seducer's goodness equals even a paladin's or ranger's. . . . What is a seducer? A typical seducer is an extremely beautiful human female who's constant goals are to help humankind with current problems such as poverty and starvation. . . . Only but sixteen seducers presently walk and seduce the surface of Faerun. Fortunately for the men of Toril, they're spreading like a disease!

Dear Editor:

Are many of your readers parents or grandparents? If the answer is yes, we've got a good subject for you to publish. We've just proudly released an unprecedented video series titled *The Magic of Paper Folding* (vol. 1-4) which teaches the ancient art, *origami*. . . .

I am writing in the hopes that other players of the TOP SECRET/S.I.™ system will agree with me in my dispute with the Administrator of my group. My character is a Ninja. . . . My Administrator thought that he had killed my character

while he was making an assassination attempt on two other player characters. [The Administrator] refuses to accept the truth that Ninjas can only be killed by other Ninjas. This was proved to be true in the movie, *Ninja III: The Domination*, when the Ninja continued to live when his head was cut off. This was also proved in the *G.I. Joe* comic book in which the Ninja Storm-Shadow went into a Phenix trance, which only made him look dead, when he was shot. . . . Why don't we make these games realistic?

I would like to know if you can give me advice for somethings. For instance when me and my friends play Advanced Dungeons & Dragons I always come up with stupid names like Kor the barbarian or Sinadon the fighter. And also I make wierd decisions so I'm wondering if you can help me out.

I am currently in the process of writing a module, and I would like to know if it meets your standards. . . . I have to tell you one thing, but I don't think it will affect your judgment much. The module is based loosely on an episode of a (don't laugh at me) cartoon. If it matters any, it was the "Smurfs!" shown on September 13th.

[From a 13-page article—with illustrations] The Wench was written in response to a player asking me to write the class for her character. The Wench is a conglomerate of a thief and an illusionist, with a few tricks of her own thrown in. . . .

[Spells for Wench class] *Guido, The Magic Pimp: Guido* is for those customers who do not

pay up. He is a rather powerful illusion who cannot be disbelieved by normal people. . . . *Othcar, The Magic Bouncer: Othcar* is the most powerful illusion Wench has. . . .

Dear Dragon,

According to the "TSR Previews" department in DRAGON issue #178, Wizard Spell Cards have been released as a new product for February (1991). However, I bought a set of official AD&D 2nd Edition 1st level wizard spell cards last summer (the copyright date is 1990) when I was in Japan. Over there, they are sold by spell level and, of course, they are in Japanese. The fact that the Japanese had spell cards before we did is of concern. Do the Japanese have any other TSR products that we do not and, if so, what? Do they own TSR?

Dear Dragon,

I realize that this probably won't see print until after Christmas, if it sees print at all. My problem has been bugging me for years and I want it cleared up. I'm tired of tales of the Jolly Old "Elf" Santa Claus. Santa is *not* an elf, he is a dwarf!! Yes, a dwarf! [Two pages of evidence supporting this viewpoint follow]

[Suggestion supplied by reader on a recent survey form] You should start a singles' column for adult gamers!

Dear Dragon,

Tonight a Kobold will enter Roger Moore's bedroom and eat his socks.

Ω

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EDITORIAL

An Ode to Bubba

Artwork by Jim Holloway

The first clue we had that our undead-hunting expedition was drawing to a close came when what was left of our party was overtaken by an army of skeletal conquistadors. This was a problem, because we were on a boat in the middle of the Caribbean, and running away was going to be difficult. We were playing a modern-horror role-playing game, and Dave, the game master, had a silly grin on his face the size of New Hampshire, so we knew we were all going to die.

Actually, we knew we were all going to die quite a bit earlier in the session, about the time that the shotgun-proof zombies ate two of our party in the Louisiana swamps, which explained why we were now on a boat in the middle of the Caribbean getting as far from that swamp as possible. It obviously was not far enough, as the army of skeletal conquistadors was preparing to demonstrate.

Everyone in the group drew his gun and opened fire. Almost everyone.

"Ah, do not fire, do not fire!" called my character, Juan Jesus "Bubba" Rodriguez. Bubba was built like a half-ogre but was basically a really relaxed and carefree guy, even with undead swarming all over his ship. He knew his shotgun was useless, so there was no reason not to be a little laid back. "Not to worry," he told the rest of the group as they hysterically blazed away with every weapon they had at the advancing horde. "These are *Spanish* undead. They will listen to me. Watch. *Eh, muchachos, como están?*"

Talking to undead had worked for me once before, when one of my fantasy-game characters was able to buy off some wraiths with a wine bottle. It wasn't working now. The GM was obviously not impressed with my grade-school command of Spanish. He had been telling everyone for days that everyone was going to die in this, the first adventure he was ever running as a GM, so he was proud of how well he was doing. He wanted to see that everyone was properly eaten alive, and he rolled dice and we rolled dice and the undead made out like they were at a buffet luncheon.

Real-

izing there wasn't much left to do at this point, Bubba resignedly fired a few last rounds of buckshot at the undead, denting their rusty conquistador helmets as they chewed on the rest of the adventurers. He was the last to go, but before the undead conquistadors got him, he threw his shotgun away and leaped off the boat into the water.

"Bubba's swimming to shore," I told the GM flatly. I was kind of attached to Bubba, and I didn't feel it was right for him to turn into an hors d'oeuvre without some sort of a struggle.

"No way! You can't!" Dave yelled, not to be cheated of his rightful prey. He was also a teenager and prone to yell at anyone for any reason. "It's too far!"

I picked up the dice and began rolling. Bubba had a great Swimming score, and I made three or four skill rolls in a row. "He's still swimming," I told Dave.

"There are sharks in the water!" Dave yelled. "There are alligators all around! And there are undead, too!"

"Bubba's still swimming," I said doggedly, making another half-dozen rolls. "He's not gonna stop."

Dave went into a frenzy of die-rolling, trying to have everything in the ocean down to Amazonian piranha find Bubba Rodriguez and eat him, but I kept making his Swimming roll. Dave was trying hard to follow the rules and was too new at the game to simply say, "Too bad, you've been eaten," so after a few hours of the Australian crawl, Bubba Rodriguez pulled himself up on shore and collapsed. He was back in the swamp, of course, but he was alive. And that's where the game stopped, because now that everyone else in the party had been eaten, the rest of the players were hungry and heading for the kitchen.

I felt I'd achieved a sort of moral victory, even if no one else cared (after all, *their* characters were eaten.) I realized the importance of never letting the bad guys get you down, even when everything is lost and the

GM is almost having a spasm trying to figure out how to kill your hero.

Bubba did indeed go on to join future adventures, though he was eventually used as a test character in a new game system and had the lower half of his body changed into that of a giant lizard (a "technical error"). Still, he managed to retain his basic cheerful nature, and he attracted some very unusual girlfriends, but we won't discuss that here. He never became Zombie Chow. He was a winner,

I had occasion to think of Bubba recently when we were in the midst of converting DRAGON® Magazine to a desktop-publishing format, and the computer system had managed to print out a book-review column in which every page was identical, the end of the fiction story was cut off and lost in the files, and we didn't have enough material and had to fill four pages at the last moment with an article we hadn't even edited yet. This came on a Monday morning when I'd gotten only three hours of sleep the night before. On top of all that, I had no M&Ms.

If I were Bubba right now, I thought, resting my forehead on my computer screen, this would be a good time to jump in the water and swim for shore. But there was no water, so I decided that Bubba would (assuming he knew how to edit better than I knew how to speak Spanish) keep up the good fight and never surrender, and would edit away. So I did, and the issue went out at last, and I did not become Zombie Chow.

Some people wonder if you can learn anything from playing a role-playing game. I think you can. But you don't always have to tell people where you got your knowledge. 

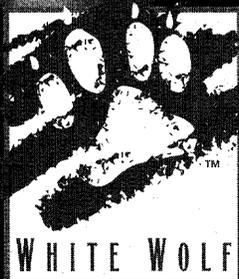


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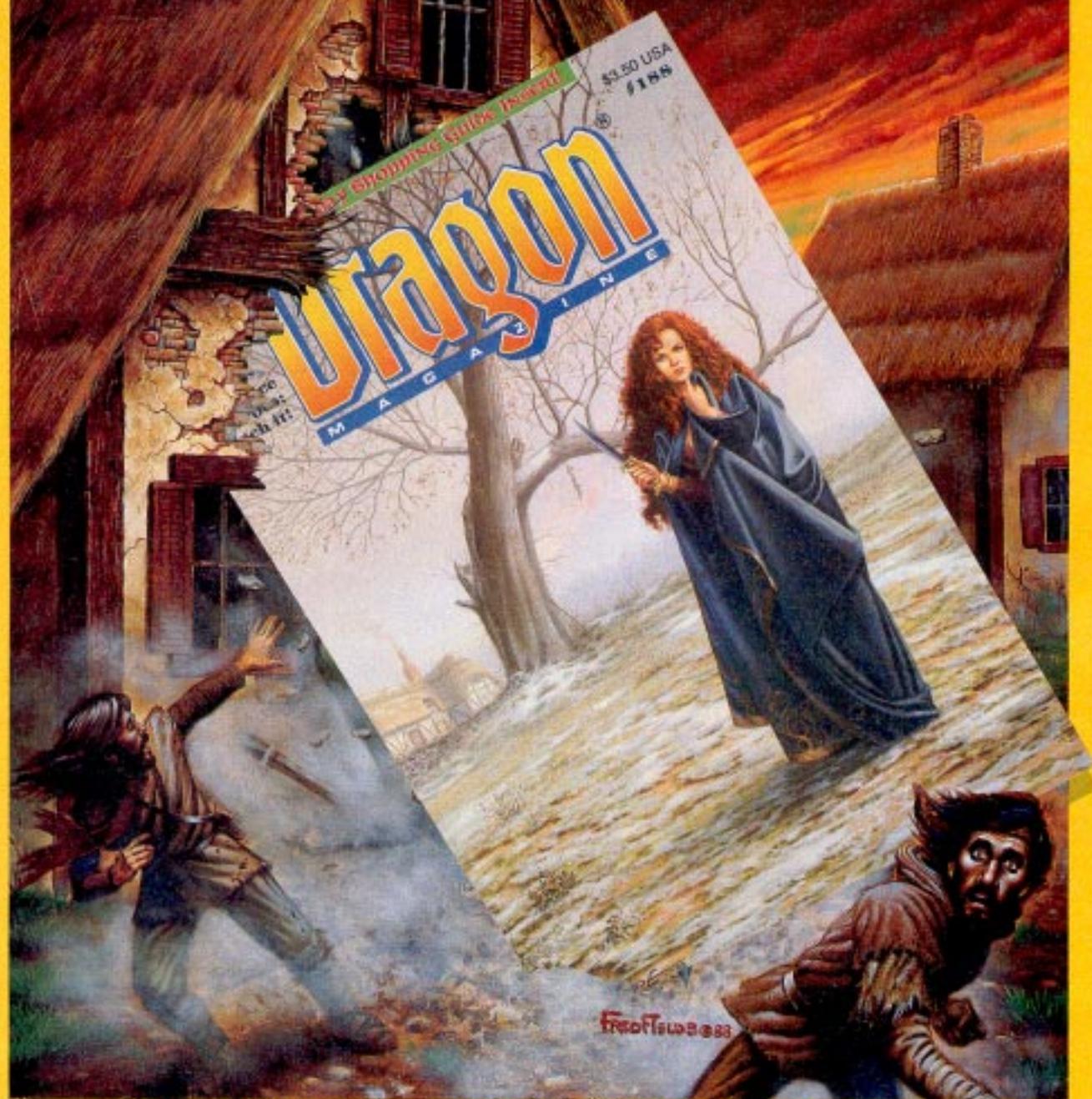
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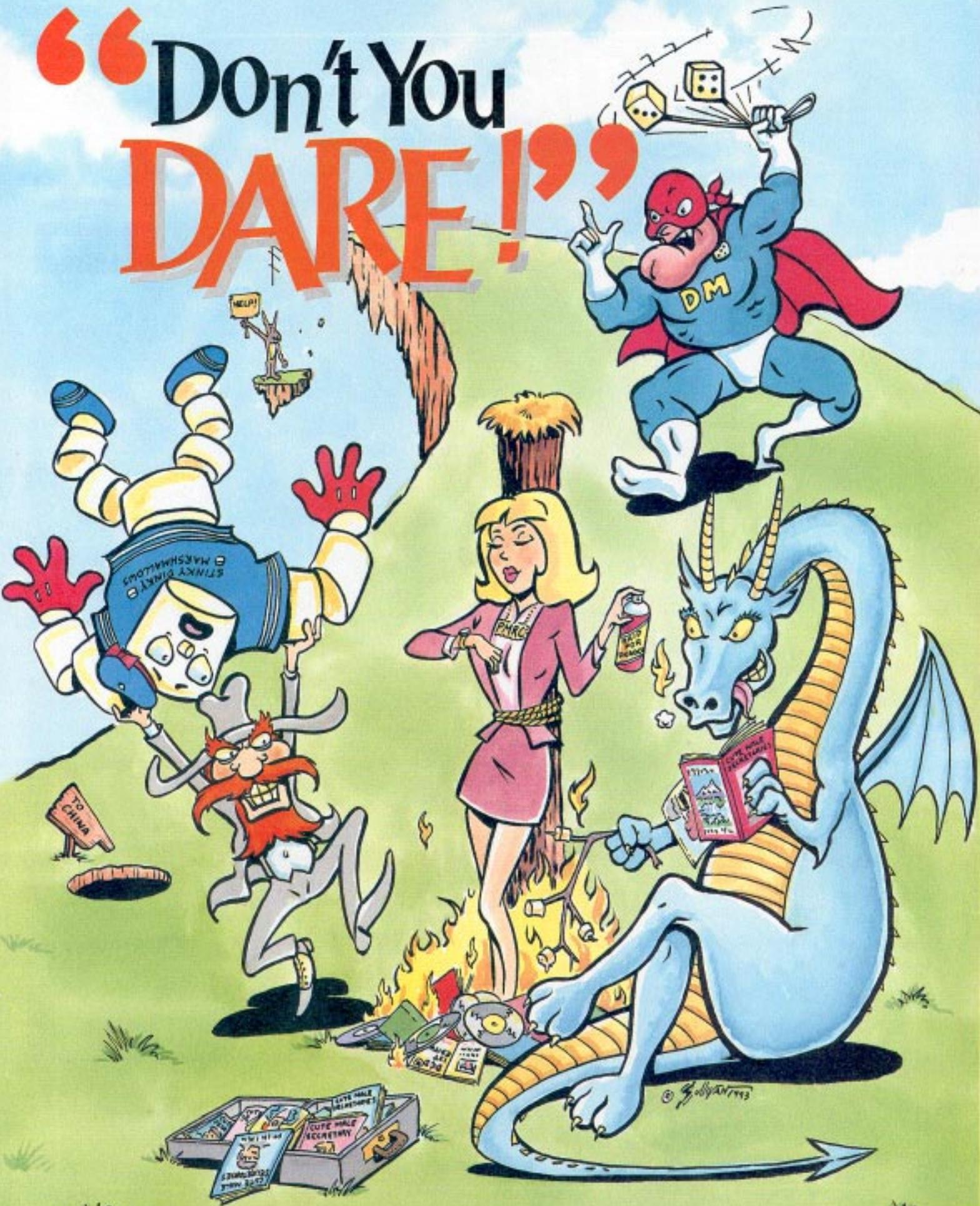
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Artwork by
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“Don't You DARE!”



A dozen "don'ts" for comedy role-playing fun

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Artwork by Stephen Sullivan

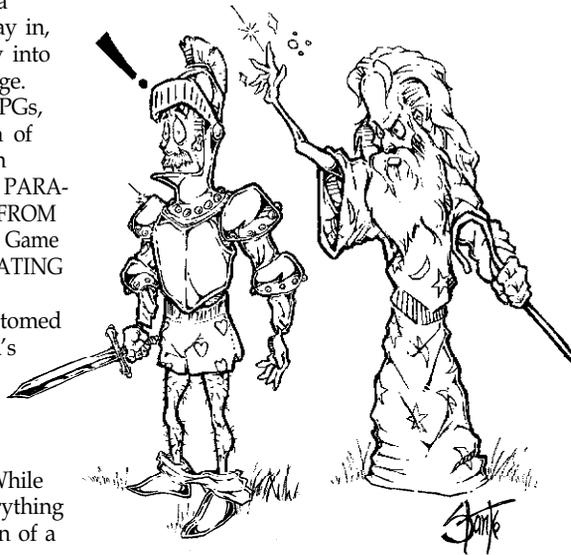
Although most role-players have a favorite game system or genre to play in, many also make an occasional foray into something different, just for a change. When it comes to change-of-pace RPGs, nothing beats the slapstick mayhem of comedy RPGs such as Steve Jackson Games's TOON*, West End Games's PARANOIA*, R. Talsorian's TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE*, or The Avalon Hill Game Company's TALES FROM THE FLOATING VAGABOND* games.

Unfortunately, when a GM accustomed to a serious gaming system like TSR's AD&D®, FASA's BATTLETECH*, or Steve Jackson Games's GURPS* rules tries to shift gears and run a game, he often brings along all the baggage of serious game systems. While the following list won't tell you everything you need to do to run a good session of a comedy RPG, it does point out some major don'ts, standard practices of serious gaming that should be avoided for the sake of good comedy.

1. Bean counting: Games like Steve Jackson Games's GURPS system and ICE's CHAMPIONS* rules have complicated character creation systems involving the purchasing of attributes, advantages, and skills using a pool of character points that can number into the hundreds. Comedy games like the TOON and TALES FROM THE FLOATING VAGABOND systems have character creation systems that seem similar, so the average GM might get the impression that he should be as vigilant about point-spending accuracy for these games as he is for the "serious" RPGs.

In fact, as long as the comedy GM keeps an eye out for blatantly gross point cheating, such minor errors in accounting (or "creative financing") should be ignored if they lead to a funny result. For example, if a FLOATING VAGABOND Patron is outfitted with an arsenal of high-power weapons he obviously didn't have the money to buy, the GM might have to make some changes; if the same Patron used that nonexistent money to buy potentially funny gear, like rubber clown feet, a pet rock, and a lifetime subscription to *Sporks Illustrated*, *the Men's Magazine of Utensils*, he should be cut some slack.

More relaxed GMs might even want to abandon the point-building systems of comedy games entirely, simply telling the players to come up with some sort of funny character. As long as the characters end up looking *basically* legal, and as long as they're funny, then no one need care that a carefully crafted set of rules has been circumvented.



Artwork by John Stanko

2. Rules slavery: Just as with character creation, about half of the time spent playing a serious RPG involves the GM and players having to remember rules, throw dice, and consult charts. While all comedy RPGs use dice and have rules and charts aplenty, it must be remembered that there is an important difference between comedy and serious RPGs when it comes to this stuff. In serious games, these things are used to control the flow of the game. In comedy games, dice and rules can actually impede the flow.

Most serious games include a statement to the effect that you are encouraged to modify the rules to suit your own tastes. The equivalent rule for comedy RPGs is that you should feel free to completely ignore all of the trappings of rules, charts, and dice if they get in the way of the action and fun.

As an example, in the first TOON game I ever ran, we started off playing things exactly by the book. Whenever a player wanted to do something, he'd ask me what attribute or skill to roll against, he'd make his roll, announce whether he'd made it, then turn to me to hear what the result of his successful or failed activity was. As the game progressed, I got tired of having to play such a major rules-role in the session, so I just began telling the players to roll against whatever skill they wanted, then I told them to interpret their own results. Finally, they really got into it, rolling the dice with abandon, interpreting the rolls without even bothering to look at their skill scores, and just announcing what action happened using the rule "whatever's funny is legal" to adjudicate the results. We could even have abandoned the rolling of the dice alto-

gether, except that there's even some fun just in the action of madly scrambling to find a pair of dice and roll them on some nearby flat surface.

Were we following the carved-in-stone rules of the game? No. But did we have one of the most hilarious free-form game sessions we'd ever been in? You'd better believe it.

3. High-brow role-playing: Some GMs' RPG campaigns are more than simply hack-&-slash affairs; they use the game as a vehicle to investigate important themes and social questions, like sexual equality in a fantasy setting or the legal implications of vigilantism in a super-hero game. While there is nothing wrong with this (in fact, some of my best gaming sessions have been of this sort), comedy games are about much simpler things, like how many times does a mouse have to hit a cat with an anvil before the latter falls down.

Even if you're playing in a setting that parodies a serious game setting (such as the "Dungeons & Toons" or "Supertoon" settings of the TOON game's *Tooniversal Tour Guide*), you have to remember to leave behind all thoughts of "gaming with a message." Heck, just leave behind all thoughts whatsoever.

4. Plot-forcing: Whether you use an adventure you designed yourself or one you bought in a store, most GMs have so much time, effort, or money invested in an adventure that they will fight tooth and nail to prevent the players from deviating from the plot. Some of the professionally designed adventures thoughtfully provide the GM with methods of keeping the train on the tracks, such as suggestions that all side-branches of the road the party is supposed to travel be populated with hordes of monsters so dangerous that the PCs will be forced to take the correct path to save their lives.

In a comedy RPG, the plot is just an excuse to get the PCs to do something funny. If the "something funny" happens to be related to the plot, that's a bonus; however, as the main goal is humor, not problem-solving, a simple thing like the plot should not be allowed to stand in the way of the adventure.

This isn't to say that the GM should shun plots altogether. In comedy games, the plot serves a special purpose. Whenever there's a lull in the comedy or one of the player's jokes fails to lead anywhere, *that's* the time to remember the plot. Whenever the players stop generating their own humor, it's a good time for the GM to remind them of what the plot was when they started. They probably won't get any

closer to solving it this time around, but a good plot gives players lots of ideas from which to draw wacky tangents.

5. Goal orientation: We've all heard the phrase "Winning is everything," and most RPGs play by this same spirit. Oh, certainly, you can't simply win or lose a normal fantasy game, as each game session is merely part of an ongoing campaign. Any particular victory or setback is only the precursor to the next set of obstacles in the PC's way. Still, players want to successfully pass more rolls than they fail, beat more monsters than they are beaten by, and collect more treasure than they can spend.

In good comedy, it's as fun to fail as to succeed—in fact, sometimes it's more so. Players in a comedy RPG shouldn't be hung up on success at all costs. It's up to the GM to ensure that the penalties of failure are at least as funny as the rewards of success at the level of both the individual die roll and the overall goal of the adventure. Thus, the players won't be trained to strive for success and avoid failure because of the comedic rewards.

Of course, there will still be a sense of satisfaction that will result from an adventure that was both funny *and* successful, so the GM shouldn't force failure on the players just for the fun of it. For example, if the basic premise of an adventure is supposed to be the rescue of a kidnapped princess, he shouldn't let the princess be killed in the end, even if it is done in a funny manner. If the PCs fail to rescue her by their own efforts (or if they entirely forget their mission by the time the session approaches a close), she should be freed in the end by some improbably coincidence and berate the PCs for their ineptitude (in a humorous manner, of course). The scenario should still be one in which winning is possible and, indeed, in which the PCs usually win in the end. Still, you shouldn't let the players get obsessively one-minded about success to the exclusion of other comedic possibilities.

6. Conversational equality: In many serious RPG campaigns, the GM sees his relationship with the players as one of equality. Thus, he thinks that he has the right to talk as much as they do. All of them. Put together. And, if he has lots of interesting things to say, such as giving detailed descriptions of the, lost city in the jungle that the PCs have found, or of the combat maneuvers of their enemies, the players won't even complain about the GM's long-windedness; they'll probably praise him for his imagination and descriptive capabilities.

In a comedy game, however, the rules are different. Talk is cheap, but action is where the real humor is. Instead of bogging down the game with long descriptions and carefully crafted monologs, the GM's narratives should be short and to

the point, leaving more time for the players to play instead of pretending to listen to details that they fully intend to ignore once the GM stops talking. You needn't worry that a less-than-full description might lead to mistaken impressions ("I thought you said that the door opened inward!"); if a mistake leads to a silly situation, then your job (making funny things happen) has been done for you.

If you ever do find yourself unconsciously monopolizing the conversation for a standard GM monolog, quickly cut to a fight, a chase, or an inexplicably strange occurrence to cut yourself off. If any of the players tries to take more than his fair share of game time by endless talking, use the same method on him.

7. Favoritism: In a lot of games, the easiest way to organize the characters is for one of them to act as leader, while the rest are followers and supporters. In practice, there are often multiple leaders for different situations, such as a street samurai taking the lead during combat in FASA's SHADOWRUN* game, while a decker or other character does so in other circumstances. This pattern is easy to fall into because it provides the most effective allocation of resources to problems. The player of the fighter gets to do most of the talking during combat, the cleric during negotiations, the thief during the off-hours, etc.

In a comedy game, effectiveness should take a back seat to a lot of other considerations, one of which is involvement. A lot of times, comedy game sessions are dominated by the loudest, most animated, or funniest players. But the concept of "effective allocation of humor" just doesn't carry the appeal that the same concept does for firepower. For maximum enjoyment of the game to be had by everyone, the GM must ensure that everyone participates maximally.

Don't get caught up in the actions of a few players, even if they are doing the most interesting stuff. Having a leader and a bunch of followers just doesn't work here. And don't let anyone "pass" on his turn; make him say *something*. Having the strange occurrences occur to the quietest player is one good way of getting him into the spirit of the thing.

8. Stinginess: One of the last duties a GM has to perform at the end of most gaming sessions is to award experience points (XPs) or their equivalent to deserving PCs. Most serious games have a strict set of guidelines on how this is to be done, hoping to prevent the problem of XP hyper-inflation rapidly producing characters able to destroy the entire campaign world. Thus, XP awards are usually small and sometimes rare. As an extreme example, Phage Press's AMBER* game includes a statement by Eric Wujcik to the effect

that there's no requirement that AMBER players ever be rewarded with advancement points. In that author's campaign, points were awarded on an annual basis, not after every game session.

This is just fine for serious RPGs, but it just doesn't cut it in comedy games. Gaining experience; plot points, promotions, and the like are all *fun*, so you have to make sure the players get lots of them. Of course, you should also make sure that they get only what they deserve, so a disruptive player shouldn't get as many XP as one who contributed a lot to the occasion. Still, everyone should come away with something at the end of the game.

In fact, why wait for the end of the game? In the TOON game, the Animator is expected to hand out Plot Points whenever something cracks him up instead of waiting for the end of the game. The same should go for all comedy RPGs. If you're playing the TALES FROM THE FLOATING VAGABOND game and a player blows away a Disgustingly Cute Furry Thing in a particularly inventive way, give him 5 Experience Points right then and there. If he was actually *supposed* to kill the Furry Thing, make it 10!

This practice is not even likely to lead to hyper-inflated super-characters! Oh, sure, the PCs are going to become more powerful, but in a comedy game that's not a big problem, as the settings used in those games are inherently more flexible than those in serious RPGs; they can expand to include mega-characters without becoming warped out of shape like normal campaign worlds. (If you're still afraid of the spectre of overpowered PCs destroying a campaign, take a look at the section on "Fairness".)

9. Fairness: One of the hallmarks of a good GM in most game systems is that he's fair. Characters may be injured or killed in his campaign, but only if the rules strictly require it or, within the context of the ongoing narrative, the character deserves it. Thus, when a player's hero is harmed, he knows that there was some reason behind the injury, from something as simple as the fact that he failed a parry roll, to something as complex as the fact that he had failed to live up to the heroic ideal required of him on his quest.

In comedy RPGs, things are different. Here, you shouldn't let something as trivial as good or bad dice rolls decide how the story is going to progress, nor should anything happen *because* of anything else. The only reason for events to occur is because they are fun or funny. If the best thing the players can say about you after the game is, "Well, at least he was fair," you've failed to create comedy.

Taking the example of combat, a serious campaign GM will try to balance the strength of the party and its opponents so that there is always a risk of the PCs being

defeated. However, he will usually ensure that the risk isn't so great as to make it likely that the players' beloved characters will be destroyed.

In a comedy game, killing a PC (or making him "fall down," in the TOON game's terminology) can actually be fun. Since the players don't usually take as much time to create this sort of PC, a PC's death usually isn't fraught with the same sort of heartaches (besides, in the TOON game, "fallen" characters get up again). While a comedy game GM shouldn't go out of his way to kill PCs, he also shouldn't take great pains to ensure parity between heroes and villains, as long as the eventual encounter will be funny. As it says in the rules for the PARANOIA game, desperate struggles against ludicrously impossible odds make for some of that game's funniest moments.

10. Overuse: After a few sessions of any serious RPG, the players have usually figured out some of the more effective tactics for combat, negotiations, bargaining, or whatever, as defined by both the written rules and the style of the GM. In fact, a GM might even give preference to PCs who develop individual "trademark" styles that differentiate them from all the other characters of the same type in a campaign (such as a fantasy-game warrior who uses a weapon less effective than the long sword that most fighters use). In other RPGs, skills improve the more you use them and degrade if you ignore them, so that over time you'll find characters with a few popular skills or spells with which they are proficient, but with a number of other skills that they tend to ignore.

While this may lead to more effective PCs and more successful adventures, it can get boring, and boredom is the bane of comedy gaming. Sure, players who have optimized their characters by putting all their experience points into building up a few key skills or abilities are going to want to use those abilities as much as possible, and if a particular tactic is found to be especially effective in certain situations, they'd be fools to use the some other tactic or ability. And that's the key to it all: They're *supposed* to be fools when they're playing comedy RPGs!

Encourage your players to experiment with their characters' abilities. If the party is faced with an overwhelming menace—say, a 400'-tall killer robot—and one of the "heroes" puts away his shoulder-mounted robot-killer missile launcher and pulls out a pair of brass knuckles, so that he can go hand-to-hand with the robot, don't follow your initial inclination to kill him outright, even though that's what the rules say will happen. The player has done something silly, and you should reward him. Of course, you don't have to let him win because of his silly tactic; that would be too easy. Let the PC survive for a few rounds of the fight, even letting him score

some significant damage on the robot before being trounced. If, by some strange coincidence, all the other PCs pull out brass knuckles and have at the robot, throw logic to the wind and let them defeat him, retroactively deciding that the robot's only weaknesses were to brass and fisticuffs (see "Consistency" below).

11. Consistency: A good, serious RPG campaign world simulates the real world in a number of ways, with the obvious differences that make the game worth playing, like the addition of working magic to a medieval setting or of vampires to the modern world. Whatever changes are made, the players can rest assured that some things are constant, like the laws of gravity, mathematics, and causality. Moreover, the players can be confident that the rules of the game are going to remain the same. If the rules changed without warning or justification, the GM knows what sort of a ruckus that would cause with the players.

If the same held true for comedy RPGs, things would become too predictable. The robot killers in the "Overuse" example above would find that repeated use of brass knuckles against killer robots would become progressively less effective, possibly even disastrously so. Whenever the players in a comedy game start to think that they've got the universe figured out, it's the GM's job to prove them wrong.

The key to humor is that it is unexpected. In a humor game, things don't always go exactly as planned. The more divorced the game is from reality, the less the players should be able to count on things like cause and effect. In the TOON game, you can shock your players by ending a sequence of running breaches of the laws of probability with something that is completely normal; for example, if the players have been having fun calling for a taxi to see what strange thing other than a cab will appear next, it might be fun to follow the 747's, turbo-charged bulldozers, and flying frying pans with an actual New York City taxi, complete with obnoxious New York City cabbie.

12. Damage control: A lot of magazine articles have been written on the subject "What do you do when things start to go wrong?" In a comedy game, the correct answer is "Nothing." Or, better yet, "Make it worse." If in the first 10 minutes of a serious game the PCs defeat the villain who was supposed to provide a full night's entertainment, or if they end up killing the NPC who was supposed to lead them to the next stage of the adventure, the GM would have to scramble to come up with a replacement villain or NPC in order to salvage the situation and prevent the PCs from being stuck in a no-win or no-fun situation.

If things start to go wrong in a comedy RPG, however, *let* them. When the players get their characters into an impossible sit-

uation, don't help them out; just let them muddle around in it for a while. If you're lucky and good at improvising, they'll never know that they screwed up your adventure in the first place. If it works, don't let on that things weren't planned that way. Accept praise for anything that works, blame the players for anything that doesn't, and remember that "Any funny idea you can take credit for is a good one."

In the spirit of ignoring rules, I'll ignore my restriction on a dozen points and offer an extra "don't" to remember:

13. No-fun puns: So far I've been saying that humor is better than seriousness when you're running a comedy RPG. Well, that's not exactly true; humor *of the right sort* is better than seriousness. If you come to rely on the wrong type of humor, you'll find the game being less fun than the worst of serious RPGs.

A lot of comedy RPG players, GMs, and even professional writers think that you can get by on a pun or a joke, and that a silly name will make a boring character interesting. In fact, it just makes him a boring character with a silly name. On the other hand, some GMs make their jokes too difficult, involving complex plays on words (some in foreign languages), side references to obscure television shows of the '50s, and punch lines that are catastrophically forgotten at the last second.

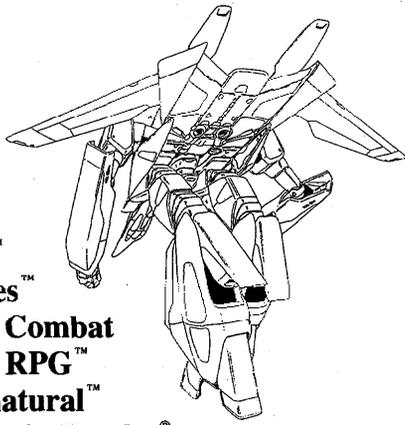
If you want the sort of belly-laughs that make it all worthwhile, you have to go slapstick. If a character fails at an attempt to do something, don't just have him fail, have him fail *disastrously*. If he succeeds, have him succeed *spectacularly* (which doesn't mean *completely*; a single spectacular success should never completely solve the problem the PC is facing). No matter what you do, don't let the pace of the game get bogged down. When you've forgotten what should come next in the adventure, don't try to come up with something intricate. Just pick a character and have something drop on him from out of the blue.

More importantly, if some joke or shtick manages to get a laugh from your players, reinforce the humor by having the joke repeatedly come back to haunt the PCs later in an adventure, or even in a completely unrelated adventure. Running gags are the sort of thing that become the folklore of a gaming group, causing players to start giggling at the mention of it months after the event. Ω

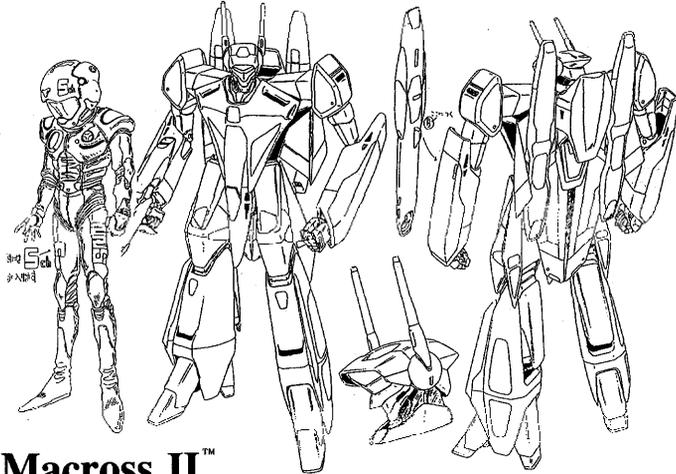
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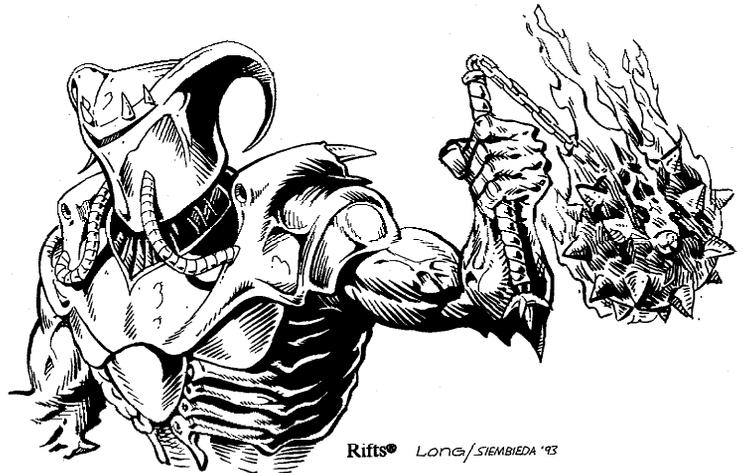
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 - Least baatezu
 - Greater baatezu
 - Number of eyes on a cyclops
 - Gambler's refusal: 2 words
 - Root meaning "within," as before "-terica"
 - Infiltrator's role
 - Wildebeest
 - King's messenger: abbr.
 - Misdirection* lasts eight _____: abbr.
 - Town officer
 - Oregon's time zone: abbr.
 - What hanburis cost in Kara-Tur: 2 words
 - Like a hanburi priced at one yuan: 2 words
 - Class of lernaean creatures, to a biology sage
 - Least baatezu
 - Representative at a role-playing convention
 - Swamp-traveling boot
 - "You _____ right!": 2 words
 - Greeks' fifth letter
 - Like Otik's spiced fried potatoes
 - Lit only with a small candle
 - Neither's companion
 - _____ -kien (oriental long sword)
 - Response to #5 down
 - Cave bear's child
 - _____ word, *blind*
 - Tavern favorite
 - Feature of a giant skunk
 - Lesser baatezu
 - _____ man (Oz creature): 2 words
 - Places alone
 - Begins video game anew
 - Portal guardians
 - Prince's title: abbr.
 - Narrow abyss
 - NASA moonlander
 - Bird akin to giant eagles
 - Lesser baatezu
 - Like the teeth of 17 across
 - _____ -fiend (baatezu enemy)
 - Dir. from Qualinost to Solace: abbr.
 - Nymph's beloved
 - Filled, as a theater: abbr.
 - Greater baatezu
 - Lesser baatezu
 - Colloquial crossword abbreviations
 - Farmhouse features
 - Word with ghoul or phantom
 - Actor Peter O' _____
 - "Wild" gov't. organization: abbr.
 - Spell that clay golems hate
 - Comb. form with "-dactyl"
 - Caramon, to Palin and Tanin
 - _____ Red (Viking explorer): 2 words
 - Lowest baatezu
 - Lesser baatezu
 - Pittsburgh player that sounds like a rogue
 - Scientific theory (abbr.)
 - Military command: 2 words
 - What a *knock* spell does to a door
 - Brigandine, e.g.
 - "Help take a _____ out of crime."
 - Flogging weapon
 - _____ standstill (stalemated): 2 words
 - Fighter's prime req.
 - _____ fiend (greatest baatezu)
 - Singers Green and Yankovic
 - Quasi-elemental plane

Solution is somewhere in this issue! ☐

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
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| 29 | | | 30 | | | 31 | 32 | | | 33 | 34 | | | |
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| | | | 39 | | | 40 | | | | | | | | |
| 41 | 42 | 43 | | | | | | | 44 | | | 45 | 46 | 47 |
| 48 | | | | | | 49 | | 50 | | 51 | | | | |
| 52 | | | | 53 | 54 | | | 55 | 56 | | | 57 | | |
| | 58 | | 59 | | 60 | | | 61 | | | 62 | | | |
| 63 | | | | 64 | | | | 65 | | | 66 | | | 67 |
| 68 | | | | | | | | 69 | | | | | | |
| 70 | | | | | | | | 71 | | | | 72 | | |

- Down
- Monsters' "target" stat
 - Burst: 2 words
 - Lesser baatezu
 - Two: prefix
 - "What do you expect, _____ your beer?": 2 words
 - Send to the brig: 2 words
 - Yuki-_____ (evil Kara-Tur maiden)

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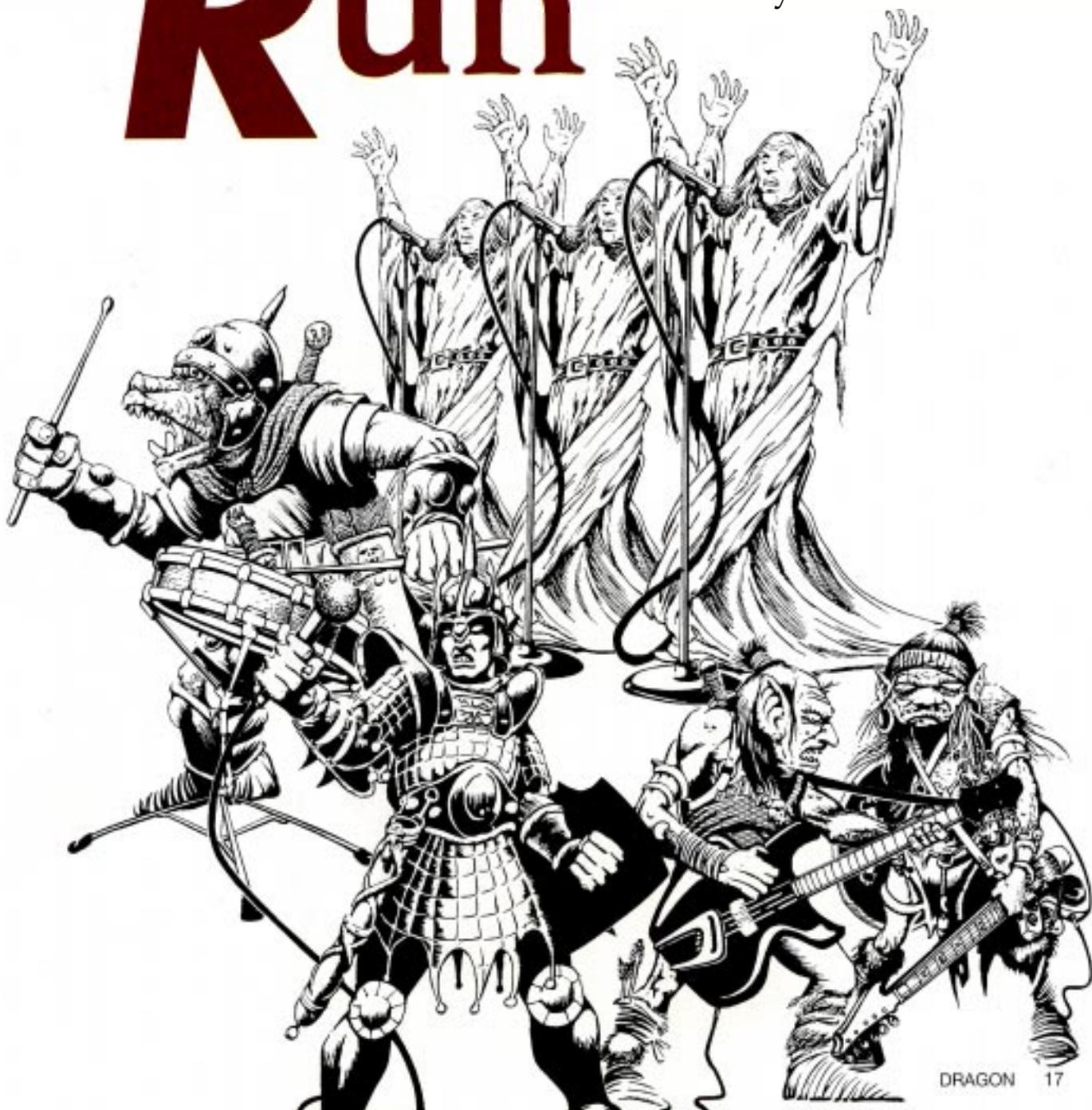
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Band on the Run



A collection of songs for anyone who will sing them by people who would rather remain nameless, for reasons that will be entirely too obvious



Fun, Fun, Fun

(Till Her Daddy Takes the Long Sword Away)

for the AD&D® game
(with apologies to the Beach Boys)

(chorus in parentheses and italics)

Well, she got her daddy's sword
and she asked if she could give us a hand now.
Seems she forgot all about
the mon'stery like she told her old man now.
Before her daddy could catch her,
she went lookin' for adventure so grand now.
And she'll have fun, fun, fun
till her daddy takes her long sword away.
(*Fun, fun, fun, till her daddy takes the long sword away!*)

Well, the orcs can't touch her
'cause she swings that mighty sword like an ace now.
(*She fights like an ace now, she fights like an ace.*)
She makes a squadron of ogres
flee home with the look on her face now.
(*A look on her face now, a look on her face.*)
A lot of trolls try to catch her,
but she vanishes with nary a trace now.
And she'll have fun, fun, fun
till her daddy takes her long sword away.
(*Fun, fun, fun, till her daddy takes the long sword away!*)

Wa-ooo, wa-ooo-ooo-ooo-oo-oo
(*She fights like an ace now, she fights like an ace.*)
Wa-ooo, wa-ooo-ooo-ooo-oo-oo
(*A look on her face now, a look on her face.*)
And she'll have fun, fun, fun
till her daddy takes her long sword away.

Now, we knew all along
that her scheme was just too good to be true now.
(*Too good to be true now, too good to be true.*)
And since he took the sword away,
she's been feelin' bored and terribly blue now.
(*Terribly blue now, terribly blue.*)
But she can come along with me
'cause I got another sword +2 now,
And we'll have fun, fun, fun
now that daddy took her long sword away!
(*Fun, fun, fun, till her daddy takes the long sword away!*)

[slow fade]



Brown-Eyed Ghoul

for the RAVENLOFT® campaign
(with apologies to Van Morrison)

Hey, where did we go
Our last AD&D game?
Our DM—a real pro—
I give him the full blame.
We were hackin' and a-slashin', hey hey,
Leapin' and a-boundin'
In the misty graveyard dusk
With our pulses poundin'.
Saw you—my brown-eyed ghoul.
You're my brown-eyed ghoul.

Moment I saw you
(Your fangs had that dull glow),
I knew that you had me
Paralyzed, sweet and slow.
Lurking in the moonlight, cacklin',
Rising from behind a grave.
Drippin' and a-droolin',
You tell me it's me you crave
Oh you, my brown-eyed ghoul.
You're my brown-eyed ghoul.

As you dismember me,
I hear you sing:
[gross phlegmy sounds]
Nya di-dah
Pgne pgne pgne pgne pgne Pgne pgne pgne pgne di-dah
La ti da

So then you clawed your way
Right through my heart and bone.
I love your mind, it's in decay,
And my, how you can groan.

Sure, we got problems now and then
(Sometimes I'm overcome by your breath).
Though you like to munch on carrion,
With my dream-ghoul, love conquers death
Oh, my brown-eyed ghoul.
You're my brown-eyed ghoul.



Gnomish Space Marines

for the SPELLJAMMER® campaign
(with apologies to the Beatles)

In the sphere where I was born,
Lived the oldest gnome I've seen,
And he told us of his life
In the Gnomish Space Marines.
So we 'jammed up to the sun
In our fine well-built machine,
And we joined the stately ranks
Of the Gnomish Space Marines.

[chorus]

We're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.
Yes, we're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.

Got our tinkers all aboard,
All the ones we could afford.
Our kazoo band likes to play. . .

[musical interlude]

We're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.
Yes, we're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.

Giant hamsters move the wheels,
And they drive our great machine.
They give us spaham for all our meals,
And bite us only when they're mean.

We're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.
Yes, we're all part of the Gnomish Space Marines,
The Gnomish Space Marines, the Gnomish Space Marines.



[repeat chorus; note that in actual practice, gnomes constantly add new verses to this song, extending its length ad infinitum]

Companions' Rhapsody

for the DRAGONLANCE® campaign
(with apologies to Queen)

TANIS: Is this my real life?
Is this just fantasy?
Where do the stars hide?
Why does evil close in on me?

RAISTLIN: Hourglass eyes
Look up to the skies and see.
I'm not a weak mage,
I know the truth, you see.
There will be Dragons Blue, Dragons White,
Dragons Good rise to fight.
Any way the War goes
Doesn't really matter to me—to me.

TAS: Tanis, just look at me!
Found a purse all full of gold!
Oh, it's yours? Well, then I'll hold—
Tanis—please let go of me!
I swear I thought you'd thrown it all away!

STURM: Tanis . . . hey, let him go.
He didn't mean to take your cash.
We must be off to find the Lance tomorrow.
Caramon, Caramon:
Where is Kitiara?

KITIARA: I'm late, to meet my friends.
Sent men to the front line
Greatest power will be mine.
Good-bye, everybody, I've got to go,
Gonna leave you all behind and lead my troops.
Tanis (ooo-ooo), you deserve to die.
Behind my back you've fallen for Laurana. . . .

LAURANA: I see a little Qualinesti in your soul,
Tanthalas, Tanthalas, can I be your companion?
The memories you're fighting—
That human woman's fright'ning me!

TANIS: Kitiara (*Kitiara*), Kitiara (*Kitiara*)
Kitiara Uth Matar—
A Dragonlord!

FLINT: I'm just an old dwarf, everybody bugs me.
Chorus: He's just an old dwarf, but he's still family.
He'll give his life so that we can be free.

CARAMON: Easy go, easy come. Everybody thinks I'm dumb.
Chorus: Car-a-mon, we do not think you're dumb.
CARAMON: I'm not dumb?
Chorus: Car-a-mon, we do not think you're dumb.
CARAMON: I'm not dumb!
Chorus: We do not think you're dumb.
CARAMON: I'm not dumb, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum!

Oh, brother Raistlin, brother Raistlin,
Brother Raistlin, where'd you go?

RAISTLIN: To Takhisis, she's a black robe set aside for me
Forme...
For me!

[musical interlude, headbanging, etc.]

STURM: So you think evil dragons can beat the good guys?
So you think you can stab me and leave me to die?
Oh, Lady—you might do this to me, Lady
But you'll never win out,
You'll never defeat Good and Right!

TANIS: Paladine has triumphed
Check the skies and see.
Evil has no place here—
We're free.





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Weapons of Mass Destruction: On Sale Now!

A selection of devastating devices for use with the SPELLJAMMER® universe

by Matthew Webber

Artwork by Matthew Webber



"No!" Satin shouted in exasperation. "I've told you ten times now. My ship is the best in the sphere! It does not need any improvements." The centaur stamped a forehoof on the wooden deck with a resounding boom.

Nimfaratillarnisarrendilon—Nimf for short—skipped back nimbly and nervously eyed the way the centaur captain's arms had folded over the bandolier strapped across her chest. Satin Truebolt had quite a reputation with the pistol crossbows mounted there.

"Captainpleasetyou'don'tlisten . . ." he began. Satin's fingers drifted toward the pistol grips. Nimf raised his hands as his plea slowed in tempo. ". . . to me. I don't mean to criticize your ship. It's merely that it's . . . well, so woefully lacking in technologically advanced combat devices that—"

"That," snapped Satin, "is just the way I like it." One hind leg irritably dug at the deck with a polished hoof. Her lustrous black tail swept from side to side like a cat's.

"But think!" Nimf protested. "Your ship has such huge areas of open deck! Three armored turrets full of wasted potential!" Satin was sure there were tears in the earnest gnome's eyes. "That catapult, for instance. It has an elegant simplicity, but think how much better it would be converted into a launcher for Dorivartaramiarlis's New Rotating Double Discs With Serrated Edges And. . . ."

Satin growled.

"Dori's Buzz Bombs," Nimf corrected hastily. "And that prow! It would be ideal for Neggicharsi . . . Neg's Wondrous Power Flail!"

Satin looked at her ship, the Alicorn Star, whose graceful lines rose at the prow to form a stylized unicorn's head. The spiral horn stretched forward to form a lethal piercing ram. She tried to imagine the same ram with a gnomish power-flail

attached, looking for all the worlds like a giant's bolas had snagged on the end. Had she not been so angry she would have laughed out loud.

"And don't forget the enormous potential of my very own Phlogiston Fire Bombs," the gnome finished proudly.

Satin looked back at the gnome, not quite sure she'd heard him correctly. "Phlogiston what?"

"Fire bombs. The best in the sphere!"

"The phlogiston is an ocean of explosive gas, and you've invented a fire bomb for it?"

"Exactly! Think of it!" Nimf expounded happily, digging a crumpled piece of parchment out of his pocket and showing it to her. The scrap was covered with complicated diagrams and Gnomish shorthand.

"You load the bomb into a catapult—even yours would do it—and shoot it at the enemy. When it hits, the automatic ignition assembly comes into operation, which is linked to the Greek-fire reservoir here, then—"

"Off!" roared Satin, her shout sending the gnome reeling back. "Get of my ship!"

"But, Captain, think of—"

Satin whirled and kicked. Nimf tried to flee first, but he was too slow in putting the paper scrap away. He departed the main deck in a high arc, with a dwindling wail and a neat print of Satin's hind hooves marking the seat of his pants.

"There's nothing wrong with my catapult," Satin muttered to herself patting the Alicorn's rail affectionately.

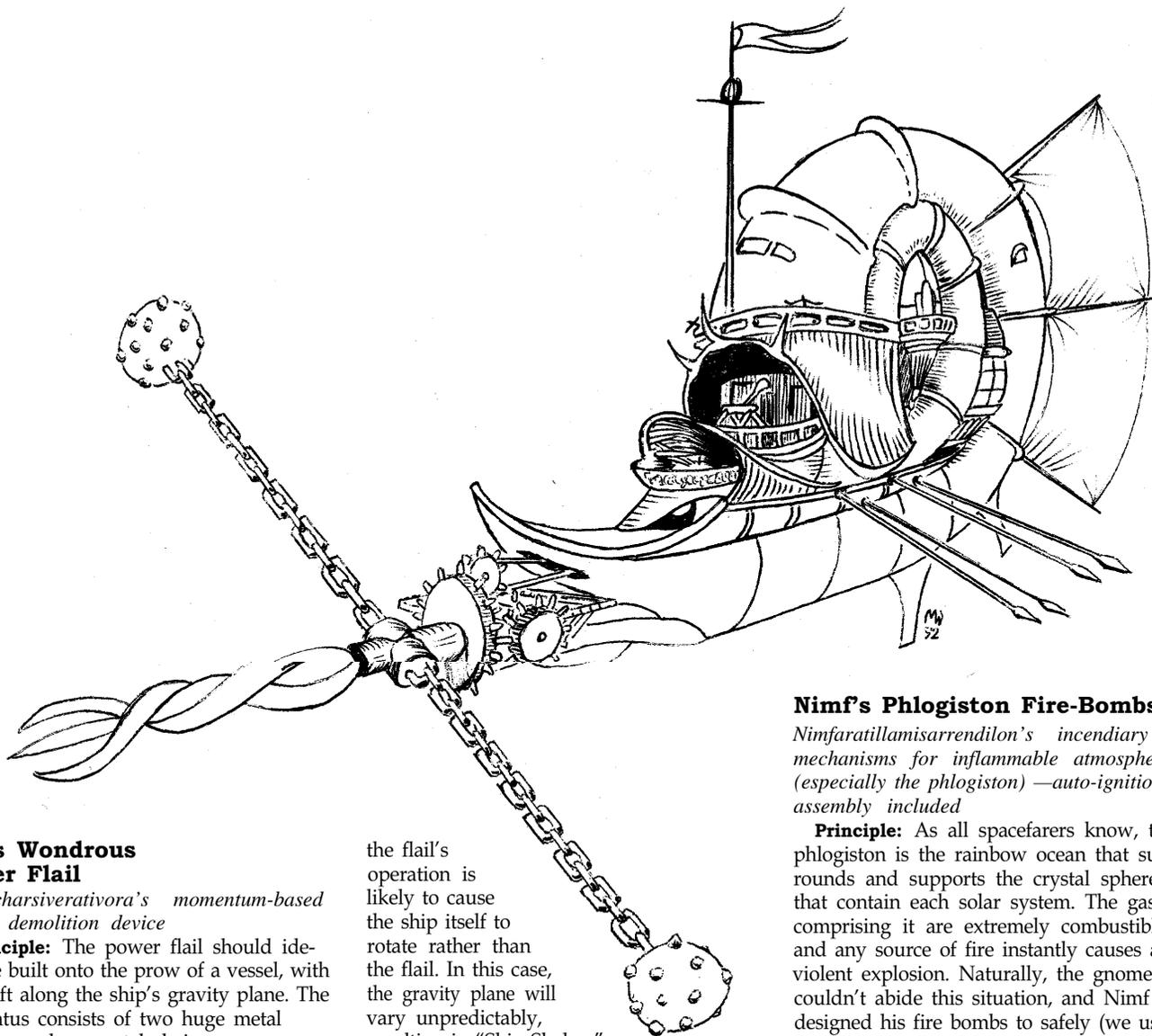
Many readers are no doubt aware of the tinker gnomes of Krynn, the world of the DRAGONLANCE® saga. Manic mechanics, they see a world where nothing exists that could not be improved upon by the addition of a host of cog-wheels, little bells, and rubber bands. Harmless enough, you might think, but unfortunately the gnomish philosophy dictates that a

machine that works perfectly is a failure; how can subsequent generations of gnomes improve on a perfectly working device? As a result, a gnomish machine is marked both by its outlandish complexity and its lack of reliability.

The advent of the SPELLJAMMER® setting unleashed the engineering chaos of the tinker gnomes on the unsuspecting universe. In short order, a traveler in wildspace could find gnomes all over the place, busily "improving" a catapult or steering vane and rendering it totally unworkable. The universe soon learned to give tinker gnomes a wide berth, leaving them to their paddleboat-like craft and politely (sometimes) declining numerous offers of free "improvements." Encounters like that between Satin and Nimf are common at every space dock.

Here are a selection of beautifully engineered space weapons for any SPELLJAMMER adventure, all designed, built, and usually operated exclusively by gnomes. They are *not* intended for serious use—a gnomish weapon is as likely to harm its operators as the intended target—but they can be amusing (particularly on an opponent's ship), and they are typical of the sort of weaponry one can expect to encounter on a gnomish side-wheeler. Gnomish weapons often inflict huge amounts of damage, but this potential is dampened by the danger to the weapon's own operators.

Each weapon description includes the principle, a description of its operation, and the typical problems associated with it. Relevant statistics are also listed. Crew numbers are in gnomes and may be halved if human-sized creatures are foolish enough to help. Also listed is the liability per attack: For every individual attack of each weapon, there is a chance of malfunction, often rolled on 1d20.



Neg's Wondrous Power Flail

Neggicharsiverativora's momentum-based enemy demolition device

Principle: The power flail should ideally be built onto the prow of a vessel, with its shaft along the ship's gravity plane. The apparatus consists of two huge metal weights on long metal chains, spun around a shaft. The device is powered by a typical gnomish assembly of gear trains and rubber bands worked by perspiring gnomes with hand cranks. The idea is to create a whirling propeller capable of crunching through an enemy vessel. The vessel shown is the prototype *Flail Snail*, plans for which were submitted to the mind-flayer embassy on the Rock of Bral. The illithids politely sent them back.

Operation: The flail takes three rounds to crank up to speed, which is usually a sedate two revolutions per minute (any faster and centrifugal force will destroy it). With two "wrecking balls," this means a possible four attacks per round. Of course, each attack also has a chance of malfunction.

Problems: Starting the device is a devil of a job: The chains tend to wind themselves around the shaft and not accomplish much. Solutions include (but are not limited to) having 1-10 gnomes with long bill hooks keeping the chain untangled, and first winding the chains in the direction opposite that of their operation so that they unwind as speed is picked up. If the ship is very light (less than 10 tons),

the flail's operation is likely to cause the ship itself to rotate rather than the flail. In this case, the gravity plane will vary unpredictably, resulting in "Ship Shaken" critical-hit conditions every round until the mechanism stops again (taking as many rounds as it took to start it).

Cost: 1,500 gp

Range: Close (ships must be within grappling range)

Crew: 6 cranker-gnomes plus 1-10 bill-hook gnomes

Damage/attack: 4d10 hit points or 1d4 hull points

Attacks/round: Up to 4 (DMs should take into account relative ship positions, etc.)

THACO: As per helmsman

Critical hit: On 18, 19, and 20

Liability/attack: Roll 1d20: 1-10, successful operation; 11-14, flail tangles in opposing ship (ships are considered grappled together, and two chains must be cut, each AC 4 and 30 hp); 15-17, impact cancels inertia (flail simply stops); 18-20, impact cancels inertia (mechanism destroyed by shock). 70% chance of tangling on startup, reduced by 5% for every gnome available with long bill-hook.

Nimf's Phlogiston Fire-Bombs

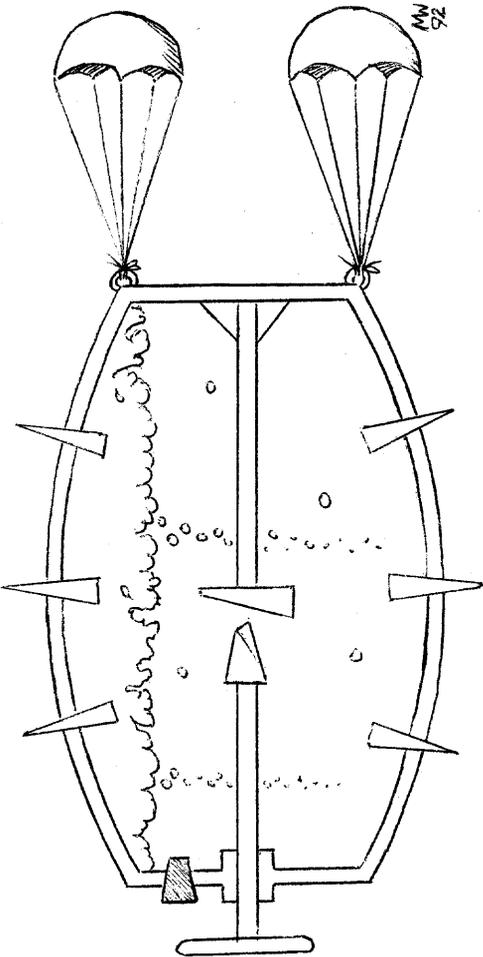
Nimfaratillamisarendilon's incendiary mechanisms for inflammable atmospheres (especially the phlogiston) —auto-ignition assembly included

Principle: As all spacefarers know, the phlogiston is the rainbow ocean that surrounds and supports the crystal spheres that contain each solar system. The gases comprising it are extremely combustible, and any source of fire instantly causes a violent explosion. Naturally, the gnomes couldn't abide this situation, and Nimf designed his fire bombs to safely (we use the term loosely) deliver a single charge of Greek fire to an enemy vessel and thereby ignite it. The bomb may be launched from any standard catapult. It is intended to hit a target plunger-first, to ignite the oil therein.

Operation: None as such; the device is simply filled with Greek fire and placed upon the catapult arm. The device can, of course, be used in wildspace, but the effect is less spectacular.

Problems: The device does not always hit plunger first. The bomb, being essentially a barrel, tends to spin in flight so that it may not ignite, simply breaking up and drenching the target with oil. To combat this, guidance chutes were added, but these created drag and reduced the range, so that the device is as likely to land on the deck of a friend as a foe. Also, guidance chutes do not function in the vacuum of wildspace.

Care should be taken to load the device horizontally on the catapult arm. If the bomb is placed plunger-first, the act of launching may detonate it; if placed tail-end first, the plunger sometimes comes out and flies away in a different direction.



15-18, fails to detonate (unlit Greek fire splashed over launcher); 19-20, explodes on launcher. DMs should take note of all spilled pools of unused Greek fire, as a spark from striking metal or the friction of a footfall could set one off at any time.

Dalla's Mechanical Lightning Arc

Dallaforengisortiala's friction-generated static electricity collection and focused delivery apparatus

Principle: This was inspired by the third-level wizard spell, *lightning bolt*. Indeed, the apparatus is not much more than a gigantic version of the spell's physical components, namely a glass rod and a large flywheel lined with sheep's wool. Gnomes wind the flywheel up to speed, placing it in contact with a tall glass column, generating huge amounts of static electricity that are channeled along an insulated copper wire. The end of the wire is maneuvered by a winch-operated arm to brush the side of an enemy vessel, hopefully discharging the collected electricity. This is supposed to start a fire on an enemy vessel, though much of its military value comes from the blinding spark that may dazzle onlookers for 1-4 rounds (save vs. spells for no effect). Metal ships such as mindspiders can become electrically charged; the weapon causes no immediate effect, but the energy discharges when that vessel comes into contact with anything else, causing damage to both mindspider and secondary target.

Operation: This device is very simple, though the gnomes like to complicate it with ever-more complex chains of gears and pulleys. Two to four gnomes crank the flywheel up to speed, while additional gnomes wind the winches that maneuver the arm out to touch an enemy ship. Whether or not there is a spark and how much damage it does depends on how long it has been since the last discharge. The DM secretly rolls 1d4; the resulting figure is both the number of rounds it takes to generate the next spark and the multiplier for the damage (and the num-

ber of hull points damaged). The effect of the weapon is a single giant spark of lightning, hot enough to cause a small explosion in most materials, with a 50% chance of starting a fire on flammable surfaces. In the phlogiston, damage is tripled, with no chance of fire.

One particularly useful application is to cause Spelljammer Shock on the opposing vessel's helm, as per "Critical Hits" in the *Concordance of Arcane Space* booklet in the SPELLJAMMER boxed set (pages 59-60). This requires the application of a successful spark either to the helm or its user. The helmsman takes full damage in addition to suffering Spelljammer Shock. Of course, the helm must be within reach of the Lightning Arc. It is possible for a boarding party to carry the copper wire to this point, if sufficient wire is on hand. Remember: Such wire must be somehow insulated in order to be carried.

Problems: Although the weapon isn't a bad idea in principle, the spark isn't guaranteed to occur at the desired point; there is a chance of it occurring on the generating wheel. If the wire becomes severed for any reason, this also affects the sparking point. If the weapon is used in the phlogiston and a spark occurs at the wheel, all the wool is burned away from it in a flash, rendering the machine useless.

Cost: 1,000 gp

Range: Close (ships must be within grappling range)

Crew: 2-4 generator-gnomes plus 2-4 winch-gnomes

Damage/attack: 1d4 x 1d10 hp (see "Operation") or 1d4 hull points; triple damage in phlogiston

Attacks/round: See text

TRACO: 17

Critical hit: None, but Spelljammer Shock results if helm can be hit

Liability/attack: Roll 1d20: 1-12, functions normally; 13-15, discharge insufficient to cause damage (may still blind); 16-17, flywheel sticks (takes 1d4 rounds to free); 18-19, spark on flywheel sets fire to wool; 20, reverse arc hits own vessel

Cost: 120 gp per bomb, including Greek fire charge

Range: As per catapult

Crew: As per catapult (doubled for gnomes)

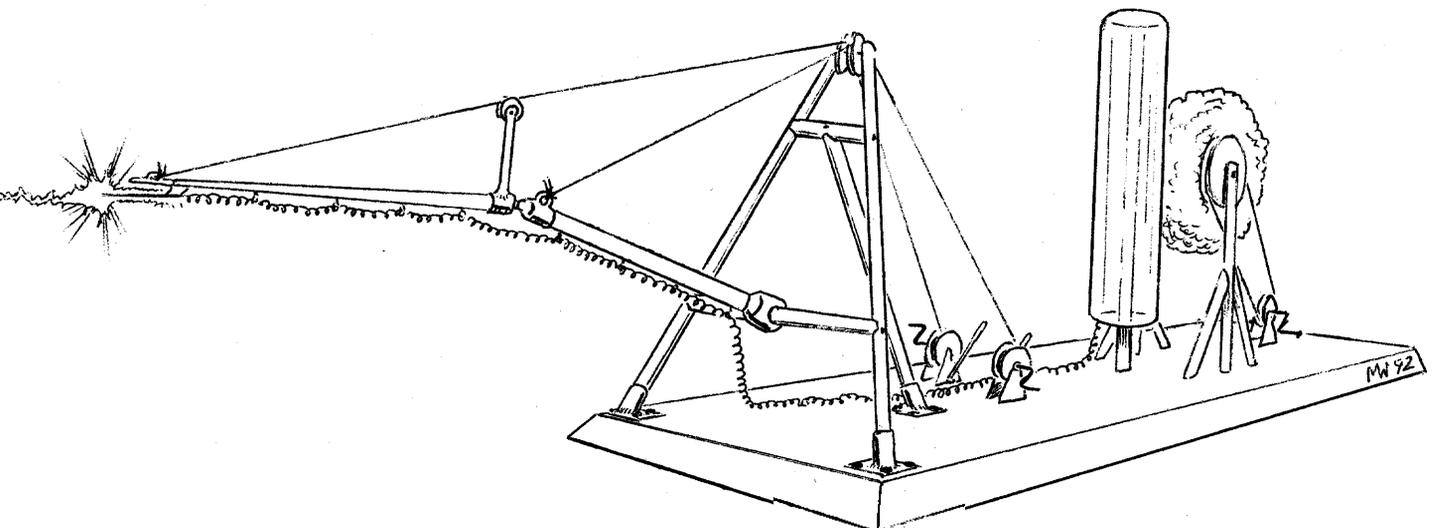
Damage/attack: (In the phlogiston) 2d6 hull points in explosion, no fire; (in wild-space) starts fire as normal Greek fire shot

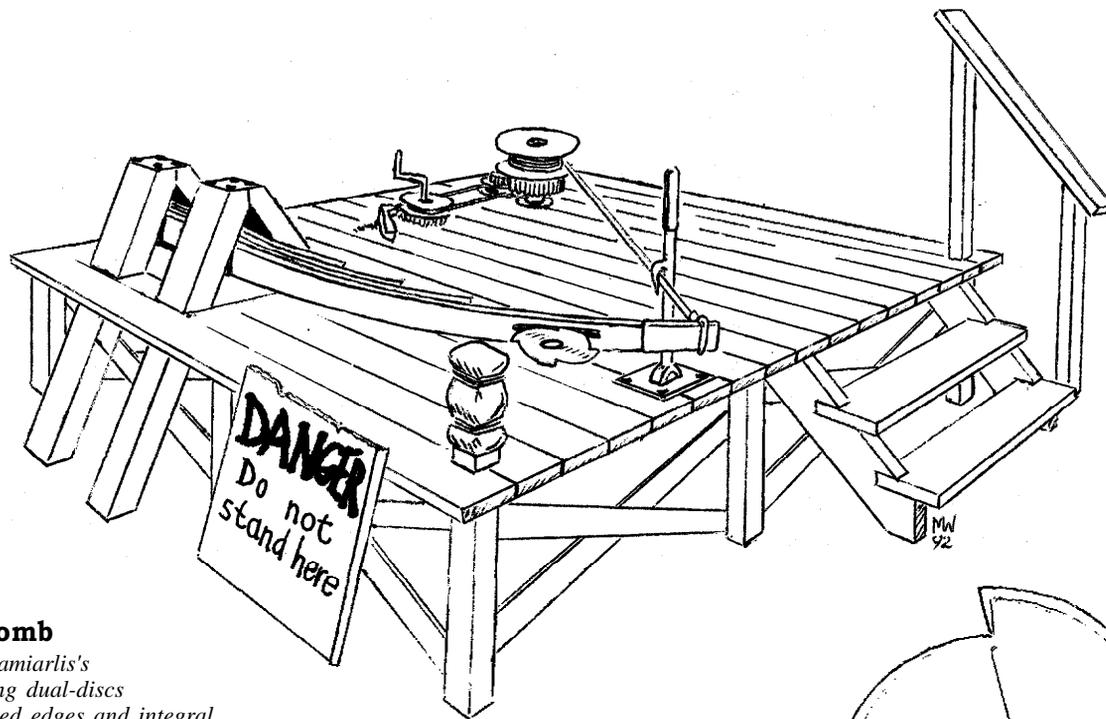
Attacks/round: As per catapult

THACO: As per catapult

Critical hit: None

Liability/attack: Roll 1d20: 1-10, operates as planned; 11-14, fails to detonate (unlit Greek fire splashed over enemy);





Dori's Buzz-Bomb

Dorivartaramiarlis's new rotating dual-discs with serrated edges and integral mutually opposing gear-sets

Principle: Though not a popular weapon, Dori's invention is unique in that there is a working version, albeit somewhat streamlined from the original gnomish version. The idea was to create a pair of spinning metal discs with serrated edges capable of sawing through masts or hulls. This objective has not been met with any degree of success yet. However, some enterprising giff who were fed up with the constant search for more smoke-powder saw that with a minimal amount of alteration, the weapon might be effective. The launcher was suitable as it stood, once 20 or so cog-wheels were removed and the irritating little bells had been disposed of. Dori's buzz-bombs were replaced by discs of ceramic material, sharpened around the edges and cut with four exaggerated teeth. The result is a machine-propelled discus (like an Oriental throwing star) that rotates at high speed, cutting a path through rigging, cover nets, and opponents until it hits an immovable object like a mast or the hull. At this point, the disc shatters into four sharp fragments that inflict further mayhem in the vicinity. The disc gets an attack roll for all targets in a straight path 2' wide. Upon fragmentation, the disc becomes four sharp missiles that inflict 1d4 hp each if they encounter a target within 10'. Targets may be selected using the *Player's Handbook* (PH) rulings on firing into melee (page 99).

Operation: The launcher works in much the same way as ballistae and catapults, being basically a spring arm to which tension is applied. The crew of such conventional weapons would have no difficulty operating this one. The disc is best fired across any exposed decks on the

enemy vessel, particularly near cover-nets and rigging.

Problems: As noted, the gnomish version simply doesn't work yet; the launcher is perfected, but Dori's buzz-bombs are sadly lacking. The blades spin well in the air but stick in the first solid obstacle they meet rather than sawing on through. These missiles can be used to the same effect as the giff version, but they do not explode on impact (except sometimes on the launcher). The giff version works well, but the weapon has not gained widespread use because ballistae and catapults deliver more harm to an opponent.

Cost: 700 gp for launcher, 1 gp for ceramic disc, 10 gp for Dori's buzz-bomb

Range: 3 hexes

Crew: 2 gnomes

Damage/attack: Disc delivers 1-8 hp to each target; fragments deliver 1-4 hp each

Attacks/round: 2

THACO: 15 (-6 to attack rolls if trying for specific targets)

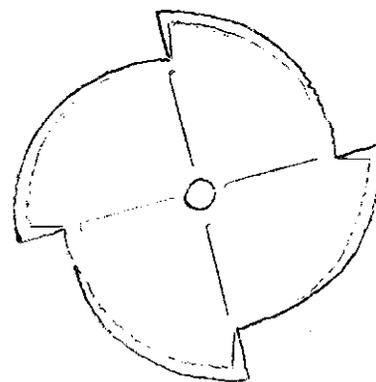
Critical hit: None

Liability/attack: When using the buzz-bomb only, there is a 50% chance it explodes on the launcher, emitting 1-10 flying gear wheels inflicting 1-2 hp each, again using the "firing into a melee" rule found in the PH. All characters within 20' are possible targets.

Krith's Crossbow Blizzard

Krithilantoreximorlisuvio's multi-directional semi-sentient bolt-launching assembly utilizing other people's crossbows

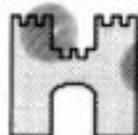
Principle: Fiendish in the extreme, this assembly is merely a triggering mechanism into which standard light or heavy crossbows may be slotted and primed.



The whole device is then dropped onto an enemy deck from above. The crossbow blizzard descends in an upright position, thanks to its parachute, and the impact of landing releases the trigger, firing 4-16 crossbows simultaneously outward in radial directions.

Operation: To operate it, this device is simply fitted with all the crossbows the operators can get their hands on, loaded one at a time, and carefully dropped over a target. To work effectively, the device has to be dropped from fairly high in the enemy's air envelope to a deck. It can also be dropped from a ship passing through the upper envelope of a heavier ship, or dropped from a vessel above a celestial body (a ground assault, in other words). It can also be left in another ship's path as a mine.

Problems: The mechanism's key point is the spring that separates the outer cylinder from the central column. The play in this spring makes all the difference to the blizzard's operation and must be just right. Too weak, and the device is likely to go off during loading, releasing all the crossbows primed so far. Too strong, and the device will never trigger; if it lands on an enemy deck, then your enemy has just been gifted with up to 16 loaded crossbows to be used against you.



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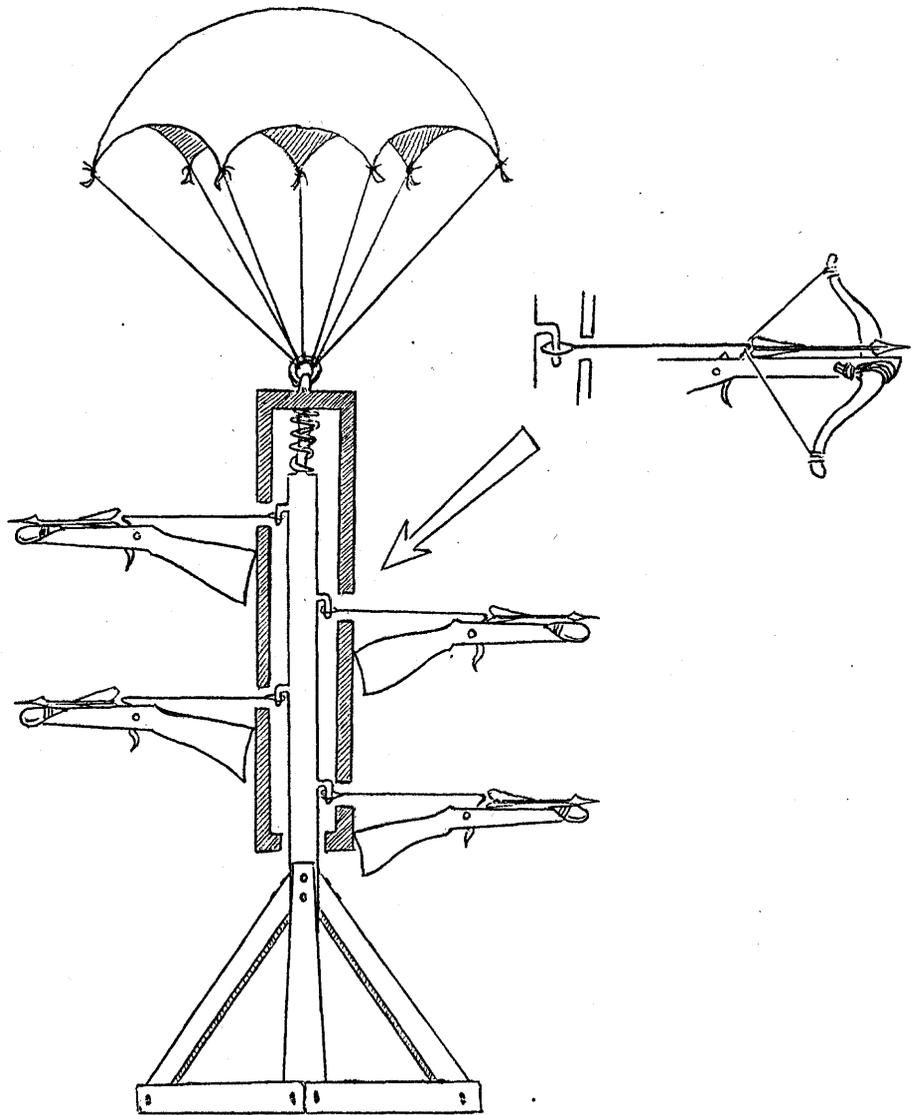
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This weapon would normally be used when it is fairly certain to be retrieved later, or as a last resort. Typical examples carry 9-16 bows at varying heights and angles. The basic device has numerous cradles into which individual crossbows fit.

Dungeon Masters who enjoy making their players nervous wrecks might like to have the loader make a Dexterity check for each crossbow. If he fails, the device goes off.

Naturally, there is a popular giff version that features arquebuses instead of crossbows. Only a giff would go near one.

Cost: 150 gp, but requires crossbows

Range: As per individual crossbows

Crew: Requires 4-7 gnomes to launch "safely"

Damage/attack: As per individual quarrels

Attacks/round: 9-16 (as per number of crossbows); assume 1-2 attacks per victim in vicinity

THACO: 20 (for each bolt aimed in direction of target)

Reloading time: 1 crossbow per round per gnome

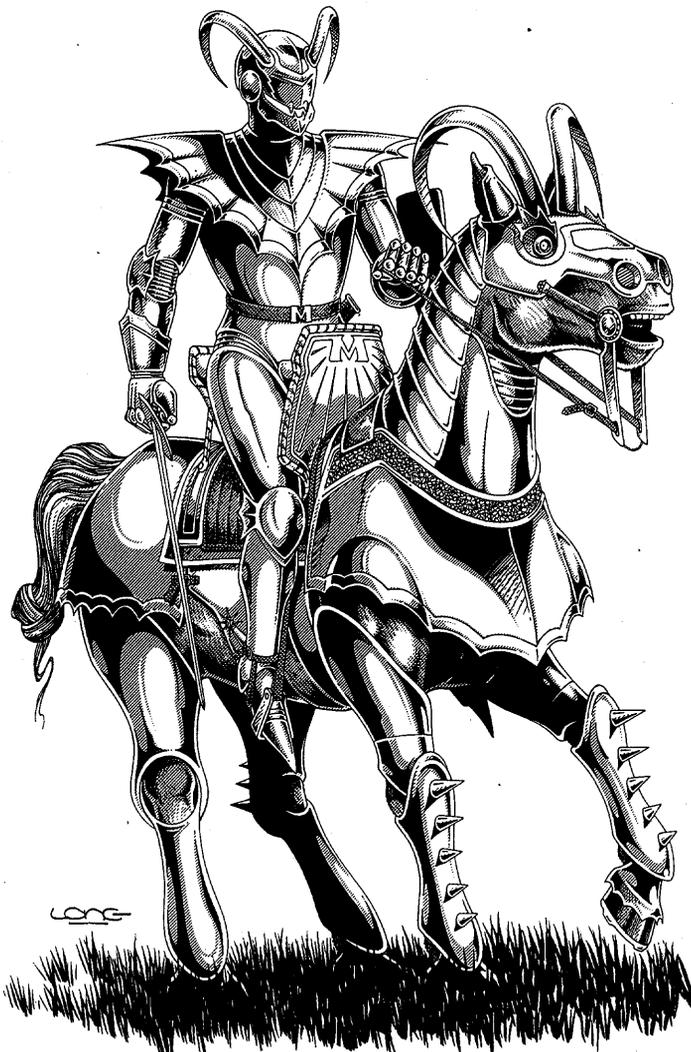
Critical hit: None

Liability/attack: Roll 1d20: 1-3, device goes off during launch; 4-17, normal operation; 18-20, device never goes off—enemy reaps crossbows galore! In addition, each bow has a 30% chance of jamming. To judge hits, DM should gauge the local situation and use the "firing into a melee" rules on page 99 of the PH. Ω



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What you are reading now is the result of an experiment. DRAGON® Magazine always has published quality articles on popular non-TSR game systems, yet we receive very few submissions of this type. In an effort to improve this situation, we contacted several game companies and asked their staff members to produce one dragon or dragon like NPC for use in one of their game systems. The result is this: The Dragon Project, a "miniseries" of articles devoted to unusual draconic characters. Even if you don't play the system mentioned in each installment, you may be able to borrow concepts or plot ideas for your own game campaign. Please let us know your opinion of our little experiment.

—The Editors

Draconis Cybernetica

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Artwork by John Paul Lona

*TORG**: Role-playing the Possibility Wars is West End Games' epic game of the "Near Now." In the TORG game, several different realities (each representing a different fiction genre) have invaded Earth to steal the rich resource of living possibility energy that makes the planet special. In response, heroes have appeared to defend the planet by using possibility energy to maintain their own realities. These are the Storm Knights, and they are all that stands between Earth and total destruction.

These invading realities have claimed portions of the Earth as their own domains as they proceed with the slow

process of draining the life force for their own purposes. High Lord Jean Malraux's Cyberpapacy has turned France into a high-tech theocracy where miracles and cybernetics coexist; England has become the realm of Aysle, a place of swords, sorcery, and dark fantasy; and Tharkold, with its occulttech demons, has warped Los Angeles and the surrounding areas into a place of futuristic horror.

Now, three years after the invasion, new horrors are being unleashed upon the Earth and its defenders. One of these is the dread Draconis Cybernetica.

Draconis Cybernetica

The creatures now known as *Draconis Cybernetica* are the ghastly result of a reality storm and a months-long project by the servants of High Lord Jean Malraux I. The outcome has been heavily-cybered beasts, now being used against their former masters in Aysle.

The saga of the Cybernetica begins shortly after the Warrior of the Dark seized power in Aysle. Coveting territory held by the Cyberpapacy, the Warrior sent forth three of the most powerful creatures in the fantasy realm, Draconis Teutonica. These massive beasts, with their fierce arctic-air breath weapon, have long terrorized the Army of the Light in Aysle, and the Warrior saw no reason they could not do the same to CyberFrance.

But the vagaries of the Possibility Wars are enough to send any plan astray. The Teutonica flew into a particularly violent reality storm near Brest. Buffeted by waves of strange energy the dragons were transformed to the Cyberpapal reality. Although their new realm could sustain their magical nature, they were stunned by the change and plummeted to earth.

Found by a Church Police patrol, their presence was reported back to Avignon. Deducing what must have happened to the beasts, Malraux ordered them bound and brought back to his city for experimentation. Using their advanced technology cybertechs were able to keep the creatures caged while they determined the extent of their injuries. Their bodies, it was learned, were undamaged, although they had lost the use of their breath weapons. But their minds had suffered in the transformation, and they seemed no longer certain of just what they were.

Gaining some semblance of the creatures' trust, Malraux's scientists began installing cyberware while working to convince the beasts that being a hybrid of flesh and metal was their natural state. When they were done, the monsters had become cybered horrors, immune to cyberpsychosis because they believe themselves to be whole with the addition of the NeuraCal and steel.

Malraux first tested them against Resistance members in Provins, allowing them to decimate much of that town. Word

Knights misinterpreted the rumors to mean the High Lord had obtained control of some Tharkoldu skats. They armed themselves to challenge the technodemonic minions, only to run into the enchantments of the Cybernetica. The dragons presented the Knights' corpses to Malraux as a gift.

Description

Vicious and deadly, the Draconis Cybernetica combine the fearsome traits of the Teutonica with cutting-edge technology from the Cyberpapacy. They are long, serpent-like monsters with two powerful clawed appendages and great wings. Armor covers all their coils, and the three specimens known to exist average 40 meters in length.

Their cybernetic enhancements make them even more of a threat. Each is equipped with sensory enhancers, including a BelleView 20-20, which adds +2 to all Perception skills based on sight; an FFO NightView, which adds +3 to Find and Tracking skill checks at ranges up to 50 meters; a DATAS Snooper, which adds a +2 bonus to hearing, normal frequency; and a TSE Bloodhound, which adds +3 to Tracking attempts using scent.

Their own formidable weapons have also been modified using the products of CyberFrench technology. They now sport FN Jammer automatic cluster guns on the tips of their wings. These fire flechette clusters that explode into whirling clouds meters from the barrel. The dragons receive the standard +3 bonus for firing on full automatic, in addition to a +3 bonus to their attack value.

Their wings, tails, and appendages are lined with slicers, monofilament-tipped blades of varying lengths. These were added in the belief that the Cyberneticas might well be entering into combat with their Teutonica brethren. Deprived of their breath weapon, the Cybernetica would be well served by closing in rapidly and slashing at their opponent's scales.

Finally, the cybertechs added a relatively small amount of Trigon body plating, more for the visual effect it would have than for any practical value.



Needless to say, the Cybernetica boasts extremely high cyber values. Fortunately, their immunity to cyberpsychosis protects them from sudden seizures. They are, however, vulnerable to disconnection when operating in a realm with a Technological axiom less than 26, just as their enchanted nature makes them likewise vulnerable in realms with Magic axioms less than 10.

Adventure books

1. Malraux has long distrusted the raven servants given to him by the Gaunt Man. Their only use to him has been for propaganda—they make excellent “demons” to be chased away in mock battle by the Church Police.

Now, in defiance of the revived Gaunt Man, Malraux has decided to use his Draconis Cybernetica to eliminate the raven spies in his court at Avignon. The battle will take place over the skies of Paris Liberte to serve as proof to the residents of that embattled city that Malraux is all-powerful.

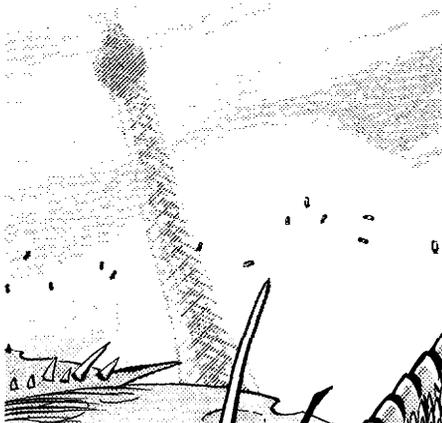
The Storm Knight PCs somehow get word of the High Lord's plan, as well as something equally disturbing: Should the Cybernetica be victorious, Parok, the warlord of the ravagons, may well interpret it as a rebellion against the Gaunt Man. Should Parok unleash a horde of his warriors against the Cyberpapacy, the loss of innocent lives could be enormous. The Knights must find a way to prevent the battle between the ravagons and the Cybernetica from taking place.

2. Chop-shop operators in Marseilles have been found murdered, their places of business looted. Investigation by Storm Knight PCs reveals that a gang of zipyankers are responsible, but they are not working alone. They obey the orders of another, one they seem to fear.

Trailing this gang is a dark and danger-

ous business, and brings the Knights into conflict with Church Police, Templars, and a rogue group of the Paris Liberte Militia readying for a raid into the former Yugoslavia. Finally, the Knights discover the true intelligence behind the attacks: One of the Draconis Cybernetica has begun to recover its memory. Knowing that legends call for dragons to hoard precious items, it has begun stockpiling cyberware, sometimes without bothering to remove it from its owners first.

The Knights must defeat this creature. If they do so, a large amount of cyberware is theirs for use or resale.



Draconis Cybernetica

DEXTERITY 8
 Flight 12, unarmed combat 11
 STRENGTH 27
 TOUGHNESS 23/35
 PERCEPTION 19
 Alteration magic 22, divination magic 22,
 evidence analysis 21, find 23, trick 22
 MIND 15
 Test 21, willpower 18
 CHARISMA 7
 Charm 9, persuasion 11, taunt 11
 SPIRIT 7
 Intimidation (15), reality (Cyberpapacy) 10
Additional skills: Three at +2 adds
Possibility potential: All
Arcane knowledges: Air 6, darkness 4
Natural Tools: Armor, value TOU + 12/35;
 wings, speed value 11; claws, damage
 value STR+ 3/30
Equipment: Cyberware: NeuraCal (5),
 BelleView 20-20 (2), FFO NightView (2),
 DATAS Snooper (2), TSE Bloodhound (2),
 Trigon body plating (1), FN Jammer (2),
 slicers (75). Cyber value: 91

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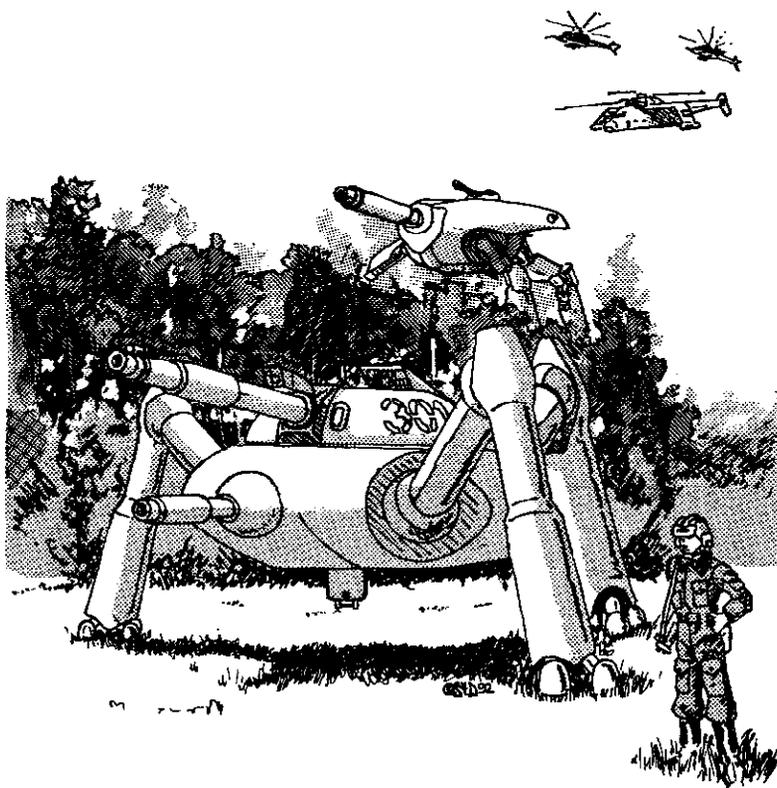
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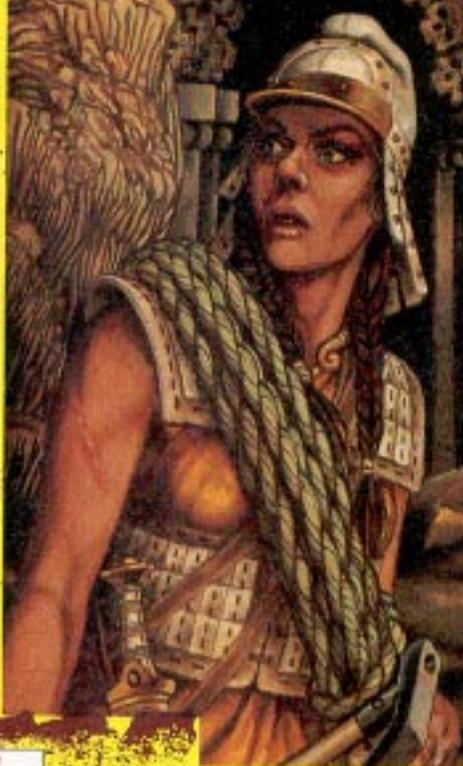
TBA Games, P. O. Box 822, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 4YF, England.

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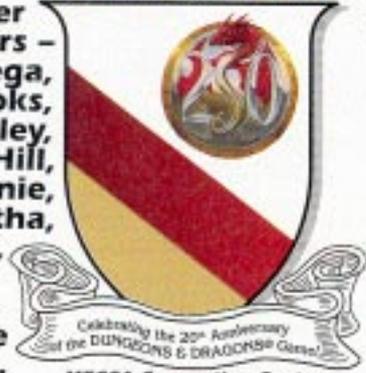
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CONVENTION CALENDAR

Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) and telephone number(s) 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 last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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

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LITTLE WARS '93, April 8-10 IL

This convention will be held at the Woodfield Hilton in Woodfield, Ill. Events include miniatures gaming covering all popular historical periods and beyond. Registration: \$8/day or \$12/weekend. Event tickets are \$1. Write to: HMGS Midwest, 1837 Paddington, Naperville IL 60563; or call Tom at: (708) 369-0840.

SPRING FANTASY REVEL April 8-10 IL

This convention will be held at the Woodfield Hilton in Arlington Heights, Ill. Events include numerous RPGA™ Network events. Other activities include the Little Wars Wargaming Weekend, running concurrently. Registration: \$12/weekend (Little Wars passes are \$3). Send an SASE to: Keith Polster, Box 27, Theresa WI 53091.

GOLD CON I, April 10 NJ

This convention will be held at American Legion Post 328, in Clark, N.J. Events include RPGA™ tournaments and role-playing, miniatures, and board games, with a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$8 before March 15, or \$10 at the door; no event fees. Write to: AU Gamers, P.O. Box 81, Whippany NJ 07981; or call: (201) 402-9239.

TECHNICON 10, April 10-12 VA

This convention will be held at the Donaldson Brown Center in Blacksburg, Va. Guests include Scott Quirk. Activities include gaming, an art show and auction, panels, videos, anime, and a dance. Registration: \$22 preregistered; \$24 at the door. Student rate is \$20. Write to: TECHNICON 10, c/o VTSFFC, P.O. Box 256, Blacksburg VA 24063-0256; or call: (703) 952-0572.

CON-TROLL, April 16-18 TX

This convention will be held at the Marriott AstroDome in Houston, Tex. Events include Dream Park, IFGS, and NASA presentations; an art show and auction; a dealers' room; filking; children's programming; a costume contest; tournament games; the Troll Stomp dance; and guests including Larry Niven, Steven Barnes, Ed Greenwood, Dell Harris, and Judy Dugas. Registration: \$25. Send an SASE to: CON-TROLL Conventions, Inc., 7311 Bellerive #1025, Houston TX 77036.

I-CON XII, April 16-18 NY

This convention will be held on the campus* of the State University of New York, at Stony Brook on Long Island. Events include an art show and print shop, an awards banquet, pro parties, movies, filking, game tournaments, an auction, videos, films, slide shows, authors and speakers, anime, and guests including Barbara Hambly, Craig Shaw Gardner, Fred Pohl, Edward Bryant, Gregory Benford, Barry

Malzberg, Barry Longyear, and F. Paul Wilson. One-day passes available at the door. Lodging is available. For fees and more information, send an SASE to: I-CON XII, P.O. Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790.

KNIGHT GAMES III, April 16-18 NJ

This convention will be held in New Brunswick, N.J. Events include RPGA™ tournaments, role-playing and board games, contests, and movies. Part of the proceeds will be donated to a campus organization for the homeless. A valid college ID is required for admission. For fees and more information, call Scott at: (908) 874-4034, or Will at: (908) 463-2259.

ANIMEDAY FILE III, April 17-18 *

This convention will be held at the Rutland Hotel, in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England. Events include lots and lots of anime. For more information, write to: ANIMEDAY III Committee, 14 Ashurst Road, Stannington, Sheffield, Yorkshire, UNITED KINGDOM S6 5LP.

GAME FAIRE '93, April 23-25 WA

This convention will be held at the Student Union Building #17, at Spokane Falls Community College, in Spokane, Wash. Events include role-playing, historical, microarmor, and miniatures games, with miniature-painting contests. Registration: \$12/weekend preregistered, \$16/weekend at the door (single-day passes available). Write to: GAME FAIRE '93, c/o Merlyn's, N.I. Browne, Spokane WA 99201; or call: (509) 624-0957.

POINTCON XVI, April 23-25 NY

This convention will be held at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. Events include role-playing, microarmor, miniatures, and historical games, with dealers, computer gaming, a miniatures-painting contest, and open gaming. Registration: \$12 at the door; \$10 preregistered by mail; no event fees. Write to: USMA Wargames Committee, ATTN: POINTCON XVI, P.O. Box 62, West Point NY 10997.

SKIRMISHES '93, April 23-25 MO

This gaming convention will be held at the Americana hotel in Kansas City, Mo. Events include AD&D®, CAR WARS®, WARHAMMER®, and STAR FLEET BATTLES™ games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest and a dealers' area. Registration: \$19. Write to: SKIRMISHES, P.O. Box 46964, Gladstone MO 64118; or call: (816) 734-8548.

U.B. CON '93, April 23-25 NY

This convention will be held at the State University of New York at Buffalo, N.Y. Events include role-playing and strategy games, with tournaments, SCA demos, and dealers. Guests include Sam Chupp. Registration: \$6 preregistered, or \$9 at the door (student discounts available). Write to: UB Strategists' and Roleplayers' Association, 363 Student Union, SUNY at Buffalo, Box 602100, Buffalo NY 14260-2100; or call: (716) 645-4128.

BOISE FANTASY ARTS CONVENTION April 24-25 ID

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Boise, Idaho. Events include gaming, dealers, costuming, an art show, and panels. Registration: \$22 at the door (one-day rates are available). Write to: BOISE FANTASY ARTS CONVENTION, P.O. Box 8602, Boise ID 83702; or call: (208) 336-0568 or -3155.

- ★ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
- ⊛ indicates a European convention.

ROC-KON '93, April 30-May 2 AR

This convention will be held at the Excelsior hotel in Little Rock, Ark. Guests include Suzette Haden Elgin, Mary Hansen-Roberts, and Greg and Angela Bridges. Activities include AD&D® and STAR FLEET BATTLES* games, plus dealers, an art show and auction, a costume contest, and 24-hour videos. Registration: \$20. Write to: ROC-KON, P.O. Box 24285, Little Rock AR 72221; or call: (501) 370-0889.

WIZARD'S CHALLENGE XI April 30-May 2 *

This convention will be held at the Delta Regina in Regina, Sask. Events include GURPS*, ROLEMASTER*, SHADOWRUN*, and WARHAMMER* games. Other activities include games, auction, panels, a figure-painting competition, and a medieval banquet. Guests include Robin Curtis and Loyd Blankenship. Write to: Ken McGovern, No-Prairie-Con, 2101 Broad St., Regina SK, CANADA, S4P 1Y6; or call: (306) 757-8544.

BRISCON '93, May 1-3 ★

This convention will be held at the QUT Kelvin Grove campus in Brisbane, QLD. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a used-game sale and an end-of-con barbecue. Registration: \$25 (Australian). There will be discounts for those under 15 years of age. Write to: Chris Ryan, PO. Box 182, Indooroopilly, QLD AUSTRALIA #4068; or call: +61-7-870-8156.

CONVOCATION '93, May 1-2 MA

This convention will be held at the University of Mass.-Amherst Campus Center. Events include role-playing, strategy, and miniatures gaming. Other activities include a costume contest, a figure-painting contest, open gaming, and a dealers' room. Registration: \$5 preregistered; \$7 at the door. Area students receive a discount. Event fees are \$3. Write to: UMASS Grenadiers, Box 178, SAO, Amherst MA 01003.

HIGHLAND VI, May 1 TN

This convention will be held at the University Center on the campus of Tennessee Tech in Cookeville, Tenn. Events include gaming, a dealers' room, an art show, and door prizes. Registration: \$2; \$3/event. Write to: Thomas W. Nelson, 1107 Sioux St., Athens TN 37303; or call: (615) 745-0648.

MAGIC CARPET CON '93, May 7-9 GA

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Dalton, Ga. Guests include Andre Norton, Susan Schwartz, and P. M. Griffin. Activities include gaming, a con suite, an art show and print shop, a dealers' room, and a masquerade. Registration: \$20 until March 31; \$25 thereafter. Write to: MAGIC CARPET CON, P.O. Box 678, Rocky Face GA 30740.

OASIS 6, May 14-16 FL

This convention will be held at the Altamonte Springs Hilton in Altamonte Springs, Fla. Guests include Connie Willis, Michael Whelan, and Andre Norton. Activities include a dealers' room, an art show and auction, a con suite, panels, videos, and gaming. Registration: \$24 at the door. Write to: OASIS, P.O. Box 940994, Maitland FL 32792-0992; or call Ray at: (407) 725-2383.

KETTERING GAME CONVENTION VIII May 15-16 OH

This convention will be held at the Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include fantasy role-playing, board, miniatures, and computer games, plus a game auction and an RPGA™ Network tournament. Registration \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruening, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429; or call: (513) 298-2480.

MADISON GAMES CON '93, May 15-16 WI

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn South in Madison, Wis. Events include role-playing, war, miniatures, and board games. Other activities include a games auction. Judges and dealers are welcome. Registration: \$8/weekend or \$5/day. Write to: Pegasus Game, 6640 Odana Rd., Madison WI 53719; or call: (608) 833-4263.

ADVENTURE GAMEFEST '93, May 21-23 OR

This convention will be held at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games in all genres. Other activities include door and event prizes, a game auction, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$7/day. Write to: Adventure Games Northwest, Inc., 6517 NE Alberta, Portland OR 97218; or call: (503) 282-6856.

ECLIPSE '93, May 21-23 MO

This gaming convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Columbia, Mo. Guests include Jean Rabe, David "Zeb" Cook, Tim Beach, Rick Harris, and Bruce Nesmith. Activities include many RPGA™ sanctioned events and war gaming. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Write to: Jim Herring, 3702 W. Truman Blvd., Ste. 223, Jefferson City MO 65109; or call: (314) 635-2441.

ATLANTA ART FESTIVAL, May 22-23 GA

This convention will be held at the Cobb County Civic Center in Marietta, Ga. Activities include SF, visionary, and fantasy art. Write to: Imagine That, P.O. Box 1133, Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223; or call: (216) 923-8823 days.

NEWPORT MINI-CON '93, May 22 RI

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson in Middletown, R.I. Events include AD&D®, RAVENLOFT®, SHADOWRUN®, and BATTLETECH* games. Registration: \$8 until May 8; \$9 thereafter; \$10 at the door. Write to: NEWPORT MINI-CON, c/o SMAGS, P.O. Box 6295, Fall River MA 02724.

ORGANIZED KAHN-FUSION, May 22-23 PA

This gaming convention will be held at the Embers in Carlisle, Pa. Guests include Greg Porter and Greg Costikyan. Activities include open gaming, panels, dealers, a figure-painting contest, and readings. Registration: up to \$12. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070; or call: (717) 774-6676.

GAMEX '93, May 28-31 CA

This convention will be held at the Airport Hyatt hotel in Los Angeles, Cal. All types of strategy, family, and adventure board, role-playing, miniatures, and computer gaming will be featured. Other activities include flea markets, an auction and a dealers' area. Write to: STRATEGICON, PO. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849; or call: (310) 326-9440.

GAME-A-THON '93, May 28-30 NY

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Inn at the airport in Albany, N.Y. Events include RPGA™ Network events, plus miniatures, board, and role-playing games. Other activities include a benefit for the Farano Center for Children. Registration: \$18 before May 7. Write to: Michael J. Rivet, Jr., GAME-A-THON, 602 Foxwood Dr., Clifton Park NY 12065; or call: (518) 371-8953.

GAMESCAUSUS II, May 28-31 CA

This convention will be held at the Airport Hilton in Oakland, Calif. Events include AD&D®, CALL OF CTHULHU*, CHAMPIONS*, PARANOIA*, TRAVELLER*, AXIS & ALLIES*, CAR WARS*, STAR WARS*, BATTLETECH*, and CIVILIZATION* games. Other activities include a dealers' room, a painting contest, a flea market, and a 24-hour-a-day movie room. Registration: \$25 preregistered; \$30 at the door. Judges are welcome and will receive discounts. Write (and checks payable) to: Trigaming Assoc., P.O. Box 4867, Walnut Creek CA 94596-0867.

NORTHWEST GAMEFEST, May 28-30 OR

This gaming convention will be held at the Monarch hotel in Clackamas, Ore. Events include role-playing and board games. Other activities include a costume contest, a dealers' room, and a video arcade. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$18/weekend or \$10/day at the door. Write to: NRMR, PO. Box 6068, Salem OR 97304; or call: (503) 982-1232 evenings.

MIGSCON XIV, May 29-30 *

This historical gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Hamilton, Ontario. Events include WRG 7th-Edition ancients*, DBA* and ASL* games. Other activities include games set in the following periods: Ancient, medieval, Renaissance, Seven-Year War, Napoleonic, colonial, ACW, WWII, and modern. Dealers are welcome. Write to: MIGSCON XIV c/o P.O., Box 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Ontario, CANADA L8L 8E9; or call: (416) 351-7207.

TWINCON '93, May 29-31 MN

This convention will be held at the Thunderbird hotel in Minneapolis, Minn. Events include dozens of role-playing, war, and miniatures games, plus a con suite. Registration: \$20 preregistered by May 1; \$30 at the door, and there are no game fees. Write to: TWINCON, P.O. Box 8010, Minneapolis Mn 55408.

CONMAN '93, June 4-6 NH

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's in Manchester, N.H. Events include AD&D®, CALL OF CTHULHU*, TORG*, TOON*, and RPGA™ Network events. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, an art show, demos, a vendors' area, and a benefit for the New Hampshire AIDS Foundation. Registration: \$17/weekend, single-day rates are available. Write to: CONMAN, P.O. Box 842, Manchester NH 03101.

ILLINICON '93, June 4-6 IL

This gaming convention will be held at the Hendrick House dorm on the campus of the University of Illinois. Events include AD&D®, SHADOWRUN*, CALL OF CTHULHU*, BATTLETECH*, and STAR FLEET BATTLES* games. Other activities include a game auction, a miniatures-painting contest, movies, dealers, and open gaming. Registration: \$5, plus a one-

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time \$3 event fee. GMs are welcome. Send an SASE to: Urbana Gaming House, 904 W. Green, Box 1801, Urbana IL 61801; or call: (217) 328-8053 early evenings.

CONQUEST I, June 11-13 MD

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Hagerstown, Md. Guests include Jonathan Frid, Eric Menyuk, John Anthony Blake, and Sandy Petersen. Activities include an art room, dealers, workshops, a charity auction, and a video room. Registration: \$30 pre-registered before May 15. Send an SASE to: CONQUEST I, P.O. Box 1007, Hagerstown MD 21741-1007; or call: (301) 733-4649.

HEROES '93, June 11-13 NC

This convention will be held at the Charlotte International Trade Center in Charlotte, N.C. Guests include Mark Bagley, Dick Giordano, George Perez, and Dave Sim. Activities include contests, art seminars, workshops, and exhibits. Registration: \$25/weekend or \$10/day. Write to: HEROES '93, P.O. Box 9181, Charlotte NC 28299; or call: (704) 394-8404.

CAPITALCON IX, June 12-13 IL

This convention will be held at the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Ill. Events include role-playing, miniatures, war, and board games. Other activities include an auction, a flea market, and a figure-painting contest. Registration: \$10 at the door. Write to: John Holtz, 400 E. Jefferson St. #508, Springfield IL 62701; or call: (217) 753-2656.

RECONN '93, June 12-13 CT

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Norwalk, Conn. Events include role-playing, miniatures, war, and board games. Other activities include a movie room, and a dealers' area. Write to: Jim Wiley, Gaming Guild, 100 Hoyt St. #2C, Stamford CT 06905; or call: (203) 969-2396.

ATLANTICON '93, June 18-20 MD

This convention will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Md. Guests include numerous gaming personalities. Activities include role-playing, miniatures, and board games, plus a dealers' area. Registration: \$20 preregistered; \$30 at the door. Write to: ADF Inc., P.O. Box 91, Beltsville MD 20704; or call: (301) 345-1858.

CONTINUUM '93, June 18-20 MO

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Cape Girardeau, Mo. Guests include Mark Lenard and Robin Curtis. Activities include gaming a dealers' room, an art show and auction, a masquerade, a costume contest, a video room, and a charity auction. Registration: \$35/weekend before May 18; \$40 thereafter. Single-day rates are available. Send an SASE to: CONTINUUM '93, 1617 Lyndhurst, Cape Girardeau MO 63701; or call: (314) 334-4386.

GLATHRICON '93, June 18-20 IN

This convention will be held at the Executive Inn in Evansville, Ind. Events include AD&D®, MARVEL SUPER HEROES™, SHADOWRUN*,

and CHILL* games. Other activities include an art show and auction a masquerade, panels, dealers, and a charity event for the American Cancer Society. Registration: \$15 before May 1; \$20 thereafter. Write to: GLATHRICON, c/o Evansville Gaming Guild, P.O. Box 15414, Evansville IN 47716; or call: (812) 477-9508.

HEXACON III, June 18-20 AZ

This convention will be held at the Camelview Resort in Scottsdale, Ariz. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures gaming. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, a game auction, dealers, anime, panels, guests, and computer gaming. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$15 at the door. Write to: HEXACON, P.O. Box 62613, Phoenix AZ 85082; or call: (602) 497-9554.

MICHICON '93, June 18-20 MI

This convention will be held at the Southfield Civic Center in Southfield, Mich. Events include board, role-playing, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' room. Registration: \$16/weekend or \$9/day preregistered; \$18/weekend or \$10/day at the door. Write to: Metro Detroit Gamers, M-93 Pre-reg., P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte MI 48192.

NEW ORLEANS SF & FANTASY FESTIVAL June 18-20 LA

This convention will be held at the Clarion hotel in New Orleans, La. Guests include Robert Silverberg, Walter Jon Williams, George Alec Effinger, and Aaron Allston. Activities include 24-hour open gaming. Registration: \$20 before May 15. Write to: NOSF3 1993, P.O. Box 791089, New Orleans LA 70179-1089; or call: (504) 837-0125.

RIVERCON '93, June 18-20 OH

This convention will be held at the campus of the University of Cincinnati, College of Applied Science in Cincinnati, Ohio. Events include role-playing, miniatures, computer, and board games. Other activities include a dealers' area, open gaming, and door prizes. Registration: \$10 before June 4; \$15 thereafter. Write to: RPS RIVERCON, Univ. of Cincinnati, College of Applied Science, 2220 Victory Pkwy., Cincinnati OH 45206; or call: (513) 232-6213.

WYVJZRCN '93, June 18-20 WA

This convention will be held at the Skagit Valley Fairgrounds in Mount Vernon, Wash. Events include a wide variety of role-playing and board games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, videos, door prizes and a dealers' room. Registration: \$15 preregistered before May 1; \$20 thereafter. Daily rates are available. Write to: WYVERCON, P.O. Box 2325, Mount Vernon WA 98273; or call Larianne or Todd: (206) 428-5900. Ω

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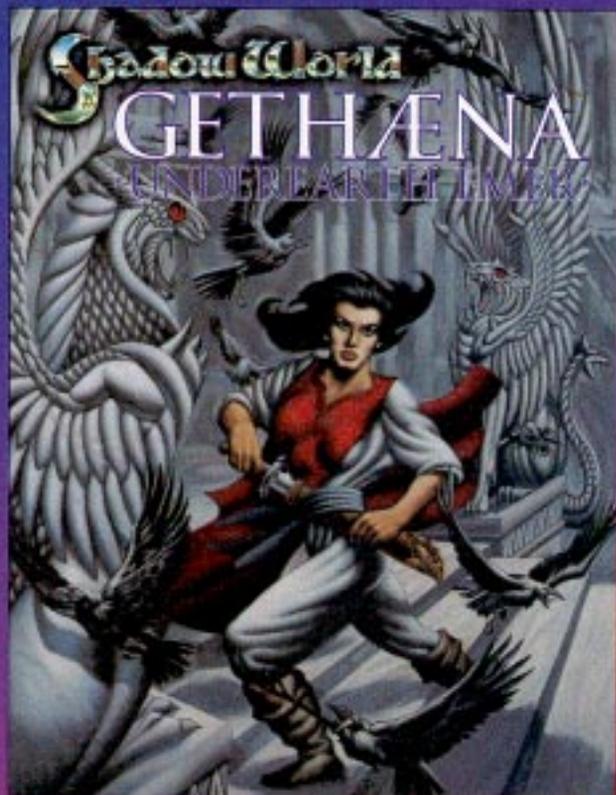
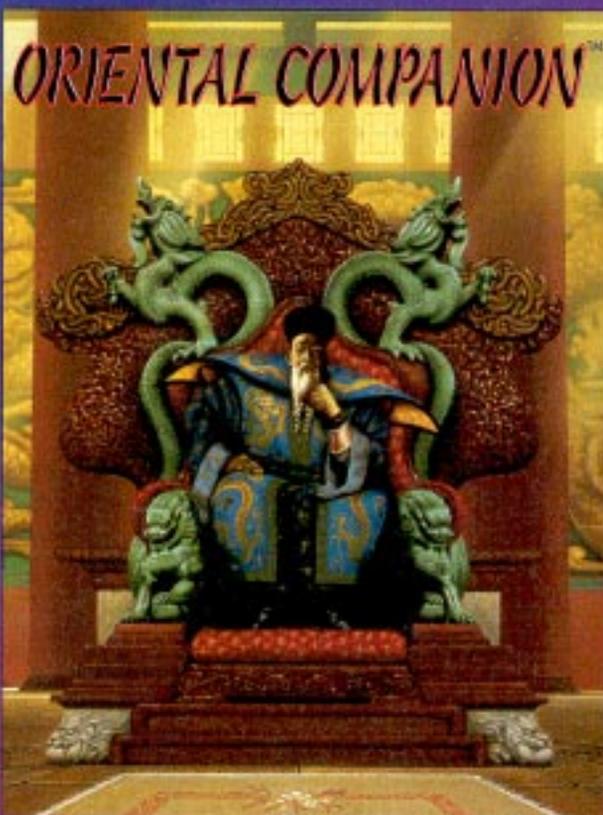
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The Known World

Grimoire

This regular feature offers answers to questions on the D&D® game, its worlds and its products, occasional articles, and "first reviews of D&D game products. Readers are welcome to send questions, suggestions, or criticisms on the game or on the material published here. We can't promise all letters will be answered in this column, but they all will get our attention.

This issue of the "Grimoire" deals with a new nation located on the Savage Coast. The exploration of this area goes on, thanks to the amazing library of Raman Nabonidus. From his vast collection of ancient writings, we discover revealing fragments of a struggle that took place centuries ago. Today, only a dark realm remains, sinister testimony that good does not always win over evil at least until ancient heroes return.

Found in the navigator's journal of Don Jorge de Vilaverde:

"It took no fewer than 15,000 nuggets of depleted red ore and several years of diplomacy, but at last, here it is: A small promontory near Asur overlooking a protected cove. I named our new acquisition *Porto Escorpião* for the glory of Vilaverde and my father's wealth. Indeed, it is but a small trading post, but nonetheless a colony of Vilaverde. It will be weeks before

my message reaches Porto Preto, and perhaps months before troops arrive. The treaty grants us full ownership for a century, but I trust a stronghold of good, solid stone and a handful of experienced crossbowmen to be a better warranty on this land. By then, no one in this savage land will dislodge us, for we are the strongest.

"I do not feel safe here, however. I ordered the crew to stay together at all times and avoid involvement with the natives. The creepy carapace of the Nimmurians and their odious stings are a constant reminder that man is not yet a master here. It is clear in their attitude that we aren't exactly welcome, but perhaps merely useful to some dark purpose of theirs. Only time will tell. Fortunately, the Nimmurians are just as greedy and desirous of the red steel blades as we are. In this, we have an advantage."

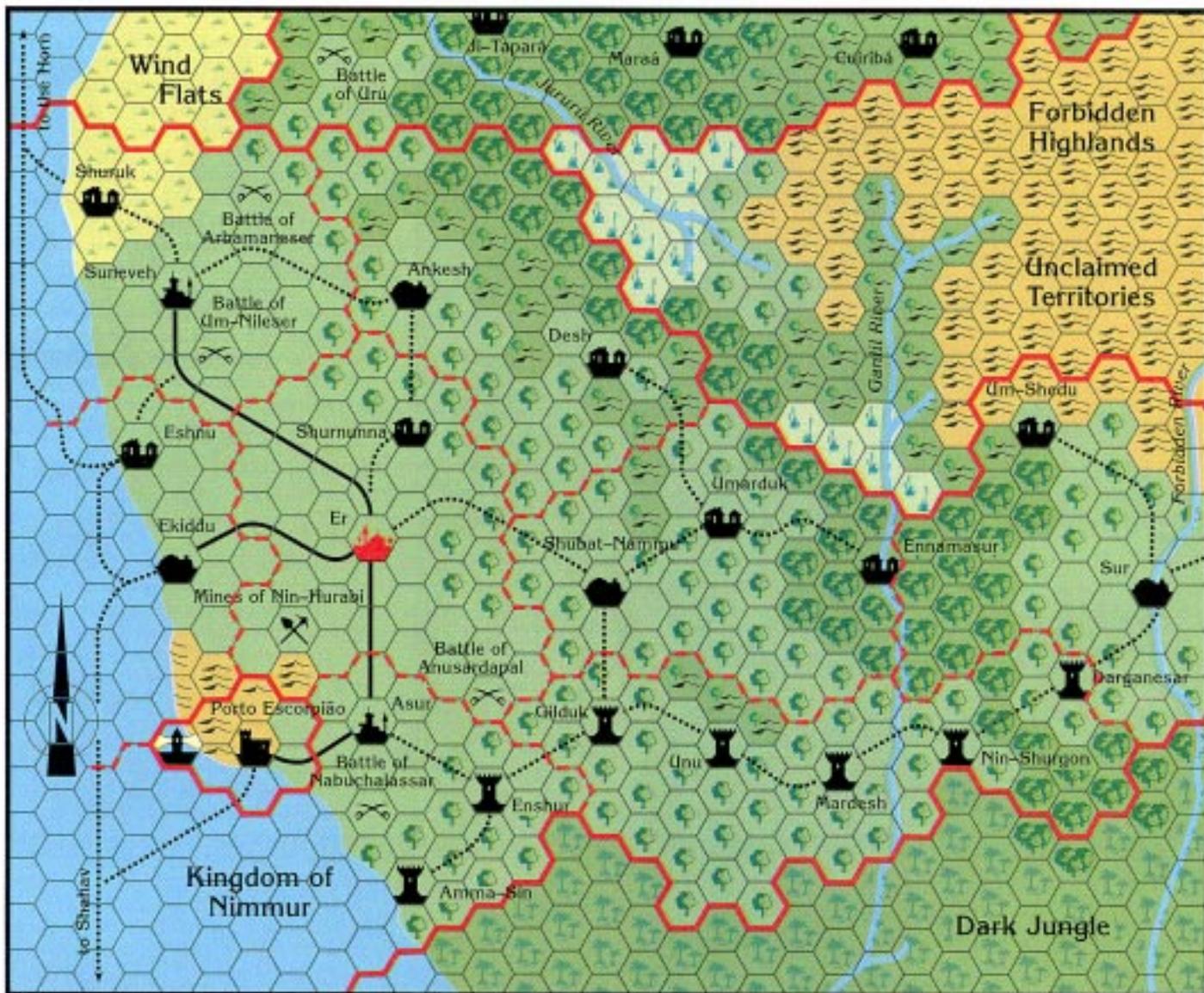
Diary of a Gargoñan spy—Unsigned:

"Even today, I still loathe the sight of the folks of Nimmur. Half-man and half-scorpion, they instill fear and repulsion in my very soul. It's been a few years since I snuck deep into the great Ziggurat of Er. From the shadows, I spied on one of their priestesses. Her entire body was covered with gross make-up. She approached a fountain and washed the make-up off, with obvious delight. Nausea almost overcame me when I realized her body was translucent. With the brazier glowing behind her, I could see a black heart through her translucent chest, pumping some evil ichor through her veins.

"I could hear dark incantations echoing from the cavernous halls below. Soon, others joined her, coming out of a great stone gate leading underground. They all showed the same ghastly translucence. I suspected the make-up covering their bodies was in fact intended to conceal this strange feature rather than being a simple cosmetic element. I was soon to confirm my theory. I must have made some noise then, for one of the manscorpions pulled a sword and rushed in my direction. I fled and, by luck, reached a concealed door in the side of the temple. I kicked it open just before the manscorpions lunged at me. As the sun poured in, the creatures screamed in pain and retreated suddenly. A mere caress of the sun's rays had blistered and cracked their skins. I fled, never to return."

Runic ideograms engraved and illuminated by Uhdū Momba, disciple of Yav, found on a set of ivory tusks:

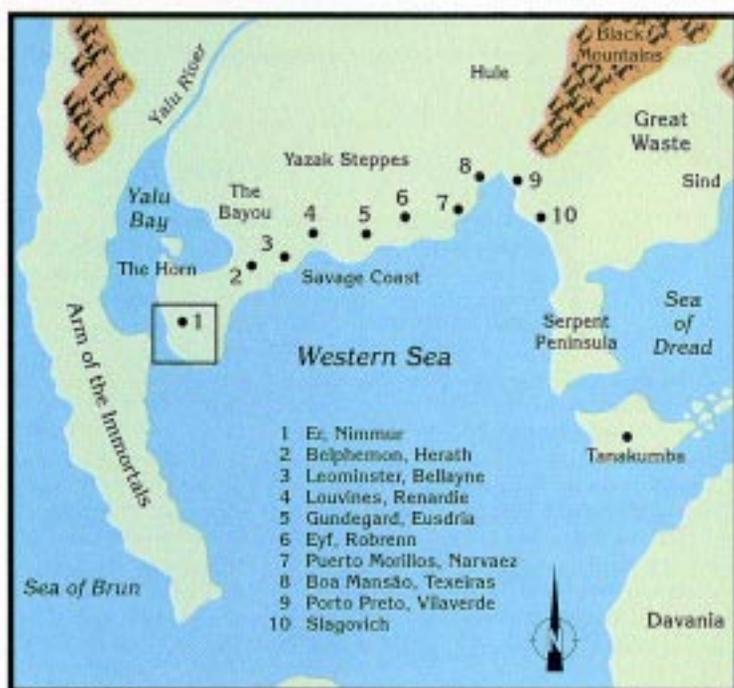
"Pity those who scorn the Immortals. Pity those who suffer their wrath. Today's Nimmurians are such a people. They were once known as the Sohktars. These are manscorpions who, many centuries ago, greatly angered their patron, the Great Lord Ixion. These denizens of the fiery Great Waste adored sun so much



Scale: one hex equals 8 miles



Cartography by John Knecht



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they wasted much of their time basking in it. They stole from the meek when needed, but else failed to establish any great, lasting power.

"Alas, a foe came one day. They clashed for decades, and many times did the Sohktars lose. In their distress, these brutal and ruthless creatures implored their patron for a final victory. Instead, their foes conjured a great storm that masked the sun. Horrendous numbers of disheartened Sohktars died that day. The survivors fled, rejecting the Great Ixion as their patron. Enraged at his subjects' failure and gravely insulted at their rejection, Ixion cursed them. They were never again to enjoy the warmth of the sun. Mere exposure to the sun or its reflection off the moon inflicted horrible pain and death on the Sohktars.

They fled the sun-drenched surface world. Exiled in deep caverns, they wandered for centuries and grew bitter. Their flesh turned translucent from lack of light and the curse's effects. One day they found an exit, far to the west. They dwelled there for decades, hiding at the edge of darkness. For them, it was like dying of thirst before a lake of fresh but poisonous water. O, perverse fate.

"During that time, the Sohktars lost much of their original culture. New priests rose among them. These creatures of hate honored Atzanteotl, and their quest was to bring shame to Ixion's name. Their patron's whispers led them to Nimmur and taught them to manufacture a special make-up. With proper incantations, the make-up protected them from the lethal rays of the sun. They could return to the surface, yes, but in a very perilous way. They couldn't help but hate all surface dwellers."

Found on a scroll from Sir Archibald Foulkes, Sage of Bellayne and Scholar in Ancient History:

"There was a great civilization here, centuries ago. Judging from runes and sculptures found on the walls of the old ruins near Ankesh, I now have good reason to believe this land was once home to a difference race.

"After unearthing a vault, I couldn't fail to notice the recurring motif on the bas-reliefs, very tall humanoids with the heads of bulls and powerful wings on their backs. One scene showed a lion hunt where the felines looked small in comparison with those mysterious winged minotaurs. These must have been the true, ancient Nimmurians who once ruled these lands. They were followers of Idu, whom I later equated to a mythological figure better known as Ixion.

"Their history was difficult to piece together—the manscorpions get suspicious of outsiders lurking anywhere near their ziggurats or ruins—but this is what I gathered. The winged beings once ruled

this land in what could be interpreted as a golden age. Alas, they were losing an ancient war against the orcs in the south. At this time, newcomers appeared and offered their assistance against the orcs. Judging from the descriptions, these could be none other than the manscorpions who rule here today. They called themselves the Sohktars, a wandering tribe of unknown origin.

"The ancient Nimmurians and the Sohktars fought side by side until the orcs had been beaten back to the southern jungles. There followed an obscure era; many runes and bas-reliefs of this period have been damaged or removed for some unknown reason. I found some clues leading me to believe Nimmurians were mysteriously disappearing, and the Sohktars had been blamed for this.

"Soon afterward, Sohktars were brutally expelled from the cities of Nimmur and a bloody war followed. Sculptures revealed that the manscorpions had armies of considerable size. Those sculptures strangely show them rising from the earth. Nimmur achieved spectacular victories, casting mysterious rays of fire, such as those at the Battle of Urn-Nileser. The sculptures displayed fields of twisted, fiery husks, agonized manscorpions burning under the sun. But it was too late for Nimmur. There were too many manscorpions. One after another, the besieged towns fell. Sohktars probably massacred or enslaved those who surrendered. Perhaps the survivors fled. There is no way to tell to where, since the bas-reliefs of that period all end at this point.

"I must presume that the Sohktars usurped the land of ancient Nimmur, its history, culture, and even its language. The winged-minotaur race probably died out. Of course, I wouldn't bring any of this up with the manscorpions. Simply admitting that I can read these ancient scriptures may be reason enough for these beings to seek my death. One must beware of such a ruthless and cruel people."

Etchings on a set of lacquered hatchling turtle shells, from Count Disbaal of Enom:

"This is the most amazing discovery of magical prowess in a very long time. To think that it lay there, so close to us and for so long, is simply mind boggling. What else does Nimmur conceal?"

"Herath always maintained excellent relations with our Sohktari friends. We find them suitable, almost likeable. Herath was young when the Sohktars invaded Nimmur. We offered our help in defeating the winged ones. Ancient Nimmur was a powerful, advanced culture then, a threat to young Herath. Returning the favor, Sohktars smuggled many winged ones into Herath to be studied in our laboratories. This earned us great magical knowledge. And ever since the Sohktars' arrival

in Nimmur, the orcs have become far less active on our side of the border, too, and that can only be praised.

"The secret began to unfold before me during a visit to the city of Er, on a trading mission to the palace of Anupalassar, King of Nimmur. Left alone one evening, I observed the sky from my window and noticed an unusual alignment of stars. Just then, I heard a low buzz in the street below. Screams of terror immediately followed, as several manscorpions crackled and literally burst into flames. Others, looking down from their windows, quickly pulled their blinds shut and barricaded themselves in their houses.

"Hours later, priests picked up the charred remains. No one at the palace acknowledged the incident. They looked embarrassed, though. It occurred to me that two strange monuments stood at the ends of the street. From my vantage point, I determined a curious pattern formed by a series of such monuments extending from the great temple throughout the city. Later in the morning, I also found more scorched traces on several other streets aligned with the monuments. There was a definite link between these.

"I would not rest until that secret was unveiled. Over years of quiet observation, Nimmur finally revealed to me the existence of perhaps the strangest magic yet on Mystara. It appears ancient Nimmur had developed a powerful device that could augment spell effects to astounding proportions. This device drew upon the power of the stars, or perhaps the reflection of distant suns.

"Judging from the position of the monuments in the city, the device functioned only during certain stellar alignments. The monuments collect the energy and focus it on the temple. There, ancient Nimmurians probably used the celestial power to some unknown effect.

"It seems our manscorpion friends of Er only acquired partial knowledge of the monuments' use, and their lack of experience with astronomy makes the passage of the stars' energy through the city rather unpredictable. By itself, the energy should be no more harmful than moonlight, but for some unknown reason, it burns Sohktars caught in its rays, popping them like insects on embers. Perhaps this is some sort of curse the ancient Nimmurians left behind to torment the Sohktars.

"I traveled to the other cities of Nimmur. All of them featured the same devices, but the monuments showed damage and recent restoration, possibly by the manscorpions. The work didn't seem quite right however, and I suspect the only functioning device remains the one in Er.

"The truth came forth some years later, when clay tablets from ancient Nimmur found their way to my tower. The winged ones didn't all die under Sohktari stings.

The people in each of the besieged cities managed to escape death in great numbers using the magic of their temples, in most cases mere moments before the final assault of the Sohktars. Only priests remained behind, to strip temples and monuments of their runes. The priests knew they would be stranded and doomed. They were resigned to die in their temples. All except for one city, Er.

"Treachery prevented the priests from destroying the Ziggurat of Er. Perhaps the Sohktars arrived too quickly. They did not realize what they had captured. Only centuries later did they discover the source of the lethal rays. This explains why the Sohktars chose Er as their new capital, and why they so quickly adopted the name, culture, and architecture of Nimmur. They even took the language of Nimmur as their own. Again and again, they tried to recreate ancient Nimmur's greatness and pierce its mysteries. I have no doubt that the manscorpions used this device at least once, against a great orcish invasion several years ago.

"I now understand why the manscorpions guard their temples and monuments so jealously. This is one secret that must not fall into the hands of outsiders. Fortunately, Herath stands as the ally of Nimmur. Perhaps Herath too, some day, will acquire the secret of the stars."

Nimmur

Kingdom of Nimmur—Capital: Er (Pop.: 19,700 manscorpions and outsiders); Army: 6 pincers; Ruler: Anupalassar II "the Firebranded," oldest son of Dargon I. Royal lands include the area around Er and the "Southern Shield." The family domain is Asur. Patron: Menlil.

Present-day Nimmurians are manscorpions who usurped the land from its previous occupants, a race of winged minotaurs. The current Nimmurians are vicious, even worse than the Herathians. At least the latter have a clinical, scientific interest in magic. Herathian pragmatism is their governing factor. In contrast, the manscorpions of Nimmur are ruthless, conniving creatures filled with hatred. Pity and remorse are unknown to them. They crave the sun, but at the same time fear it.

Nimmurians cover their bodies with a thick make-up to protect themselves from the lethal effect of the sun, the result of an old Immortal's curse. The make-up ranges from brown for the lower castes, to red for warriors, and gold with embellishments for nobility. Clerics usually cover their entire bodies with silver runes over black make-up, without which they couldn't cast spells under the sun. When outside, all manscorpions wear masks featuring monstrous grimaces. The masks provide a visor and dark lenses to protect the manscorpions' fragile eyes.

Idu's Curse

Sunlight is excruciating to the manscorpions of Nimmur. Normal clothing is insufficient to stop the curse's effects. Only protective make-up or armor can shield them from the deadly rays and the pain. Direct sunlight blinds these manscorpions (as per a *light* spell) unless they wear dark lenses to protect their eyes. Artificial light doesn't affect them.

If ever caught in direct sunlight without make-up (less than 50% of the body covered), they suffer 3d6+2 points of damage per round until pulled underground or total make-up is completed. Their Dexterity and Morale also drops to 3, they automatically lose initiative each round, and they move at half speed (rounded down). After one continuous turn of exposure, they burst into flames and die (with no saving throw). If a manscorpion with partial make-up (50% to 99% of the body covered) is caught in direct sunlight, treat it as if caught in reflected sunlight instead (see below).

Any open wound (not covered by protective make-up) exposed to direct sunlight causes the manscorpion's ichor to boil and hiss in the wound, causing incredible pain (double damage from the attack).

When caught in reflected sunlight (moonlight, starlight, or sunlight reflected from a mirror, etc.) without make-up, Nimmurians suffer only 1d6 points of damage (or an extra 1d4 points of damage for an exposed wound); their Dexterity and Morale both drop to half (rounded down). If caught in reflected light with partial make-up, they suffer 1d4-1 points of damage per round, with no other effect on Morale or Dexterity.

Nimmur today

The arrival of traders from Vilaverde sent a message to the manscorpions' leaders that it was better to tolerate visitors on the surface, and even trade with them, than to tigh them forever. Vilaverdians and most eastern traders were more advanced than the Nimmurians. The outsiders' red-steel blades proved quite a deterrent. The manscorpions want the secret of that new metal.

Up to two-thirds of Nimmur's foreign trade is overland, to and from western Herath. Several tribes of jungle orcs secretly take bribes from unscrupulous Vilaverdan traders to raid caravan trails linking Herath to Nimmur.

Almost a quarter of Nimmur's foreign business passes through Porto Escorpião, the Vilaverdan colonial enclave and best port facility in the country. Vilaverde arranged for rival traders to be virtually locked out of Nimmur by slapping a 33% tax on anything shipped by non-vilaverdians through Porto Escorpião. What little remains of maritime trade involves scores of private traders between Bellayne and

Slagovich, through the shallower ports along the coast of Nimmur. This far from the Known World, Ierendian and Minrothad ships are rarities. The Nimmurians have no ships of their own.

The manscorpions export spices, some food (figs, dates, nuts), salt, sheep, wool, carpets, tapestries, expensive resins, rare woods, fine oils, perfume, and dyes. They import foodstuffs (beef, rice, grain), wines, obsidian, silk, leather, iron, foreign armor (upper body only), and weapons.

Today, foreigners may come and go in Nimmur, though the vicinity of ziggurats and palaces remain strictly off-limits to outsiders, under penalty of death. Visitors are otherwise generally safe elsewhere, if they don't travel alone. Behind these appearances of neutrality, the Nimmurians conceal their curse and their burgeoning knowledge of the star device in Er, as well as a vast underground kingdom beneath Nimmur.

Ever since the manscorpions assumed the ancient Nimmurian cultural identity, they dropped their old tribal structure, and put in place a new dynasty of kings. Today, King Anupalassar II rules over smaller manscorpion provinces owing fealty to the throne of Nimmur. Provincial governors have the hereditary title of prince. The present king earned his nickname, "the Firebranded," on a journey to Herath. During an ambush, an ogre ripped open the king's great helm with a battle axe, wounding him and scarring his face from the sun's rays.

Nimmur is an ally of Herath, although the Nimmurian clergy believes manscorpions will rule the entire peninsula some day. On the other hand, Herath hopes to steal the secret of the ancient Nimmurian star device. Right now, the Nimmurians still have a problem with decidedly unyielding orcs in the south. These orcs are savage creatures that have adapted to the thick jungle of the Orc's Head Peninsula. Nimmur also faces a dilemma with the encroachment of foreign settlers, especially lately the affluent Herathians moving into the City of Er. It is becoming difficult for the clergy to keep unwanted visitors out of the ziggurat quarters in their cities. The manscorpions ignore the northern coastal lands because of mosquito and killer-fly infestations that have decimated settlers and sheep flocks there in the past.

Nimmur's armies

Nimmur maintains permanent, professional troops trained and paid according to precepts laid down by ancient Nimmurian generals (inspired by the real world's Assyria). Although nobles comprise most of the upper ranks in the army, effective authority is based on actual military rank, not social status.

Towns of a thousand people or more are walled. Most structures are made of

dried mud bricks. Each town pays for its own army. The troops are disciplined and organized. Troops of the same types all wear the same armor and tunics within their respective armies. Conical helmets with bronze masks are predominant. Manscorpion armor costs three times that of its human counterpart because of its complexity (larger abdomen and eight leg pieces, tail and sting remaining unarmored). Nimmurians do not use mercenaries.

For 100 troops, 20 ride mule-driven war-chariots (two mules, a driver, and a warrior per chariot; short bow, spear, and scale mail). Twenty more use longbows, short swords, and scale mail; twenty are heavy infantry with lamellar (banded) armor and Nimmurian poleaxes; and forty are light infantry with leather armor, large shields, spears, and short swords. The war-chariots of Er are scythe-wheeled and larger than those of other cities. Twenty are long-bowmen with short swords and scale mail. Another 20 are heavy infantry with lamellar (banded) armor and Nimmurian poleaxes. The final 40 are light infantry with leather armor, large shields, spears, and short swords.

Armies break down into battle pincers of 100 troops, in turn splitting into tactical stings of 20 troops. Officers, petty nobles with simple warrior rank, and priests usually ride the smaller war-chariots.

Dominions of Nimmur

Asur—Capital's population: 15,100; Army: 4 pincers; Ruler: King Dargon I "The Defender." Dargon was the previous king of Nimmur. His army slaughtered a great orcish war-horde of over 15,000 at the battle of Anusardapal, named after a hero who died there. Now a tired old warrior, he abdicated in favor of his son but retained the honorific title of king. Asur is the dynastic domain. Dargon now oversees spying activities on the Vilaverdians, hoping to capture their fortified port.

Ankesh—Capital's population: 2,500; Army: 2 pincers; Ruler: Prince Sheneser II "Iron Sting." Ankesh regularly sees raids from Jibarú phanatons. Hills and heavy forest present a difficult environment for Nimmurian troops, especially their war-chariots. Phanatons are thought to be no more than primitive forest barbarians that present little danger to Nimmur.

Ekiddu—Capital's population: 3,100; Army: 2 pincers; Ruler: Princess Ishmamna I "Black Heart." Ekiddu is trying to become a trading town. Unfortunately, its port is shallow and presents no contest to the Vilaverdan colonial enclave just to the south. The capital of Ekiddu is the town where the most foreigners can be found.

Shubat-Nammu—Capital's population: 1,250; Army: 1 pincer; Ruler: Prince Namrud XII "Seven Legs." Dubbed the armpit of Nimmur, this impoverished state is all

but lost in the forest. Many of the manscorpions from this state join the armies of other dominions or become bandits.

Suneveh (Northern Shield)—Capital's population: 18,200; Army: 5 pincers; Ruler: Prince Enshurnasirpal III "The Impaler." The ruler of Suneveh has recently acquired medicine that should negate the effects of killer flies on the Wind Flats. Soon, settlers will be sent to support a major northern territorial expansion north of Nimmur.

Sur—Capital's population: 3,900; Army: 4 pincers; Ruler: Prince Nergil VII "Cotton Head." All the caravans between Herath and Nimmur stop in the capital of Sur, a rich trading town. The treasures of Sur make a tempting target for the orcs of the Dark Jungle.

Southern Shield—Army: 5 pincers; Administrator: Lord Ishme-Hursag. This dominion belongs to the throne of Nimmur. The administrator's responsibility is to patrol the caravan trail and keep it free of marauding orcs—a tough duty. No sane warrior wants to be transferred to this military outpost.

Low-Realm of Apsur—Total population: 80,000 manscorpions, no outsiders; Army: 12 pincers. Ruler: Queen Tigurta I "The Taciturn." This is the underground kingdom of the old Sohktars. Its caves spread as far as the center of the Forbidden Highlands, with tunnels and cracks connecting to the ziggurats of Er, Asur, and Suneveh, and a few other secret spots in the Forbidden Highlands. Although a subject kingdom of Nimmur, Apsur is at risk of breaking away. The queen is a High Priestess of Nin-Hurabi (see "The manscorpion pantheon" below) who resents the authority of the surface king.

The manscorpion pantheon

The early Sohktari clergy removed all references to ancient Nimmurian patrons, save perhaps in some forgotten ruins outside the cities. They replaced them with an adaptation of their own pantheon. It should be noted here that Sohktars easily penetrated ancient Nimmurian society because the "scorpion-man" figure existed in ancient Nimmurian mythology.

The beliefs of today's manscorpions of Nimmur reflect the duality in their life: the dark underworld from which they come, and the world above that they crave but which kills. Death under the sun represents a mystical cycle that started with the break from Idu-Ixon and a return through his flames.

Beyond those listed below, many minor Immortals have places in the Nimmurian pantheon, representing various aspects of Nimmurian life. According to ancient beliefs, they are all thought to travel on magical cloud chariots.

The spell effects noted below for Nimmurian clerics are special powers, not actual spells (see *Wrath of the Immortals*, Book 1, pages 17 and 29).

Menlil (Atzanteotl) is the Immortal who whispered to chosen Sohktars during their-aimless journey through the caves of Mystara. He promised them Gilmun, a land of sun and light where they could dwell. Through his dreams, he taught his followers how to make the protective make-up. Menlil is now the patron of Gilmun, the "land-above." Also called "The Guide," he stands as the patron of war and revenge, and the chief figure of today's Nimmurian pantheon.

Manscorpion clerics of Menlil can cast a *cause light wounds* spell three times per day.

Nin-Hurabi (Nyx) is the patron of Apsur,

Manscorpion Poleaxe: Weapon Mastery Chart

| | Mastery | Damage | Defense | Special |
|-------|--------------|------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| [P=H] | Basic | 3d6 | — | Attacks every other round |
| | Skilled | 3d6+3 | H: +1AC/1 | Attacks every round |
| | Expert | 3d6+6 | H: +2AC/1 | Deflect (1) |
| | Master | P: 3d6+10 S: 3d6+8 | H: +2AC/2 | Deflect (1) |
| | Grand Master | P: 3d6+16 S: 3d6+12 | H: +3AC/2 | Deflect (2) |

[P=H] Primary target is a foe attacking with either hand-held or hand-thrown weapons

P: Primary target

S: Secondary target (monsters attacking with natural weapons)

H:AC/#: AC bonus and number of times per round this AC bonus can be used against attacks from primary targets

| Abilities | STR | INT | WIS | DEX | CON | CHA |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Race Max. | 18 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 18 | 18* |
| Manscorpion | +1 | -1 | -1 | — | +1 | — |

* Charisma applies only between manscorpions; penalize Charisma when dealing with humanoids, -5 when dealing with demihumans or humans.

the dark underworld beneath Gilman. She represents earth, fertility, birth, the safety of the caverns, and ultimately, darkness. Nin-Hurabi bears no ill will toward the manscorpions. She only seeks to protect them and believes they should remain in the caves of Mystara. Nin-Hurabi opposes Idu, who is the embodiment of light. She despises the way he dismissed and cursed the early Sohktars. She also frowns on the way Menlil cheated the manscorpions with his shabby make-up trick, and how he manipulated them into taking over ancient Nimmur.

Manscorpion clerics of Nin-Hurabi can cast a *darkness* spell three times per day.

Idu was the name ancient Nimmurians gave Ixion, their chief Immortal, who represented the sun. For the manscorpions of today's Nimmur, Idu has become the prince of perversity an "evil" figure that no one should honor. His perversity lies in the fact all manscorpions seek Idu's mighty fire and his light, the attainment of which brings only destruction. Idu is the Immortal who betrayed and abandoned the Sohktars, but also he whom the manscorpions hoped they could honor again. Dying by his flame is both a horrible fate and a highly spiritual act, for it represents the end of the manscorpion's quest and a return to Idu's mythical realm.

Manscorpions honoring Idu are considered evil heretics by the established

clergy. A secret few exist who suspect Menlil influenced their Sohktari ancestors into mistrusting Idu. They also resent Menlil's misleading promise of sun and light.

Manscorpion clerics of Idu can cast a druidic *produce fire* spell twice per day. They also receive a +1 to their rolls when trying to Turn Undead.

Manscorpions as NPCs

Manscorpions, especially the Nimmurian sort, should remain NPCs under the DM's control. Here are the details of that NPC class, as it could be used in a campaign. Considering the number of hit dice of a normal manscorpion, it is easier to assume there are lesser manscorpions of 1-7 HD and greater manscorpions of 8 HD and up (spell-casting clerics).

Using the standard fighter experience table, apply a 30% penalty to all earned experience for a standard manscorpion; the penalty should be only 20% for Nimmurian manscorpions because of Idu's curse. All manscorpions start with 1 HD, equal to a 1st-level human fighter, but manscorpion warriors have none of the human fighter's special abilities or Fighter Combat Options. Manscorpions always make their saving throws as fighters.

Even when manscorpions reach 8 HD and become clerics, they continue to gain 1d8 hit points per hit die. They also retain all fighter weapon skills previously acquired (edged and piercing weapons are permitted).

A saving throw negates a lesser manscorpion's poison. If the save fails, the poison causes illness (Movement, Dexterity, and Strength are halved, rounded down; initiative -3). The effects of the poison begin 1d4 rounds after the sting, and last 4d6 hours. The sting itself inflicts 1d4 points of damage.

The poison of a greater manscorpion is deadly. Its sting inflicts 1d10 points of damage, and the victim is paralyzed for 1d8-1 rounds. A failed saving throw vs. poison means instant death. If the DM allows a player to run this type of monster as a PC, the poison should be of the paralyzing type only (with a saving throw-vs. paralysis) for the sake of fairness to other players and game balance.

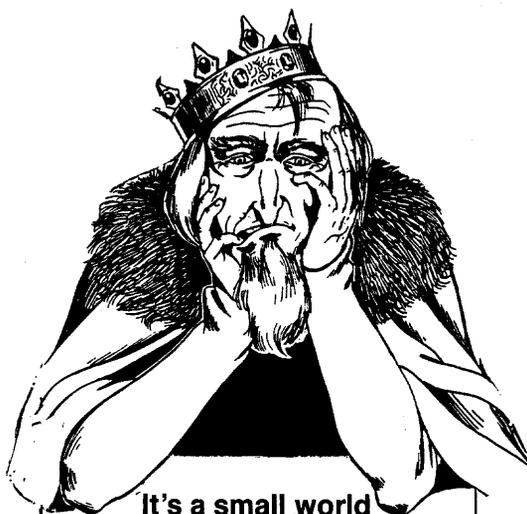
Manscorpions cannot rise beyond 13th level. If the DM allows unlimited levels, manscorpions should use 1d6 for determining hit points, from 8th level up. This should be decided before bringing such a character into play. Constitution bonuses are added when the NPC is created and every time it gains a new level, up to 9th level. Racial ability modifiers are given here:

Miscellaneous: A manscorpion can hold its breath as long as a normal human, but cannot swim at all. Water dissolves Nummurian make-up in 1d4 rounds. Manscorpions of Nimmur have

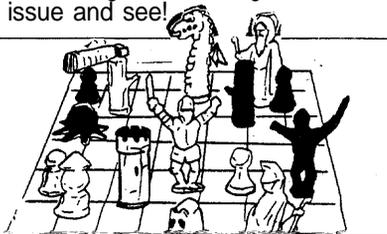
infravision and a natural armor class of 7. Addition of body armor of AC 7 or worse only improves the manscorpion's natural armor class by one point. For body armor of AC 6 or better, use the rating of the armor worn, plus an armor-class bonus of one point. Shield and Dexterity modifiers to armor class work normally. Assume the normal monster's AC 1, as described in *the Rules Cyclopedia*, comes from armor and high Dexterity. The huge pole arm listed in the monster description exists in Nimmur, but it is so heavy that a manscorpion warrior with basic mastery can effectively swing it only once every other round. Such a weapon costs 10 gp and has an encumbrance of 200 (see Weapon Mastery chart).

Note: Don't forget to apply the Hit Roll bonuses from the table on page 76 of the *Rules Cyclopedia*. Special *deflection* is explained on page 80 of the same book. The Nimmurian poleaxe can be neither used with a shield nor thrown. It is a two-handed weapon. Non-manscorpions have a -5 attack penalty when using this weapon because of its size and the way it is balanced. Manscorpion masters and grand masters of the Nimmurian poleaxe are a myth. No manscorpion is skillful enough to with the poleaxe to reach those levels.

Ω



What are the latest releases in miniature figures and scenery? What rules are best for tabletop war games? Turn to "Through the Looking Glass" in this issue and see!



Errata: DRAGON® Magazine #190, page 45. Mining Effects in general do wipe out farming and taxation in a hex, but as a DM option, this effect could be limited to borderland or wilderness areas only. Farming and taxation in rural or more populous areas could remain unaffected.

Column 3, paragraph 2, "... as shown in the *Method* entry earlier..." should be changed to "... as shown in the *Procedure* entry earlier..."

Column 3, last paragraph, "... at the end of the month, better luck next time!" should be changed to "... at the end of the year, better luck next time!"

DRAGON Magazine #189, page 44, under "Food": To find out how much urban population farmers can support, divide the farming/fishing population by 5 (not 4). In the example given, the 300 oasis farmers could support 60 soldiers (not 75). The example is still valid despite the error.

Dungeons & Dragons

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T

By Steven Schend

THE MARVEL-PHILE

Files from the Funhouse of Solitude

You know, I've been at TSR for a few years now, and I'm used to the late-night comings and goings of certain pipe-smoking wizards, but some really weird stuff keeps showing up around my cubicle when I'm on deadlines. I'm working late one night and I hear some high-pitched "cinema villain" laugh (You know: "Mu-hu-ha-ha-ha-ha!") just outside. I need a break, so I get up to see what's so funny that has a co-worker regressing to such depths. The last thing I saw, at the end of a purple and red blur, was the head of a large blue sledgehammer.

I woke up a few hours later, only to find my computer screen filled with the information below. The writing was something that would have failed my high-school English classes, but the content was fun, nonetheless. After much liberal clean-up work (on the text and my office—whatever put the grape jelly on my chair and the glue on my keyboard will pay for the damages!), the secrets of Slapstick, the hero who laughs at danger, can now be told!

SLAPSTICK™

Steve Harmon
High-school class clown

| | | |
|---|---------|---------------|
| F | TY (6) | Health: 92 |
| A | IN (40) | |
| S | TY (6) | Karma: 34 |
| E | IN (40) | |
| R | PR (4) | Resources: FB |
| I | GD (10) | |
| P | Ex (20) | Popularity: 2 |

[The above was all broad-mindedly translated from such material as "Slapstick's the worst butt-kicker around and nobody can touch him and he's smarter than the average bear and. . ." You get the picture. Try to imagine the pain of this former English teacher.]

KNOWN POWERS: [Well, this isn't nearly as easy to translate. I think I'll leave the original text in (though I'll add at least a semblance of spelling and grammar), and make my guesses afterwards.]

"OK, lemme see . . . I'm totally indestructible, see? I've got a bod that's made



outta the same stuff that the rest of the super-dudes use for costumes—unstable molecules, 'cept I'm alive and they're not! Anyway, like I said, nothing can hurt me because I'm like a toon in that totally cool movie—pretty righteous, eh? And if you

plug me in, I get pretty pumped up in a Charles Atlas meets Reddy Kilowatt sort-of-thing!

"My four-fingered gloves (aren't they cool? It's a pain when you gotta dial the phone, though) now have some

thingummy in 'em that helps me out. The left one's got a button that lets me change from my ever-studly he-man self to my even-more-studly super-hero identity of Slapstick quicker than the pep squad can faint at the sight of a dissected frog in Biology! The right one is my very own handy, dandy, 'bag o' tricks.' It stores stuff inside it somehow or other, and when I want stuff, I wiggle my fingers and presto! Instant access! I keep my hammer in there all the time, and a good supply of sodas, chips, and my gym clothes (gotta remember to let Mom wash those—it's been six months). All this and more! My bestest ability to confound all evil-doers (or at least those that mess with me) is my charm, my wit, my *joie de vivre* (that's French for awesomacious life, dude)! Remember, Slapstick's not in it for revenge or glory—I'm in it for the yucks!"

Alter Ego: Slapsticks ego is high-school class clown Steve Harmon. They change identities (and the properties of Slappy's body) by pressing the "biomagnetic pulse activator stud" on his left four-fingered glove.

Electroplasm Body: Slapsticks body is composed of "living unstable molecules" collectively called electroplasm. His gloves contain molecular stabilizers that hold his body at a minimum level of coherence. This form mimics his human shape, but exaggerates every action due to its remarkable elasticity and pliability. The special properties of this electroplasm body grant Slapstick these powers:

– **Invulnerability:** Slapstick is composed of Unearthly (100) material strength "electroplasm." This doesn't give him Body Armor or perfect resistance to damage; it's just next-to-impossible to destroy the little guy! The effects of any attacks are temporary on Slapstick: If he's shot, his body is riddled with bullet holes; if he's blasted with a flame-thrower, he's charred and smoking, but he keeps on smiling! Slappy ignores all Battle Effects Table results except Slams and Stuns, which occur as normal.

– **Elongation, imitation, plasticity, shape-shifting:** Slapstick has all of these powers due to his unstable body, but he has no conscious control over them. The player and Judge can work on strange effects and uses of these powers for Slapstick, but they only kick in for limited amounts of time and only under extreme stress (stretches an extra foot to reach a bomb, swinging over the city with his knees behind his head, bouncing upon impacts, face changes to famous cartoon characters when in pain, etc.). Slapstick can attempt to use these Remarkable (30)

rank powers consciously, but he needs to make a Yellow Psyche FEAT to do so for one round.

Leaping: Slapsticks resilient musculature and unstable body allows him Remarkable rank Leaping (30' leaps).

Lightning speed: Slapstick can move at Amazing (50) ground speeds (8 areas/round) when running normally. If panicked (failed Psyche FEAT in the face of danger), he can attain up to Unearthly (100) ground speeds (10 areas/round) for one round.

Energy conversion: Slapstick is affected cosmetically only by Physical, Force, or Energy attacks. However, if exposed to high-voltage electricity, his body absorbs up to Unearthly (100) amounts of electricity per round and expands to a 7' height with exaggerated muscles ("Hero of the Beach" model. Slapsticks Strength is increased to the rank of the electrical attack, but his Strength maximum is Amazing (50) rank. This enhanced Strength can be maintained for 1-5 rounds (1d10/2) or for as long as Slapstick remains exposed to electrical current.

TALENTS: Trivia: B-, C-, and D-grade SF and horror movies; Smarmy jokes; "Martial arts S" (Unique: +2CS to Fighting when resorting to combat tactics of comedy films—eye poking, nose-kissing, etc.); Hammer (+1CS to Fighting rank when using his special sledgehammer).

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: If you were the class-clown and were suddenly endowed with the powers and indestructible nature of a cartoon character, how would you act?

HISTORY: How did Steve Harmon become the most animated hero of the MARVEL UNIVERSE™? What is the spectacular origin of the awesome vigilante who plays cruel tricks on crime? How did he get out of detention long enough to earn his powers and battle his foes? You be the Judge and pick one below:

A. Prolonged exposure to radiation from years of sitting too close to the TV took its toll. Steve Harmon made one of "those weird faces for too long," and it stayed that way. That should teach you to listen to your mother.

B. Midget aliens who sit in judgment over the universe (and take themselves way too seriously) came down to Earth and granted Steve his "Magic Four-Fingered Gloves of Power," to protect Earth from evil-doers.

C. Granted powers beyond mortal comprehension by some old homeless guy who lived beneath Grand Central Station,

Steve Harmon needs only to speak the words of power ("Klaatu Barada Nikto") to become Slapstick!

D. Accidentally falling through an alien funhouse mirror, Steve's molecules were nearly stretched across 3,741 dimensions until an extra-dimensional scientist of sparkling wit helped Steve master his awesome powers. Steve then used his newfound powers to free lots of captive Earthlings and fend off an extradimensional invasion of Earth by the evil clowns of Dimension X!

DR. DENTON™

Oliver Denton

Future mad scientist

| | | |
|---|---------|---------------------------|
| F | FB (2) | Health: 12 |
| A | PR (4) | |
| S | FB (2) | Karma: 44 |
| E | PR (4) | |
| R | RM (30) | Resources: PR (allowance) |
| I | GD (10) | |
| P | PR (4) | Popularity: 0 |

KNOWN POWERS:

Oliver is a mutant with enhanced Intelligence (Remarkable (30) rank) for his age. All this means is that he's able to avoid the minor troubles that most eight-year-olds indulge in, and move straight up to indulging in the serious, property-damaging troubles that most parents associate with teenagers, the X-Men, or Godzilla.

TALENTS: Electronics, Engineering, Mechanics, Robotics, and Mad-Scientist Rhetoric.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Despite all his grand designs, Oliver Denton is still an eight-year-old boy with many attitudes, needs, and wants of a typical child that age. Of course, most children can't convert their fathers' cars into particle accelerators and giant robots. What does this kid act like? Get some old Universal SF films, and watch the mad scientists. Now, extract puberty, the wild hair, lab coats, and the hunchbacked assistants (but keep the maniacal laughter and the overwrought, overdone, overbearing attitudes and speeches). Dress him in some awful outfit only mothers think their children look good in, and you've got Oliver. His parents thought he was a normal child until he answered that ad by the Mad Thinker—"We're looking for people who like to build androids."

TEDDY™

Humongous, unstoppable, rampaging killer android

| | | |
|----------|---------|----------------|
| F | GD (10) | Health: 100 |
| A | GD (10) | |
| S | IN (40) | Karma: 6 |
| E | IN (40) | |
| R | FB (2) | Resources: NA |
| I | FB (2) | |
| P | FB (2) | Popularity: NA |

KNOWN POWERS:

Robotic construction: Teddy has Class 1000 Resistance to disease, aging, mind control, and powers that affect the human mind and emotions (like "Leave it to Beaver" re-runs). Of course, it is subject to attacks that control machinery.

Body Armor: Teddy's metallic hide granted it Remarkable (30) rank protection from physical harm. This, of course, does nothing to protect its poor, artificial psyche from the damaging psychological effects of the random acts of senseless violence visited upon him by a cruel, manipulative, world.

Weakness: Read the signs, kids! "Don't feed monkey wrenches to the androids!"

TALENTS: None, and isn't that sad? Suppose Teddy had wanted to go out into the real world, leaving behind a life of

servitude, and join our productive work force. Could he have gotten a job with no appreciable skills beyond a dazzling smile? I guess we'll never know.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: The one thing you need to understand about Teddy is his sparkling dialogue ("Teddy go on mindless rampage! Teddy win fight, get babes!"). You just can't buy conversation like that anymore.

HISTORY: [Once again, we have Slapstick's words, loosely translated into English.]

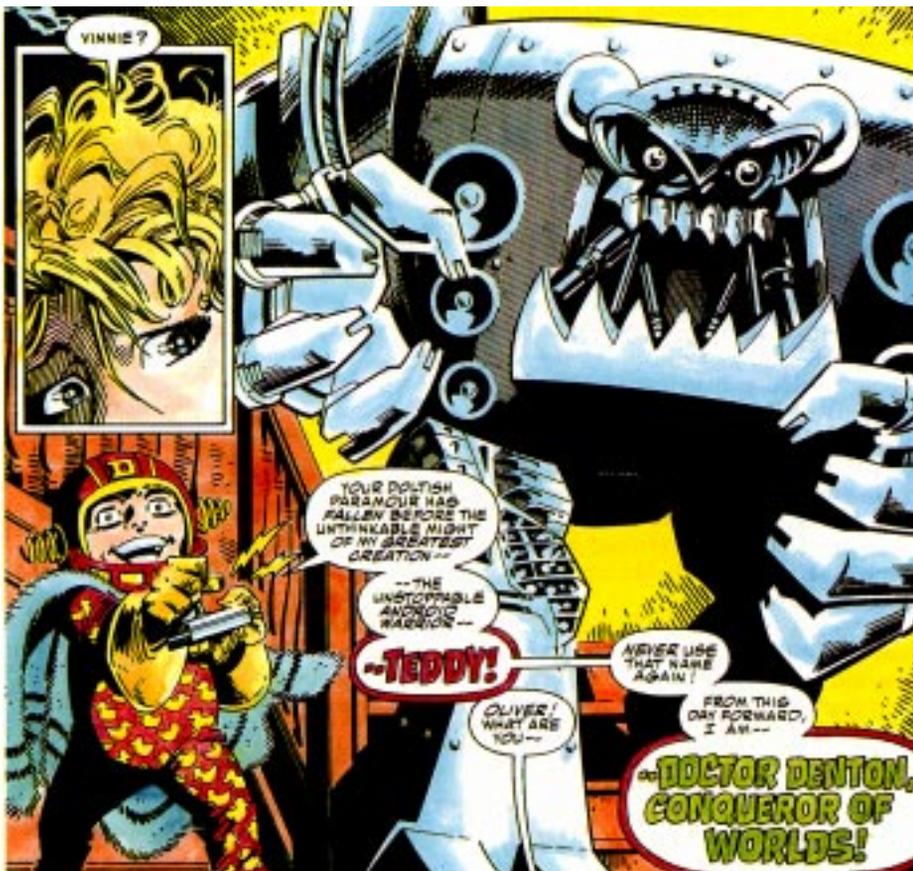
"What's this kid's problem? Darned if I know! Geez, all I know is that I finally got the nerve up to call that major babe, Barb Halsey, and she wanted me to meet her at the Dentons' place where she was baby-sitting, right? (Can you believe that? Barb Halsey! No, I'm not kidding! I couldn't believe it either!) Anyways, I took my bike over (must have hit somewhere around Mach three—my ears were ringing, but hey, did my hair look good! So, I go to the door, expecting Barb to answer the door, when it opens to reveal Vinnie! Yeah, Vinnie 'the living wall' linebacker of the school football team! Barb made some excuse, but I wasn't quite listening at that point. Her loss, right? Yeah, sure.

"Well, where the heck was I? Oh, yeah—

the secret life of the Terrible Techno-Toddler! (Be afraid! Be very afraid! NOT!) Since I was leaving the place at a much more depressed pace than I arrived, I barely noticed when the street lights flickered along the entire street, but I heard the woman of my dreams scream! Changing to Slapstick, I stormed the house, ready to defend Barb from . . . an eight-year-old kid wearing red and yellow pajamas, a towel for a cape, and a football helmet. (Sheesh! Even I had better taste in costumes when I was eight.) Just when I figure I've gotten the lamest Rogues' Gallery this side of Squirrel Girl, I got clocked good by a metal fist the size of Toledo! I chose that time to fake like I was knocked out so they wouldn't bother Barb. Really. I had 'em right where I wanted 'em. Really.

"Ok, so I come to and I'm trapped in what looks like Victor Frankenstein Jr.'s room. I goaded him into torturing me to protect Barb, swiftly tricking him into pumping me full of electricity. Before anyone could scream 'It's alive! Alive, I tell you! Alive! Bwah-ha-ha-ha-ha!', I'm more pumped up than the Hulk having a bad hair day! Before the midget can blindsides me with his erector-set-of-doom, I figure I'll take the controls away from him. Guess I don't know my own strength, but I smash the controls. Great—one walking, talking, bucket-of-bolts giving new meaning to the words 'delinquency, violence, and a general disregard for authority can be traced to heavy metal.'

"Well, the hero wins the day, gets the girl, and doesn't even get in trouble for the mess he made! What? Oh, okay, so I had some help from the kid! Hey, I had to show Barb what a compassionate guy I am, forgiving mine enemy and all that jazz. So the kid plugs me in and feeds me maximum wattage so's I can teach his robot a thing or two about mindless rampaging (having been a major fan of it since I was four). Anyway, a few rounds with the hyperthyroid tinkertoy did nothing but move some furniture (and some walls), so I took a recipe from Mother's Delicacies of Destruction: Take one (1) robot/android/synthezoid/artificial being; insert one (1) wrench in mouth; and bango! Teddy's tummy got the better of him. Dr. Denton won't be plaguing anyone with killer androids or death rays anytime soon. He won't even be sitting down for a while without remembering that you don't mess with Slapstick! But the best part about it—Barb Halsey has the hot and heavies for me! I mean Slapstick! I mean Aarrgh! This secret identity stuff can be a real drag sometimes."



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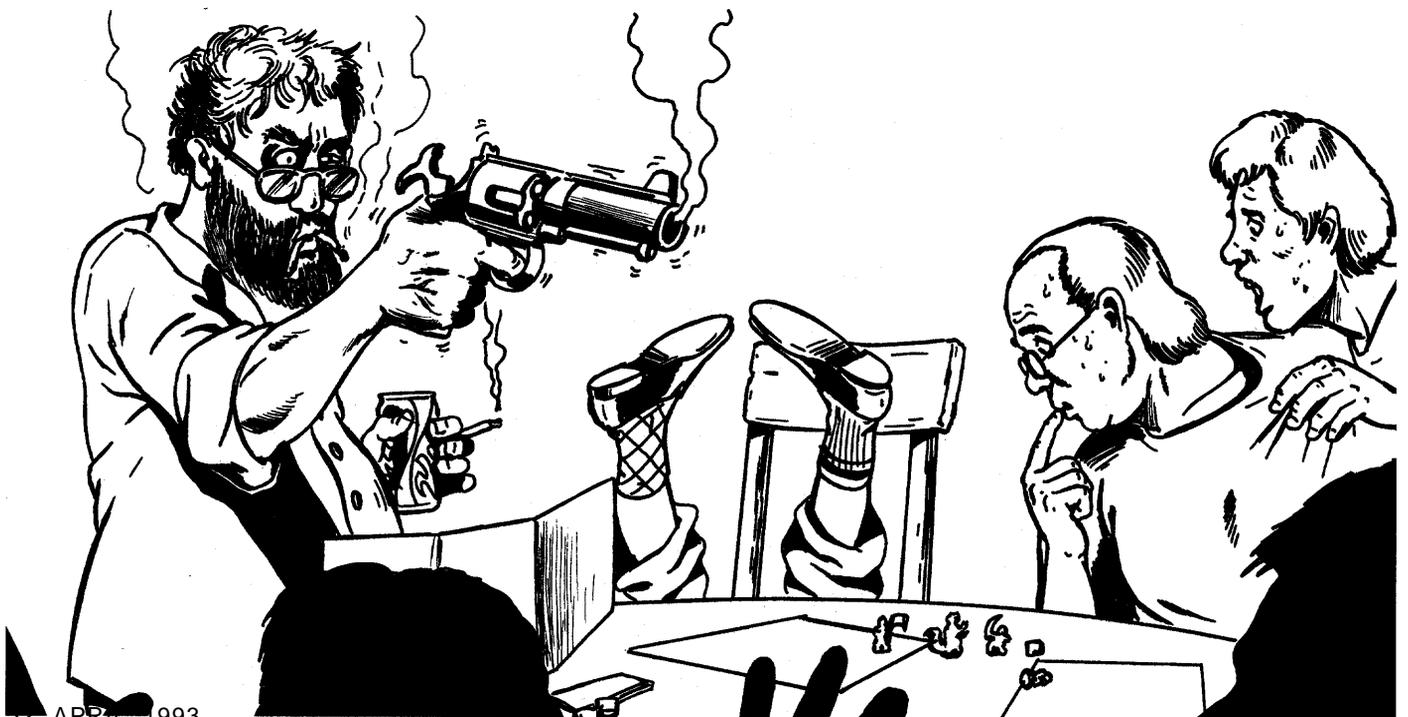
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In Praise of One-Night (Gaming) Standards

The one-shot adventure may be just what you need

by Lee Sheppard

Artwork by Jim Holloway



You know how it is. It's been a week since your last role-playing session, one in which your character reached new heights of gaming greatness, and you've been champing at the bit to continue the campaign. You arrive with high hopes of another long night of fruitful gaming, then settle into your favorite position at the gaming table, eager to get underway.

Then the bomb drops. Your game master fails to show up ("I know it's inconvenient, but I really should be at the birth of my baby") or shows up but is burnt out from work stress ("... then my office caught fire and we missed deadline.").

Contrary to popular opinion, GMing is not a paying profession (if it is, please let me know where to send my resume). Most GMs also have another life, one that pays the bills, feeds the children, or provides themselves with an education. Sometimes, the last thing a GM wants to face is a group of excited role-players. In these situations, a stoic GM might adopt a "the show must go on" attitude and push on regardless, often with disastrous results. There is nothing more depressing to a group of players than spoiling what has been, at until this point, a long and enjoyable campaign.

A far more sensible solution is for the GM to admit that tonight would not be a good time to continue this particular campaign ("but watch out next week gang!"); he or she should take a break. What should the group do in this situation? Those players possessing chaotic tendencies will probably consume large quantities of junk food while bemoaning their fate. Sensible players might want to go for the option preferred by my small gaming group: the one-night stand.

My three friends and I would role-play every weekend, taking turns as the GM. Each GM would "umpire" for four to six weeks at a time, swapping places when a campaign objective was met, characters were killed, or the current GM had had enough. Although I willingly admit that my fellow role-players were much more accomplished at running long-term campaigns, my speciality was the one-night stand. I was often called upon to come up with a "filler," an adventure that usually went for only one night (two consecutive sessions occurred only rarely).

Although short, these sessions were filled with fun and adventure—essential elements of one-night stands. The "Side Treks" included in many issues of DUNGEON® Adventures are excellent examples of adventures that can be played in one session. "Side Treks," however, are usually designed to be slotted into a longer campaign, and they are assumed to use the regular player characters who are part of that campaign. One-night stands are different in that it is suggested that entirely new characters should be created

for the single adventure only and not carried forward into other adventures (perhaps this introduces the concept of disposable characters).

Why a one-night stand?

1. A change is as good as a holiday:

One of the main advantages of a one-night stand is the opportunity to try something new. If your role-playing group plays only the AD&D® game, try a completely different game. You can always come back to the AD&D game if you don't like the new game: Remember, it's for only one night. Besides, you might discover a whole new type of adventure game that everyone enjoys. If your group isn't that adventurous, why not try a different AD&D world (for example, leave Oerth and leap into Realmspace!), or try playing a different character type. If you've always played fighters, now might be the perfect opportunity to play a wizard, cleric, or rogue.

Many new games often come with simple introductory adventures that make things much simpler for the players and the GM, as the less explanation of rules required for playing, the better. Very few GMs can afford to buy all of the new games that come out, but usually someone will have bought some new game and will be eager to try it out on the rest of the group. Let him.

Another option is to develop your own simple rules, which can be used in a variety of situations. My group developed a set of generic rules for firearms that could be used for anything between 1800 and 2000 A.D., with damage divided into simple categories (two serious body wounds meant you were dead, a light head wound meant you were unconscious, and so on). By having such an adaptable set of combat rules, we could play all sorts of adventures, from the Wild West (based on the original BOOT HILL® rules by TSR) to World War II, to modern scenarios (playing a SWAT team) and into outer space. With an imaginative GM and willing players, any scenario is possible.

2. GM's rest day: I have already described typical situations that can lead to a one-night stand. These also serve to introduce another benefit of playing such an adventure, which is to allow the regular or current GM a break from umpiring. Many GMs, especially those who umpire constantly, really appreciate the opportunity to play once in a while, tossing aside the rule books and donning the player's mantle again. This is particularly true when trying a new game. GMs are made, not born. We all usually start out as players.

3. Training new GMs. This brings up the point that in addition to resting your current GM, one-night stands are an ideal training ground for new GMs. Successful campaigning comes with experience and

confidence. Many beginning GMs lack the self-confidence to undertake a long adventure (it is a daunting task), and the one-night stand is the perfect opportunity to begin developing the skills required by those wishing to be successful GMs.

Group members can even provide feedback once the adventure has been completed. A kind word can make all the difference to a beginning GM, so be helpful and constructive in your critiques.

The one-night stand's anatomy

The beauty of one-night stands is that they can be set up with a minimum of effort, especially if easy-to-use combat and character creation rules are available. A quick start and a fast pace are the two basic elements of one-night stand gaming. In order to achieve these, GMs and players often need to be a bit more flexible in their attitudes on gaming. The key word when designing one-night stand is therefore *simplicity*. The following are some factors which, when considered, can make one-night stand gaming much easier.

1. Stereotypes: As the name of the game is pace, there is little or no time for lengthy non-player character development. In a long-running campaign, NPCs can be complex, realistic individuals, developing real personalities throughout the length of the game years. In the one-night stand, stereotypical characters make the job a lot simpler. For example, in a game set in the Old West (my personal favorite for one-night stands), the man wearing the black hat is quickly identified as the chief antagonist. In more modern settings, the man with the grenades and the pistol pointed at the airline pilot is most probably a terrorist. You get the idea. "Stereotyped" does not imply corny, but NPCs should be kept as simple as possible because time is of the essence. Chapter 12 of the AD&D 2nd Edition Dungeon Master's Guide (pages 114 to 117 in particular) gives good suggestions on how to create and use NPCs, and these simple guidelines can also be translated to other games with relative ease.

2. Quick plot: One golden rule of one-night gaming is that if the players are expected to complete an adventure in one session, it should be designed that way. It is pointless to design an adventure with a plot so complex that it would take Sherlock Holmes three weeks to solve.

Similarly, the plot should also be completely self-contained. Try to avoid leaving the adventure incomplete, in the sense that the players are left with the feeling that something more is about to happen. A one-night stand should be designed without loose plot threads or clues that could carry the game on. Having a group of players role-playing a SWAT team that must rescue the hostages and kill or capture all of the terrorists is an example of a

one-night stand. Leaving a clue that leads the players to an international terrorist ring that must be infiltrated and defeated is not a one-night stand—it is the beginning of a campaign.

The plots for a one-night stand may need to be simple, but this doesn't mean they have to be boring. Once you get into the swing of designing short, sharp adventures, it soon becomes second nature. Until you do develop those skills, look for great plot ideas from Hollywood. Although I would not suggest using a movie plot as the basis for a long adventure without considerable modification, I often used movies as my inspiration for my one-session adventures. If most of the players have seen the movie from which you've taken the plot, it makes starting play much simpler, as it removes the need for lengthy stage-setting.

To help you on your way, I'll name a number of movies whose plots are great to play as one-night stands: *Die Hard* and *Die Hard II*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, *The Warriors* (for unarmed combat fans), *The Magnificent Seven*, *Rio Bravo*, and *The Running Man*. Getting your players motivated shouldn't be a problem at all with movies like these as their inspiration.

3. Character creation: I once spent an hour creating a 1st-level magic-user char-

acter who, in his very first battle, had the misfortune of having his head cut off. The moral of this story is, don't spend a long time creating something that may not live long. For a quick start and ease of play, the GM should encourage their players to keep their character-creation system simple, perhaps using a system used by GMs when creating minor NPCs.

Especially in modern-era scenarios, only basic characteristics need to be rolled for, usually Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, and possibly morale. If an established plot is used from a movie, players could either take the role of a character in the film ("I want to play Ripley!" "I want to play Hicks!" "I want to play Newt") or create their own simple characters for the evening ("This is how I would have handled it."). Whatever system of character creation you do use, make sure it's compatible with your combat system ("Do you want to use a saving throw vs .44 magnums?")

4. Combat: Unlike the campaign adventure, where you may frequently have long periods without combat, the one-night stand should be action-packed. You are out for a bit of fun and adventure, a real "shoot 'em up," not long hours of plot development. Consequently, combat plays a very big role in the one-night stand. While realistic combat systems with

dozens of dice throws and tables might be appropriate when time is not a luxury, the one-night stand requires a bit less consultation of charts and more confrontation of enemies.

I have already mentioned that my group developed it's own quick rules for firearms; you can do the same. Remember to keep the rules simple. For unarmed or "swords and spears" combat, I'd still stick to the rules provided in the D&D® or AD&D manuals. Combat is nice and quick with these systems, and it can be sped up even more if few or none of the optional rules are used.

5. Fun: This is the most important element of one-night stands. With an exciting plot, eager players, and plenty of action, the fun part comes easily. Remember to keep the game flowing, take some risks, exercise some leniency as the GM every now and then, and—above all—enjoy yourselves.

Watching a PC grow from a nervous, vulnerable cave explorer to a brave, competent warlord is one of the real joys of role-playing. Occasionally, though, it's great to let your hair down and have a night of pure, guiltless fun. So, enjoy your next one-night gaming stand as much as I've enjoyed every one of mine. Ω

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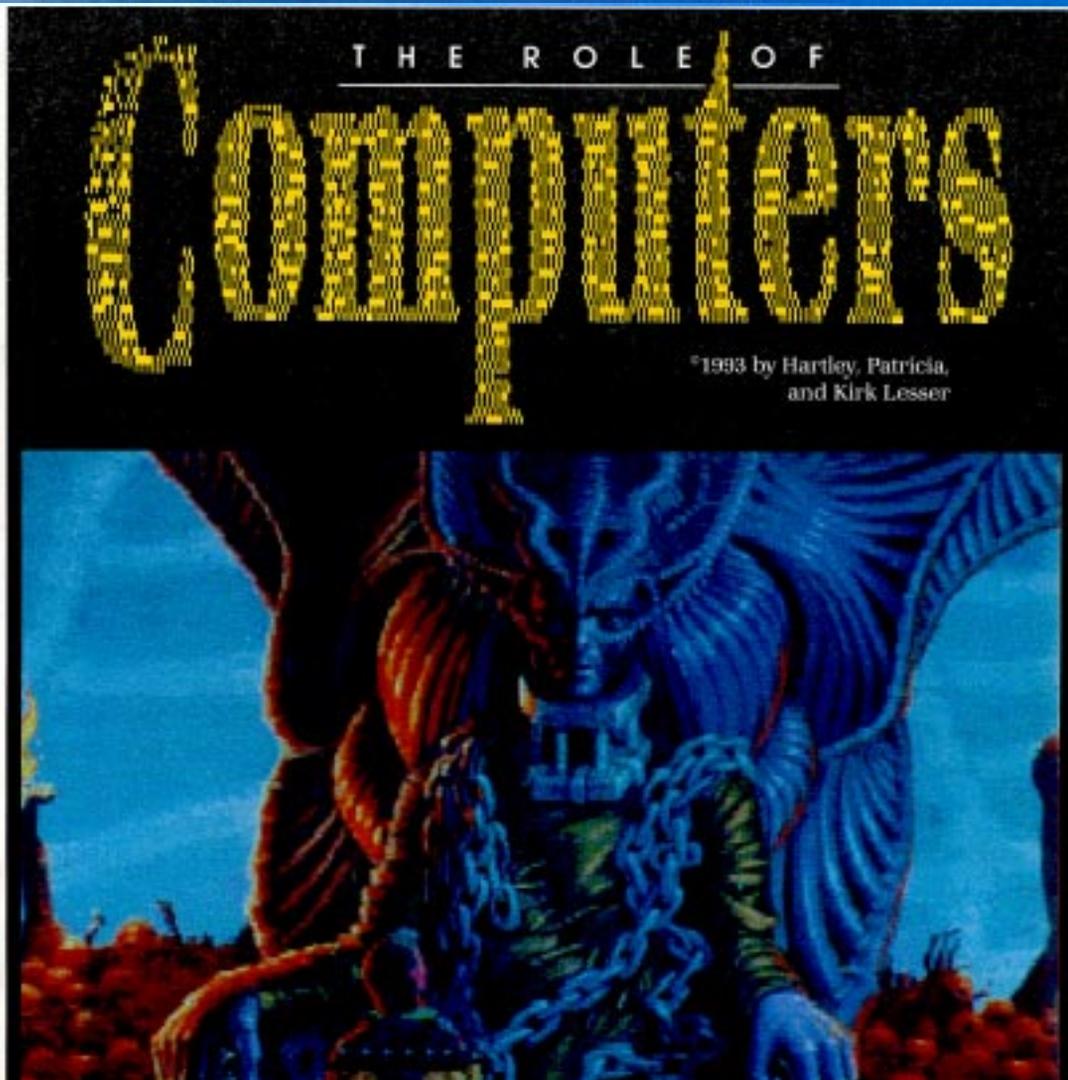
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King's Quest VI
(Sierra On-Line)

Play the best of King's Quest

KnightLine

We received a letter from a reader who doesn't like the fact that we seem to review only PC/MS-DOS games. He has an Amiga and knows there are plenty of games for that machine. True, there are! However, most games are now initially released in PC/MS-DOS format, with some in Macintosh format, so when we review a new game, you probably will see it reviewed under one of those system formats. Our experience tells us that the majority of games, when converted, play similarly, so when you read a review of a Macintosh or PC/MS-DOS game, the same comments should apply to an Amiga version as well.

Who says game companies don't listen to their customers? Impressions has sent out an upgrade disk to those who purchased *Air Bucks* after listening to your comments about how to improve the simulation. A new toolbar contains many key

commands, and an easy setting has been added to aid novice gamers. A new strategy guide has been included in the packaging, as well. And if you think this is something, version 1.2 will be ship in just a few months with 256-color artwork and a zoom mode!

New World Computing has licensed the original *Empire!* game and they've programmed some fantastic improvements to it including: Super VGA, as many as six players in a game, network and modem support, animation, advanced computer artificial intelligence and more. Also, during the first quarter of 1993, the company

will release *Might and Magic: Darkside of Xeen*. This stand-alone adventure can be combined with *Clouds of Xeen* to form a single huge game.

Strategic Simulations has a new 900 telephone number for hints or service questions. If you are under 18 years of age, check with your parents first before calling! The number is (900) 737-4468.

If you're an Apple II computer gamer and would like some information on a new fantasy role-playing game (FRPG) developed for that platform, we recommend that you contact Michael Mackay. All we have from Michael is his phone number, which is (715) 745-2810. The four disks that comprise the adventure cost \$20. Mike states the game is a continuous logic puzzle possessing "size and complexity with plots and subplots that should entertain hard-core gamers for weeks, or even months!" Because we no longer run Apple II games, we can't vouch for the game itself, but if one of you plays the

Computer games' ratings

| | |
|-------|-----------------|
| X | Not recommended |
| . | Poor |
| ** | Fair |
| *** | Good |
| **** | Excellent |
| ***** | Superb |

game, let us know how you like it.

Erik Lashufka of Newhall, Calif., writes, "I've heard about an on-line gaming network called America On-line. Do you have a phone number or an address I can contact to get more information?" We sure do, Erik. We are on this network often, especially in the games forum run by Bob Muligan. Call (800) 827-6364, extension 6394, and America On-line will send you a trial membership and some free connect time.

H.E.L.P.

Chris Savia, Springfield, N.J., writes, "I have three questions regarding *Wizardry 4: The Return of Werdna*, which I am playing on my Apple II c+ computer. First, which door has the golden Path? Which sword—red, blue, or green? And, what am I forgetting? Thanks for any help."

Our next question is from Geoff Oxnerd and is for all *Beyond Zork* experts: "How do you escape from inside the idol after the mother hungus eats the jewel and then leaves? And how do you escape from the wine cellar after you're locked in?"

Danny Pekofske of Stevens Point, Wis., has questions about *Eye of the Beholder II*. "I am having trouble with a room where a message on the wall reads 'You must leave many things behind.' I have covered every pressure plate with an item and still the door won't open. Also, in that same area, there's a door that leads to a room with many items and a strange door with many runes around it. What is that door and how do I get it to open?"

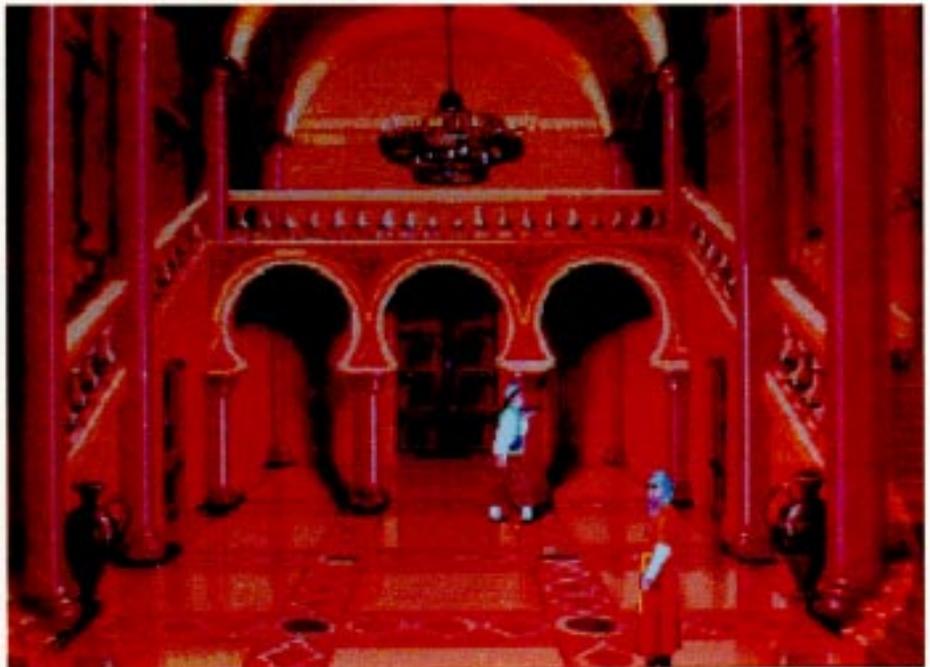
Bill Bailey of Elyria, Ohio, writes, "I have been playing *Pools of Darkness*—it's fun, but I have a problem. I went to kill Kalistes and I gave Elminster all of my equipment. I killed Kalistes and returned to Elminster, but he won't return my magical items to me. How am I supposed to get them back?"

Reviews

King's Quest VI

Sierra, PC/MS-DOS *****
Yes, this graphic quest is the next installment in one of the most popular adventure game series ever created. Roberta Williams has outdone herself—again. In *King's Quest VI* (KQ6), you are Prince Alexander. He is on a journey to rejoin Cassima, the princess that Alexander first rescued in KQ5. Unfortunately, upon finding the location of his heart-throb, he becomes entwined in the largest of the King's Quests.

The game requires about 15 megabytes (MB) of hard-drive space, and almost half of the game's puzzles are purely optional paths. The game uses the standard Sierra icon interface, and the animation and sounds are spectacular, as Sierra continues to produce software advances that gamers are now considering to be the



King's Quest VI (Sierra On-Line)

baseline for other entries into this market. The introduction takes around five MB on your hard drive, but it is astounding. The graphics are truly cinematic in approach, offering pure speech and 3-D modeling. The remainder of the game uses text windows to display information, a bit of a disappointment. If you think 15 MB of hard-drive space is necessary for a game, imagine what a truly interactive, multimedia game would require!

The KQ6 puzzles are quite difficult, and we saw many similarities to other computer games. For example, the map used to travel around the terrain, the pirate characters in the game's introduction, and even the way a certain inventory object (dangling participle) gets into our main character, all point to the *Monkey Island* game from LucasArts Games. KQ6 also displays themes from *Alice in Wonderland* and uses mythological beings and places such as the Isle of the Dead and the minotaur. However, it is the way Sierra uses these props to add to the game's entertainment value that makes this game shine.

Let's not mince words—KQ6 is, simply, the best King's Quest game yet and it is certainly one of the best adventure games on the market. It has enormous replay value, and it is challenging enough to keep the most avid player hooked for many days. The music and animation are exceptional, as is the story. Hats off to Sierra for another sparkling gem. This game was reviewed using VGA graphics and Soundblaster sound board. (Check out the "Clue corner" section for some gaming advice!)

Battle Chess Enhanced CD ROM *****

Interplay, Macintosh

If you've never played chess, this CD ROM game is reason to learn. Complete



with a 25-minute, fantastically animated and speech-synthesized tutorial, it teaches you to play chess by watching and absorbing the principles of the game as each chess piece describes, in fluid animation the role it plays in the game. For those who already know how to play, this chess game is a delightful enhancement to normal play. When you move and capture an opponent's piece, the chess pieces animate and engage in battle on the chessboard. Though they fight using their physical prowess, weapons mastery, or magic, the outcome is determined by your move. You'll watch and cheer your chess piece on as it eliminates the opposition with flair. With ten difficulty levels and an outstanding stereo music score, *Battle Chess Enhanced* is the perfect environment for chess enthusiasts who have been looking for a computer version with exceptional chess logic and an element of fun. This is certain to become a software classic. This game requires 256 colors, a CD-ROM drive, and System 6.0.7 or later.

Cobra Mission *****

MegaTech Software, PC/MS-DOS

Rarely do we find a program without some redeeming value. *Cobra Mission* is



Quest for Glory III: Wages of War (Sierra On-Line)



not only unsuitable, in our opinion, for many DRAGON® Magazine readers due to its explicit nudity, sexual connotations, and foul language, but it doesn't even pass as an interesting adventure. The cartoon-like animation is two-dimensional and left us feeling cheated. The illustrations retain the feel of the original Japanese program and are quite good, as far as static artwork is concerned. Some of the sentences read as though they have been mangled by a translator somewhere along the line. We recommend you leave this one on the shelf—don't waste your time! This game was reviewed using VGA graphics and AdLib sound board.

**Kingdoms of England II:
Vikings, Fields of Conquest**

Realism Entertainment, Amiga

Over the years, we've seen dozens of medieval strategy games for various computers. One of the better offerings is *Kingdoms of England II* (KOEII) for the Amiga computer. As many as six gamers may play this strategy game in a quest to become King of England. Since there can only be one king, differences of opinion are settled on the battlefield.

Becoming king is not easy—the computer-controlled opponents are just as

calculating as any human player. You can set up any combination of human and computer players.

The game is played in stages. In the first stage, you check the harvest for your controlled areas. Surplus food is good—not only can your surplus be sold to increase your treasury, but it can be sent to areas of your growing kingdom that run short. Once this stage is completed, you create armies, build shipyards and castles, and conquer land. More land increases your tax base, and thus your treasury. A larger treasury, combined with accumulated natural resources, allows you to expand your armies, enhance your castles, search for ore, and develop more farmland.

Each of your armies is comprised of any combination of swordsmen, archers, crossbowmen, pikemen, foot knights, mounted knights, champions, or a baron. Although the baron doesn't fight, he is required when you wish to move armies via ships (flotilla) from your port. But in order to build *anything*, you need coin and natural resources. For example, to build a keep (the next step up from a tower outpost), you must have 20 gold, 10 wood, 12 stone, and five iron units. It takes two turns to build. Then you can start to populate your keep with soldiers, maybe even a catapult or two to really give it defensive capabilities.

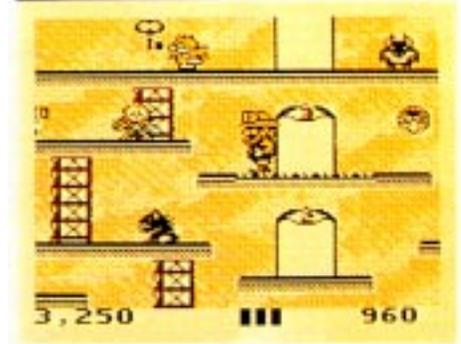
We do wish there was a way for you to override viewing opposing, computer-controlled kings' movement, as it slows the pace of this game. Also, we could rename only the first of the six kings—the program would not allow us to change any of the other kings' names.

The graphics are not overdone, and some might even be called minimal. There are no sound effects, but the game plays well and holds your interest. If you

are an Amiga gamer who enjoys strategy games, take a look at KOEII at your local retailer to see if it meets your criteria for a strategy game—it certainly met ours!

Miner 2049er

Software Toolworks, Nintendo Game Boy



Many years ago, the Apple II computer was the platform for a new arcade game. The game was exciting, it sold well, and it introduced a new character to the gaming community, miner Bounty Bob. To our surprise and delight, he's back in *Miner 2049er* for the Game Boy video-game system.

Yes, Bounty Bob's stuck once again in that blasted, contaminated uranium mine, and not only does he have to escape, but he's got to rescue Yukon Yohan who was trapped in the explosion. But there's all types of impediments, from nasty mutants to slippery slides and suction tubes. With 10 levels of action (because that's what level Yukon is on), this one will take you some time to master. You must get through every station before time runs out and stake your claim. (We recommend that you always check *under* the slides to ensure you don't miss making your claim.) Easy to learn, with smooth animation and great sound effects, *Miner 2049er* is a treat for any Game Boy enthusiast.

Quest for Glory III: Wages of War *****
Sierra, PC/MS-DOS

This is by far the finest of the *Quest for Glory* adventures created by Lori and Corey Cole. It also happens to be one of the most detailed graphic adventures released by any company, with a storyline is replete with new and interesting characters. The animation is well-plotted and planned—you'd swear at times you're looking at a movie that you can interact with. *Quest for Glory III (QFG3)* is a delightful repast in a market filled with junk food.

The Liontaurs are threatened by warring tribes. It's up to you to bring peace to the land in a deadly but engaging adventure. All of the art is hand-painted and digitized, with many of the animated sequences actually video-captured and then digitized to your computer screen.

Although you needn't have played any of the previous adventures to play QFG3, you can import your character from those

shaped through the course of events you select during the adventure. The more you do, the more experience you gain, and the stronger (physically and mentally) your character becomes. With magic and your weapon at hand, you'll find QFG3 one of the finest graphic adventures you've played.

There are many paths you can take through the game, allowing you to replay the game, trying new routes and making new decisions. At the game's outset, you must decide whether you wish your hero to be a fighter, a magic-user, or a thief. (For your first time through QFG3, go with the fighter!)

The interface for play is easy to use. Simply move your cursor to the top of the screen to view the special action icon bar and six icons appear: Run, Sneak, and Sleep are obvious. The Character icon lets you review the character sheet, while the Hourglass icon offers you information on game time as well as the current day. The Question Mark defines the other icons when you move its cursor over them.

To survive you have to eat, and that means a couple of meals each day. If you are packing rations, this process is automatic—otherwise, you'll have to search for food. Without rest, you'll consume points for spells, stamina, and health very quickly. If you must rest outdoors, start a campfire to prevent an overabundance of nasties from treating you like a delicacy.

We recommend that you speak with everyone you meet. When you use the Talk icon on another character, the game offers you a list of conversational choices. Write down what you're told! Many times, a NPC answer can and will lead you into deeper conversation for additional information. If combat becomes necessary (and it will), a **combat menu** appears, a different combat menu depending on your character type (fighter, thief, or magic-user). The actions you can select from the menu to fighting opponents range from parrying to swinging with your weapon. Your character is a magic-user, the selections covers your available spells.

QFG3 is highly recommended for gamers who enjoy graphic adventure games. QFG3 is also a great way to start a graphic adventuring experience, as it combines the best of technology and plot in a unified and interesting package. We highly recommend this adventure game to PC/MS-DOS gamers. We reviewed this game using VGA graphics Roland CM-32L. LA sound module, AdLib sound board.

Shadowlands

Domark, PC/MS-DOS

Despite a frustrating interface that takes some time to learn, this is quite an interesting FRPG. You have four game characters, that you can operate either as a



Waxworks (Accolade Software)

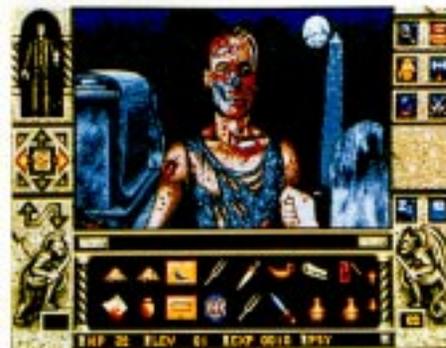
squad or as independents during the course of the adventure. Unfortunately, you have to access a character icon's arms, legs, or head in order for them to attack, pick up objects, read messages, and so on. The time required to move from the main screen to the specific icons for combat can be quite costly to your character's health! If you have one character in the lead, the other three characters do as he does, unless you specify the leader is an independent.

Using a technique called Photoscape, light in the 3-D Shadowlands is related directly to its source. Shadows and a true sense of atmosphere are relayed to the gamer—light plays a critical role in your success in this adventure. The frustration of this game's interface did detract from an otherwise highly interesting game. You probably should test this offering for yourself at your local dealer to see if it belongs in your software library. We think the adventure has definite merit and certainly consider *Shadowlands* a keeper. We played this game using VGA graphics and Thunder Board sound card.

Waxworks

Accolade, PC/MS-DOS

Be warned: In this horror adventure, death is not a pretty sight. The story background is rather intriguing—your brother Alex is long dead, yet you continue to feel his presence. Your Uncle Boris' Waxworks is filled with evil mementoes. And now Uncle Boris is dead, with no one left to mourn him, save you. A clap of thunder, scared gravediggers, and your uncle's coffin falls into the freshly dug hole but when you look in, there is no bottom to



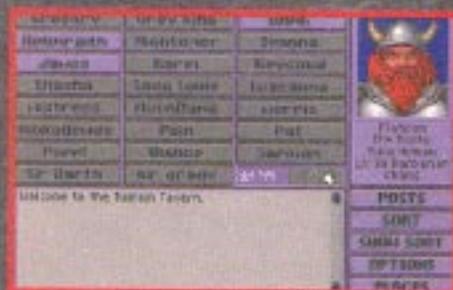
the grave, only a black void. It seems both your brother and your uncle have been swallowed by the earth itself.

The funeral director knew that the ground beneath the cemetery was rife with shafts and mine tunnels, so he knew a cave-in was possible. But you thought differently and nightmares raced through your sleep that night. You recall the conversations with Boris about Ixaona, a dark family secret. During the Middle Ages, Ixaona had been caught stealing a chicken by one of your ancestors. Her right hand was removed with the chop of an ax, and she cursed your family, one of whom was none other than Vlad the Impaler.

Ixaona's curse has continued to work through the ages—whenever twins were born, one became evil. Boris surrounded himself with evil at his home to learn everything he could about it, and he recovered Ixaona's skeleton and a crystal ball found within a box about her neck. He worked for years trying to understand the crystal ball, swearing he would lift the curse.

A call from the funeral director the next day confirmed that a mine shaft had

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opened beneath his grave. Boris' coffin was found. . . but the body was gone. You search the mine shaft with a lantern and find bat bones gnawed upon by human teeth! You also found the tracks of cloven hooves in the dust. Something was living in this tunnel. You fled.

Your attorney volunteers to handle the sale of the Waxworks and also gives you an envelope from your uncle. The letter reveals that your brother Alex is alive beneath Vista Forge, but he only leaves his lair at night. He does the bidding of Beelzebub and he has been given dominion over the demons of the past. You must defeat your brother and go to the Waxworks where you will travel through time, through the supernatural . . . and into blood-chilling adventure!

Waxworks truly is an unforgettable horror adventure. With superb VGA graphics, blood-curdling sound effects, and a graphic interface that is easy to learn and use, *Waxworks* leads you into quests you have never experienced before. The graphics are gruesome, and young children should *not* play this game. Death is a grisly experience, especially when it's your own. Horrorsoft, who designed the program, spared no detail in displaying gory deaths. However, for adults, *Waxworks* is a highly entertaining adventure. The simple-to-learn point-and-click interface makes the quests no-effort delights that will certainly thrill and excite adventurers.

There are four waxworks "scenes": an Egyptian tomb, a graveyard complete with wax zombies, Jack the Ripper scene, and a mine complete with a rampaging plant monster.

You must enter all of the scenes during the adventure, but the specific order really doesn't matter. We found that the Mine scenario was the best one to start with because you are given a good chance to defeat the first "things" you encounter, allowing you to explore and find needed items throughout the mine. For some specific hints regarding the mine scenario, see "Clue corner," below.

Aside from the level of violence and graphic horror in this adventure, *Waxworks* is a very well written adventure. The sound effects and music enhance play greatly, and you'll have a scary time trying to save the world from your brother. You should check this one out at your retailer to see if it's your cup of tea, er, blood! We reviewed this game using VGA graphics, a Thunder Board from Media Vision, and a Roland CM-32L LA Sound Module.

Wolfenstein 3-D

Apogee Software, PC/MS-DOS computers

A recent arcade-adventure game has come to our attention. The game is *Wolfenstein 3-D* (W3D) and it is definitely one of the best arcade games ever created for PC/MS-DOS gamers, created by a com-

pany that makes shareware for PC/MS-DOS machines. The graphics and sounds are fantastic, but the best news is, the entire game requires less than three megabytes of media storage on your computer. It's World War II, and as B. J. Blazkovicz, you face Hitler's most evil troops and try to unravel a horrible secret.

Six episodes are available ranging from escaping a dungeon, and destroying a scientist's laboratory, to facing Hitler himself. The unique approach that we enjoyed most is that the adventure is completely three dimensional, similar in effect to the first-person perspective offered in Origin's *Ultima Underground*. By using the joy stick, mouse, or keyboard, you can walk, run, turn, and hide behind walls, doors and other objects, with extraordinary effects on screen.

While running around the 7-9 levels per episode, you meet Nazis with pistols, SS troops with machine guns and bullet-proof vests, attack dogs, and other nasties—including an undead mutant. Most of the enemies are intelligent: They hide from your gunfire, use available cover, or try to outflank you. You're not helpless, however, as you can pick up machine guns and chain guns to aid you in your journey.

Game play is simple. You have an ammo count and health percentage display at the bottom of the screen. By entering rooms, you can collect ammo, food to restore your health, or keys that open specific doors on certain levels of the game. Treasure scattered in the rooms adds points to your score—if you have enough points, you are granted another life. You'll also find secret panels that can lead to additional treasure, food, ammunition, or possibly an encounter with Germany's bad boys.

The game is fun and exciting. Be warned though, the graphics are bloody. Dead soldiers actually bleed and sometimes scream when shot. If you're looking for fast-paced action, look no further, for W3D is a game that will keep you rooted to your seat for weeks. It is well worth the money invested in its purchase. A roaring success, W3D proves that not *all* of the best games have to come from mammoth software publishers. We reviewed this game using VGA graphics and a Soundblaster card.

Clue corner

Bard's Tale II

This trick allows your characters to advance more quickly and is especially helpful in obtaining more hit points, spell points, and spells. You need a Destiny Knight, the character you wish to advance, and a Jack of Spades monster (found in the first level of the Destiny Stone). Put the Jack of Spades in front of

your part, then the Destiny Knight, and then your character. Go outside the inn and do Party Attack. Keep attacking the Jack of Spades until he drains a level from both of your characters. Also cast Restoration in case the monster is losing too many hit points. Once he drains both your characters, cast Camaraderie on the monster to stop the Party Attack. Release the monster after the combat and take your characters to the temple and get your life force back. After that, go to the Review Board and advance both characters.

David Dyne
Holliston, Mass.

Crusaders of the Dark Savant

1. We recommend saving your game after every successful encounter or major find!

2. Be certain one member of your party possesses the Diplomacy skill. This is critical. To obtain this skill, PER and KAR must be above 14. A Lord, Bishop, or Priest character can have this skill, so roll for one of them.

3. To obtain the map, you've got to find the lagoon. We agree with the tipsters from Sir-Tech that darts are in order.

4. In order to defeat the code in the prison, you might want to check out the Black Wafer. . . if you have it.

5. The Black Wafer is usable in the Forbidden Zone.

6. The Curio Museum requires a coin—now, where do you think such a coin would normally be found?

7. "The Black Market" may allow you arms.

8. Professor Wunderland has the key to entering the Old City in the Condemned Area. You should Archive this information.

9. The Witch Mountains are to the northeast.

The Lessers

King's Quest V

1. Journey to Serenia, enter a store, and then exit. Take the fish from the barrel, and pick up the coin. Now, walk to the beehive and throw the fish to the bear. Take honeycomb from the hive. Also, pick up the stick on the ground. Walk to the ant hill and throw the stick for the dog. You can then journey to the haystack next to the Swarthy Hog Inn. Search it, and you'll be aided by the ants you helped earlier—they'll retrieve the golden needle for you. Give the needle to the tailor in Serenia, in exchange for a cloak. Also, visit the Bakery and purchase the custard pie with your silver coin.

2. Journey into the maze-like desert and stop to drink at the oasis five screens to the left of the beehive. Then, move on to the skeleton and take the old shoe. Return to the Bakery and throw the shoe at the cat to earn the rat's gratitude. Return to the desert and visit the temple. Hide behind the rocks as the bandits arrive,

wait for them to leave, and then travel to the Bandit's Camp. Steal the staff from the smaller tent. Return to the temple, open the door, and enter. Quickly take the brass lamp and the gold coin, and then leave. Visit the Gypsy Caravan, and pay your gold coin. Madame Mushka will give you information and the magic amulet.

3. First, use the magic amulet on Grahm. Then you can avoid the evil witch's spell. Enter the dark forest and find the witch. Give her the brass lamp from the desert and she will become imprisoned inside it. Go into the witch's tower and, in the first room, get the spinning wheel from the closet, the key from the incense burner, and the leather pouch from the drawer. Use the key on the small door in Dark Forest, and then get the golden heart. Walk to the screen left from the witch's tower and squeeze the honeycomb on the ground. Next, open the leather pouch and take the three emeralds. Use all three to lure an elf out from the brush. He'll give you the Elfin shoes and help you leave the Dark Forest.

4. Once you have left the Dark Forest, go to visit the Willow Tree. Give her the golden heart and then take her mahogany harp. Journey to Serenia and give the Elfin shoes to the shoemaker. In return, you'll receive a cobbler's hammer. Go to the Swarthy Hog Inn and allow yourself to be knocked unconscious by the men inside. In the cellar, you'll be aided by the rat you saved. Now use the cobbler's hammer on the lock of the cellar. Exit to the kitchen where you get a leg of lamb from the cupboard. Leave the inn.

5. Journey to the gnomes and offer the grandfather the spinning wheel from the witch. In return, he gives you his grandson's marionette. Enter Serenia and get the sled from the toy maker in trade for the marionette. Head to the Gypsy Camp, but don't be surprised if the clearing is empty. Take the tambourine from the ground and to go the Crossroads. Use the tambourine on the snake to scare it away. Next, follow the icy path. Remember to put on the cloak you got from the tailor. When you come to the waterfall, use the rope on the jutting rock, not the tree! Climb the rope.

6. After climbing the rope, cross the waterfall by jumping on the snowy ledges, then walk across the log. In the next screen, eat some of the meat from the inn and use the sled to get down the hill. You'll lose the sled at the bottom. When you come to the eagle, give him the rest of your food. When Icebella sends her wolves at you, play the harp.

Don Isaak
Seattle, Wash.

King's Quest VI

1. On the Isle of Wonder, you might consider "boring" to be the key to the pearl.

2. On the Isle of the Beast, use lettuce to

cool things off.

3. On the Isle of Wonder a Dangling Participle can help you obtain a rare book.

4. On the Isle of Wonder, distract the spider to obtain the paper that says something endearing.

5. On the Isle of the Crown, a playable instrument and a royal ring can be found at the Pawn Shop.

6. On the Isle of the Crown, perhaps the ring can fly to Cassima.

7. On the Isle of Wonder, something musical may show the way to the hole-in-the-wall.

8. On the Isle of the Crown, you may have to exchange something to obtain the tinder box.

9. On the Isle of the Sacred Mountain, get through the spikes by jumping onto the correct tiles.

10. On the Isle of the Mists, look in the fire pit to obtain something lumpy.

The Lessers

Quest for Glory III: Wages of War

1. When the robber steals in the north bazaar, do something, no matter your character class.

2. Ask Kreesha about Magic, Staff, and Ritual.

3. A water skin is a vital purchase, as are a tinderbox, a black bird, rope, and honey.

4. Acrobatics are worth the cost for training.

5. You can't make any purchases until you have Royals.

6. Whenever you see a monster, save your game! If you defeat the critter, use the Hand icon to find any treasure on it.

7. To get rewards in the Venomous Vine Room, watch the Meerbats for a time.

Then, leave the room and return to watch them again. When one of the Meerbats gets caught in a vine, use your sword (if you are a Paladin or a Fighter) on the vine to allow the Meerbat to escape. Now, select a Healing Pill and click it on the Meerbat to heal it. When you leave, your reward appears on the rocks. Use the Hand icon to retrieve it and then use a Cure Pill on yourself.

8. Playing Awari increases your intelligence—the more you play, the smarter you become.

9. Stamina can be recovered by drinking from the Pool of Peace after you fill your water skins.

10. The spear throwing room in the Simbani village is a great place to practice. A thief might consider practicing with a dagger, though, instead of a spear.

11. Be sure to practice hand-over-hand and walking across the Wrestling Bridge. A thief might also consider balancing practice here.

12. Beads, a superb dagger, and a leopard carving from the Katta make fine gifts for your bride.

The Lessers

Warlords

1. The neutral cities are your key to success in the beginning of the game. Capture as many as can, but avoid giving others cause to fight you.

2. Frugality is worthwhile—only build towers when you think it is critical to your strategy.

3. You need strong, fast armies that can be created as quickly as possible.

4. Always use two armies to capture a city. Assault the city using your weakest army first, to break down the opposition. Then, bring in your better troops to finish it off.

5. Neutral cities near temples should be on your immediate capture list.

6. Counterattack immediately after losing a city.

7. Early in the game, it is far more important to "acquire" magically-empowered friends than magical items.

8. At least one of your cities should build flying armies. You should also have one navy at your command.

9. Look for and hold areas that limit passage by enemy troops, such as passes and bridges. Once held, attack neutral cities nearby.

10. Specify exactly what each of your heroes should do. Keep them on track throughout the game.

11. Wise commanders only alienate one enemy at a time. This also makes it more likely that your enemies will attack each another first, weakening them for your assaults later. Ravage enemy-held interior cities first and then attack the frontier cities.

The Lessers

Thanks for your cards and letters. Don Isaak has been submitting hints and tips for our readers for many months! His dedication to the readers of this column is impressive, and we'd like to thank him! To help Don in providing important game hints, mail your insights to: Clue Corner, c/o The Lessers, 521 Czerny Street, Tracy CA 95376. Until next month, game on!

Ω



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NOVEL

I · D · E · A · S

How I spent my summer vacation (in Hell)

by Rob King

When I began to write this article about the 1993 RAVENLOFT® novels, I asked, "Do you want me to write as an author or as an editor?" "Both," came the reply. It's an odd and, I must admit, somewhat incestuous position I hold. As a matter of course, I strive to make a clear distinction between those roles, though occasionally I cannot ignore the fact that I am a dual-class character. Now is one of those occasions. Here goes:

When novels first ventured into the

intrepid leadership, we discovered that Gothic horror is a very different beast than heroic fantasy. Indeed, it is a were-beast. Recognizing this, editor Jim Lowder plotted out a novel series that would allow for individual stories whose characters would (fortunately) not need to survive from one book to the next. His plan of action proved a good one for 1991 and 1992. But after stories about vampires, death knights, zombies, and werewolves, the line was looking to expand into new

That's where *Tapestry of Dark Souls* originated. Seeking an experienced horror writer, Jim contracted Elaine Bergstrom, author of *Shattered Glass*, *Blood Alone*, *Blood Rites*, and *Daughter of the Night*. These books all deal with the Austra clan of vampires, and critics who have read them hail Bergstrom as one of "modern-day architects of vampire lore" (Mark Williams, *Onyx* magazine).

But the novel line wasn't looking for another vampire story. Not yet. Elaine had



husband and wife become lost on a dusty back road and encounter a little chapel that guards a tapestry of unspeakable evil. Great stuff, but in the wrong world. By removing the action from the modern American west to the dark domains and by heightening the preternatural and fantastical elements of the story, Elaine created one hell of a good RAVENLOFT novel.

Leith and her husband Vhar become lost along the road to a merchant festival and happen into Markovia, land of the beastmen. There, they discover a monastery, the Guardians who tend it, and the shimmering tapestry of dark souls that they guard. But Leith soon learns that the Guardians do not protect the tapestry from the outside world, but the world from the tapestry. The cloth was originally devised to cleanse the land of evil by drawing corrupt souls into its shimmering web and trapping them there. Now, though, the web is so full of evil creatures that it's shifting surface seems like an Hieronymus Bosch painting of hell. And one of the dark souls has a plan for releasing them all.

Tapestry of Dark Souls is fast paced and fascinating, with loads of interesting characters and a completely new approach to Gothic horror. Elaine's lush narrative deftly dances through a genre that all too often lends itself to cliché. But Elaine's

book is anything but cliched. The closest comparison I can make is to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, though that comparison breaks down in the many scenes that take place outside the monastery.

Enough of my ramblings about *Tapestry*. Read it for yourself and see what I mean. It hit bookstores this March.

The second RAVENLOFT novel of 1993, *Carnival of Fear*, also extends the line from its purely Gothic roots. In fact, this is the first RAVENLOFT novel set in an all-new domain—the land of I'Morai. On a high, lonely heath rests the sprawling Carnival of I'Morai, peopled by performers of all descriptions. In addition to sword swallows, fire breathers, jugglers, harlequins, tumblers, and other common carnival workers, the Carnival of I'Morai is home to freaks.

Arkoo is a leopard boy—his head is human, his arms and legs are a fusion of feline and human traits, and his hind legs are fully those of a leopard. Oreaux is an oracular madman who, from his imprisonment in a restraining chair, pronounces faultless prophecies. Karrick is a knifeman: His bones create knives that push outward toward the skin like the emerging teeth of a baby. In the human land of I'Morai, even elves and dwarfs "the Feral Folk of Faerie"—are numbered

among the freaks.

A murder occurs along the sideshow boardwalks, and the performers and freaks band together to find the killer. Before their task is done, though, they will wish they never began the investigation.

When I devised *Carnival of Fear*, I wanted to try a completely new approach to Gothic horror. Despite all of its theological and philosophical underpinnings, my first book, *Heart of Midnight*, is a werewolf book, plain and simple. It is also centered on a very internal, personal conflict. With *Carnival of Fear*, I sought to write a story that, like Elaine's, resisted simple classification. I also wanted the book to explore external, social conflicts, expanding the basis of horror beyond the individual to the society.

As to the quality of *Carnival*, I am the worst judge. Sure, I think it's great, and Bob Dylan thinks he can sing. Those who have read it have told me, though, that it is twice the book *Heart of Midnight* was. Very relative praise. Once again, the best way to know is to read it yourself. *Carnival of Fear* comes out in July of this year.

The third, and truly the ultimate, RAVENLOFT novel of 1993 is P. N. Elrod's hardcover *I, Strahd*. That's right, *hardcover*. With this volume, the RAVENLOFT novel line has come of age, and what better story for this format than the tragic

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tale of Strahd Von Zarovich, vampire lord of Barovia and cynosure of evil throughout the dark domains?

Not just anybody could write a convincing story from the point of view of a vampire. Especially not *the* vampire. P. N. Elrod not only can do it, she *did* do it. Impressed by Pat's Vampire Files series for Ace (*Bloodlist*, *Lifeblood*, *Bloodcircle*, *Art in the Blood*, *Fire in the Blood*, and *Blood on the Water*), TSR Book department executive editor Brian Thomsen contacted Elrod to write the story of Strahd.

The protagonist of the Vampire Files, Jack Fleming, is a vampire who narrates the story of his own life, much like Strahd in his memoirs. But that's where the comparison of the two vampires ends. Jack is a 1930s reporter. Strahd is a dictator in medieval Barovia. Jack has a hard-boiled, Bogart-like quality about him. Strahd has a warlord's honor and an artist's passion. According to Elrod, one of the other main differences between them is that "Strahd is a bad guy, but doesn't see himself as being evil; the villains of the world do not see themselves in that light. Hitler certainly didn't. I'm really not interested in vampires as monsters. If I want monsters, I can turn on the evening news."

With *I, Strahd* and her upcoming novels *Red Death* and *Death and the Maiden*,

Elrod will have written nine novels that center around vampires. When I asked Pat about this apparent fascination with the undead, her initial response was, "It stems from watching a lot of old movies during the summer and reading *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine." After a few moment's pause, Pat added, "They're very sexual creatures for me, so it goes straight to the hormones. Every time Christopher Lee bites into a woman's neck, I know she feels really great."

In writing these RAVENLOFT novels, Pat and Elaine have shifted from writing independent fiction to writing shared-world stuff. Pat puts it eloquently: "It was a lot of fun. You have to adhere to someone else's rules, so you are either forced into cliché, or forced to become more creative working within the parameters." Like Elaine, Pat took the latter route and came up with a damned good story.

When I, Strahd appeared on the schedule, I had my doubts as to whether anyone could do justice to the story of Strahd from his own point of view. Elrod did. I must say that I am very impressed.

So, where does the RAVENLOFT novel line go from here? As the line seems to have reached a certain maturity, it's time to reflect on the past and learn from it. Titles like *Vampire of the Mists*, *Knight of the Black Rose*, *Dance of the Dead*, and

Heart of Midnight have shown the strength of stories about traditional Gothic horror monsters and situations. *Tapestry of Dark Souls* and *Carnival of Fear* demonstrate the versatility of the genre. They also show and the place and function of social and cerebral horror. *I, Strahd* has taught us that when you pair up a good author with a bad vampire in a hardcover format, you're likely to end up with a product so hot that Waldenbooks will have to use oven mitts just to keep the shelves stocked.

The upshot? In the words of Brian Thomsen, the RAVENLOFT novel line in 1994 will take the best of what has gone before and balance it. Every year will feature one or two traditional Gothic tales, perhaps a few experimental stories, and maybe another hardcover. We'll see.

How about Strahd? Will we see more of him in the future? You bet. A vampire lord who's lived for nearly four centuries has a lot more unlife than can be revealed in one reading. Besides, if the other editors and I suddenly came to possess an unhealthy disregard for the master vampire's ego, it could very well mean our necks.

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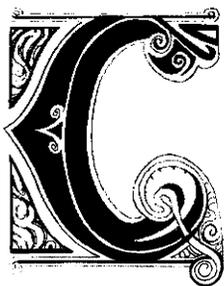
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DRAGON 67





Carik craned his neck, anxiously studying the wooded hills ahead. He was a big young man, brawny and solid and simple looking like most men born of the mountainfolk of old. But unlike them, his face was clean shaven and his eyes, instead of the usual earthy brown, were an uncommon green-blue, the color of strange and distant seas. He wore a steel

helm and a sturdy coat of mail, and carried a long sword at his side. Ahead rose the wild foothills that stood before the Middle Mountains, part of the Great Elstains that stretched across the north-kingdoms for hundreds of miles like the spines along a dragon's back. On either side of the road were fields of barley and wheat, tall grain-heavy stalks that should have been harvested weeks ago—a sure sign of trouble. He didn't like it one bit, and his hand rested nervously on his sword hilt.

"Well, I've got no one to blame but me," he muttered.

"What?" asked his companion, Yorman of Akuthar.

"I said, there's nothing here I can see," answered Carik.

"Maybe we missed the place!"

Yorman was shorter and thinner than Carik, but his dark eyes looked fearlessly from a hawkish face framed by black shoulder-length hair. He carried a scimitar at his side and wore a steel-studded leather jerkin over his scarlet tunic, but he was no swordsman. The House of Akuthar was famous and feared for its sorcery. Now he shook his dark head. "They said the place was six hills from the Brown-water Bridge, past a stand of pig-oaks, and up a fork in the road. We've passed a bridge, six hills, and an oak-thicket. And what's that?" He pointed ahead to where the road forked off up into the hills.

"A fork in the road," answered Carik, "like a hundred other forks, hills, bridges and oaks!"

"Then let's ask *him*," suggested Yorman, pointing into a wheat field. A peasant, almost obscured by the tall stalks, was busily cutting down the grain with a sickle while a boy behind him piled the fallen stalks onto a cart. Before Carik could think of a reason not to, Yorman shouted, "Ho, fellow! Come here!" The man tramped through a sickled-down swath to the road, the boy at his heels.

"What's this?" asked the peasant, looking up scornfully from under a shapeless cap of dirty grey wool at the two riders. "Knights from Lord Thargum, by my eyes! Looky here, Griffy! Right quick they came—after a hundred summons and a day late! 'Tis a right good thing we work and pay our tithes, so we can be ignored! Bah!" The peasant put his finger on one nostril and emptied the other on the ground in front of Yorman's horse. Yorman was too appalled to respond.

"We're not—" began Carik, but the peasant snapped his fingers at him.

"Ride on back to Thargum! We here took care of our own problems, so you can tell 'im to just go back to fightin' with t'other lords and trampin' and burnin' their poor folks' fields while his own go to rot! You just tell 'im Widfut of Weefield told 'im so!"

"Right!" said the boy with a wide grin, snapping his dirty fingers at Yorman.

The Heroes of Weefield

By Mitchell Diamond

Illustrations by Tom Baxa

"We're not from Thargum!" Carik managed to say at last.

"Free-sworders, eh?" answered Widfut. "You've heard of our troubles, have you, and figured on plying your trade here? Well, that's a fine and good thing, to profit by other folks' woe!"

"A fine an' good thing!" echoed the boy, snapping his fingers at Carik. Then he said "Ow!" as Widfut slapped the back of his young head.

"No, it ain't no fine and good thing!" snapped Widfut. "It's hardly somethin' to be proud of! Hardly better than those useless knights!"

"Right!" echoed Griff. "Hardly better!"

"We're from no lord," said Yorman at last. "I am Yorman of the House of Akuthar, son of Yizkor, son of Zykor, son of Anzjem the Great, who fought the dragon Gorgin the Horrendous and saved all the north-kingdoms!" He shifted his cloak to display a red-gold dragon medallion, the proud crest of Akuthar, that hung over his chest on a silver chain.

"Never heard of any of 'em!" said Widfut. "An' we got no dragons hereabouts, thank Thull! But we got an ogre, and he's tall as a tree, hungry as a wolf, and mean as a bear with a belly-ache. Half a dozen good folk he ate if he ate one, and I'd wager my last tooth he'd have ate you up, too. Lucky for you we got ourselves a proper hero, Armguard."

"Armguard the Squire?" repeated Carik, sitting up in his saddle. "As in *Boldarius* and Armguard?"

"T'same, though we just got Armguard. But he's a proper lookin' hero, with a sword twice as big as yours and armor all gleamin'. Even his horse had a better lookin' coat than yours. Rode in last night and out this morn', and by the time I get back this eve' he'll have the ogre's head, I reckon. So just ride on your way, or ride up the fork a bit, if you want to see a right good and proper hero at his trade. Now I'm off, I've three week's work to do today."

"Right!" said Griff, then "Ow!" as Widfut grabbed his filthy head of tangles and hauled him back into the field.

"What a wretched, ignorant fellow," said Yorman haughtily, watching the pair trudge away. "But I told you we were in the right place."

"So you did," agreed Carik, "and so we are! But it's been a wasted ride. Armguard probably has the ogre cut to pieces by now. Let's ride back to—"

"Let's go see!" interrupted Yorman. "Maybe you can give him a hand. After all, didn't you kill the ogre of Blackleaf Forest?"

"I suppose, well, I mean, sure I did," answered Carik, and he secretly sighed. The night before, they had been drinking in an alehouse in the village of Stonebare, where Yorman had tried to profit from his famous name by doing fire tricks and making candle-flames run around the room. He had been too tired, he had said, to do anything more impressive, though Carik knew that such simple tricks were all Yorman could do, and sometimes even they went amiss. But the villagers had been too polite to insult him by

throwing coins. Although they had never heard of the name of Akuthar before Yorman announced it, they assumed it was famous and powerful somewhere, and besides, they were a tight-fisted bunch at best. But the simple sorceries had impressed a pretty young cupmaid, and Carik (who had quaffed one ale too many) became jealous and began boasting of how he slew the Ogre of Blackleaf Forest. He made a good tale of it and was rewarded by the maid's wide-eyed gaze. But the villagers followed his tale with one about the Ogre of Weefield—and that beast was still there! Yorman, who was jealous over losing the attentions of the maid, had proudly declared that they would slay the brute, and Carik had been too ale-addled to get himself out of it.

So here they were. Carik sighed again and hoped that the ogre had already been dealt with, then heeled his horse and followed Yorman up the fork and into the hills.

The fork soon turned into a winding track, little used save by huntsmen and wild beasts. Yorman led the way, pushing through tangled brairs and hanging branches until they caught the gleam of mail through the trees. In a shadowy glade they found an elderly man clad in mail and plate. His helm was off, and his mail coif was pulled down around his neck. He was sitting on a fallen log and whetting a sword. A mail-barded horse stood behind him, nosing at the clover.

"Ho, Armguard!" called Yorman.

"Have you killed the ogre?" added Carik hopefully. The old man stood up, straightening his knees with a wince.

"Nay, not yet," he answered. "I was just off to do it! And who are you to ask?"

"I am Yorman of the House of Akuthar, son of Yizkor—" Yorman ran through his usual titles, and Armguard shrugged.

"I've never heard of any of them," he said. "But I've never had much cause to deal with sorcerers. Who's the big one?"

"He's Carik," answered Yorman with a scowl, but honesty made him add, "He slew the Ogre of Blackleaf Forest." Armguard raised his grey eyebrows, and Carik fidgeted under the old man's appraising look.

"Well!" exclaimed the old warrior. "Of that brute I've heard! Tell me lad, what manner of stroke did you use?"

Carik fidgeted even more. "It was dark," he muttered by way of answer, "and what with strokes flying about and such, I don't really remember."

"That's the way it goes, oft times," agreed Armguard. "In the heat of a fight, the best blow is forgot!" Then he sighed. "But that's too bad. I'm not too old to learn something new, and this is the first ogre I've ever faced!"

"Really?" said Carik. "Between you and your Master Boldarius . . . Say, where is he, anyway?"

Armguard sighed. "A sad tale that. Brave Boldarius ended his career in Ironhammer Valley."

"Giant?" guessed Carik, knowing something of that valley as his homeland of Uree Valley was just to the north. But Armguard shook his head.

"Dragon," he said. "But that's the way of the world. Sure as a hero picks up his sword, it shall one day fall. Poor luck though, that no bard was about to see his last battle. T'was

too good for my words. By the way, have you seen a greenish dragon roaming about anywhere, as long as four horses nose to tail, with a chipped fang on the left side?"

"You mean the dragon still lives?" asked Carik. "Boldarius was never avenged?"

"Not as yet," sighed the old warrior. "Never before had I failed him; they don't call me 'Armguard' for naught! But by the time I piled a fitting cairn for Boldarius, the day was late and the dragon was gone. I followed it for a goodly long time though, long enough to get lost and run into Stonefist the Giant."

"Stonefist!" exclaimed Carik, having heard of the biggest, meanest giant of Ironhammer Valley. "Did you kill him? Gods, what a tale that would make!" But Armguard shook his head again.

"Not really. The giant lived atop a mountain, and since I hadn't a rope to save me I couldn't match my sword against him, either. So I wandered my way south until I came to the Hidden Lands."

"The Hidden Lands!" repeated Carik. Then he frowned. "Just how long ago did Boldarius fall, anyway?"

Armguard scratched his grey head. "Hmm, let's see. About twenty years, or thereabouts."

"Twenty years!" exclaimed Carik. "What have you been doing since?"

"Ah, but that's a long story—" began Armguard.

"We don't have . . ." interrupted Yorman, but Carik had already slid off his horse to sit on the log next to the old man.

Armguard had his share of stories, and Carik was a willing listener. After a while Yorman got off his horse and wandered about the glade impatiently, lopping off the feathery white heads of flowering bugbanes with his scimitar.

"So there it is," finished Armguard a long while later. "I've been riding about seeking a name for myself, trying to free the oppressed, right wrongs, and maybe find a princess or two that needs rescuing. But nary a fair challenge have I found since Boldarius fell. Things that he and I would have dared without a second thought twenty years ago were too much for me alone! So I'm still no more than a squire with the name Boldarius gave me: 'Armguard', the guard at Boldarius's arm!"

Armguard gave the edge of his sword one final scrape and stood up. "But by my sword, today I'll make a name for myself or join Boldarius in the Hall of Heroes and drink my first cup at Kylla's Table! Today or never it'll have to be, I'm growing no younger! *Wander!*" The warhorse, a massively muscled and battle-scarred beast whose muzzle was so grey it was nearly white, picked up its ears at the sound of its name and obediently trotted up to the old warrior. "My helm!" said Armguard, and Carik gave the old man his helm, after giving the dented thing a quick rub with the hem of his cloak. "And now . . ." Armguard lifted his foot and Carik helped him into his saddle. Armguard took his time about it, grunting and groaning until he was in a comfortable position. Yorman watched the whole scene with growing unease.

"I'm off!" said Armguard at last. "When next you see me, I'll be Armguard the Ogreslayer! Nay, 'Armguard' no

more! I'll use my proper name!"

"What's that?" asked Carik.

"You'll find out when I get back!" answered Armguard. "Wait for me here!"

"There goes a right good hero," said Carik proudly, watching the old man ride off.

"Get on your horse!" snapped Yorman, jumping onto his own.

"He told us to wait," began Carik, but Yorman was already riding away. Carik mounted up and followed.

They followed Armguard at a respectful distance, through the tangled woods and over the hills until they found themselves above a deep cleft that led to a cave. There Carik and Yorman stopped and watched as Armguard gingerly picked his way down the wooded slope. Carik blinked. Armguard was riding away from the cave! The old man glanced behind him—and then stopped. Perhaps he had seen the two young adventurers waiting among the trees at the top of the hollow, perhaps not. But he stopped all the same, turned his horse around, and put a horn to his lips. The blast began loud and clear but ended with Armguard coughing and wheezing. But it was enough. The ogre stumbled out of the cave, rubbing sleep from its eyes.

It was a big, ugly brute, standing head and shoulders above Armguard even as he sat on his horse. Bald as an egg the ogre was, with a receding chin, tiny eyes, and a bulging swag belly. Its arms and legs were deceptively thin—but everyone knew ogres were as strong as stone. Its only garment was a shaggy bearskin that hung over its slumped shoulders and reached its knees, and its weapon was a great big tree branch with a knobby end.

"I think he might need a hand," said Yorman quietly.

"Armguard?" answered Carik with a huff. "I think not!"

In the gully below, Armguard drew his sword. "Hoy, brute!" he shouted, "I tell you to quit these lands and never come back, or face the blade of Armguard!"

It was a properly spoken challenge, but the ogre only went "Faa!" and swung its club around its head.

"Then perish!" cried Armguard, and he heeled his horse. The old destrier reared and charged forward.

At the same instant, Carik and Yorman sent their horses plunging down through the trees and brush on the hillside.

Armguard's sword flashed over his helm. The ogre swung its club. There was a crash, and Armguard went flying. But before the ogre could finish off the fallen hero, the veteran war-horse reared back and lashed out with its steel-shod hooves. Unfortunately, the kicks that had once dropped men dead had not their old strength. The ogre took the kicks with only a grunt and a wince, and then crushed the valiant old destrier's head with another powerful swing of its club. But Armguard, somehow, was on his feet again.

"You've slain a steed better than many a man!" cried the old hero fiercely. "Now take this!" The

sword whistled through the air, as fast and hard and deadly as it might have twenty years ago, but it sank deep into the ogre's club and not the ogre. The ogre hauled on its club, and the old man's arms could not be young twice. Armguard's sword was torn from his grasp and went spinning into the trees.

There was only one more blow. The ogre, invigorated by the morning's exercise, had lumbered away by the time Carik and Yorman arrived.

"We never even knew his true name," said Carik with a grunt as he placed the last stone on a cairn piled in the forest. It was a big cairn over a wide and shallow grave, big enough for both the fallen hero and his steed. Carik stood back and wiped the sweat from his brow, leaving a dirty streak. "What a miserable end!"

"Well, he needs to be avenged," said Yorman. "Go to it, Carik!"

Carik glanced at the sun, which was already sinking towards the western hills. "It's getting late," he answered. "It will be dark soon."

"I'll bring a torch," offered Yorman. Carik sighed heavily.

"You know when I told you I killed the Ogre of—"

"I knew it!" interrupted Yorman with a disgusted snort. "I knew it all along!" But Carik shook his head.

"No, I met the ogre, and only I walked away," he said. "But do you know how the ogre met its end?"

"Do tell."

"It was chasing me through the woods when it tripped and fell and broke its neck."

"Ha! I might have known!"

"Well, now you do! And now let's get away from these hills, that ogre, and all the wretched folk of Weefield!"

"No," said Yorman, with a cunning gleam in his eyes. "I've got a better idea!"

Sometime later that day, as the sun sank into the trees in the west and deep shadows grew in the woods, Carik drove a wagon pulled by a plodding ox down the road between the hills. He wore his mail beneath a peasant's dirty woolen cloak and his helm under a broad-brimmed straw hat, but he felt naked without his sword. A big cask rested in the back of the wagon.

The cask was Yorman's idea. The villagers of Weefield had been mightily surprised that afternoon when the ogre appeared in their fields with its head still on, and they had been terribly disappointed when Carik and Yorman rode into their village to tell them Armguard had fallen. Even Widfut had been momentarily speechless. The villagers turned to Carik and Yorman out of desperation, and Yorman had them fill the biggest cask they had with ale and top it off with a bit of strong cider, a precious bottle or two of wine, and a pot of mead as well. It was a wicked-smelling brew, and even Carik (who could usually drink anything) drew away from the heady

fumes. As Carik drove the wagon away from the village, he had heard a downcast Widfut say, "That's the last we'll see of any o'em, I'll wager my teeth!"

And then a "Bight!" from Griff.

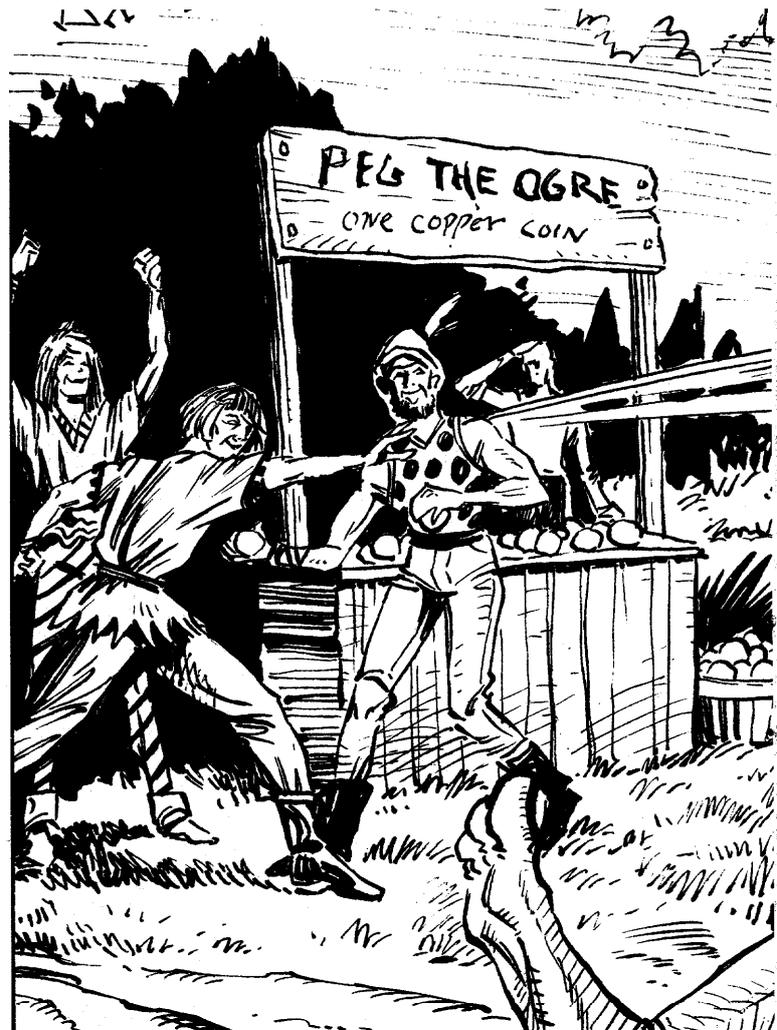
Now Yorman waited around a bend in the road with Carik's horse, where he would be ready—so he had said—to charge to Carik's rescue should he need it. But Carik wondered if Yorman would be in time if the ogre—

Suddenly a stone—more like a boulder, actually, as it was the size of a man's head—whistled through the air and hit the ox squarely between its horns, dropping the beast dead. The ogre lumbered down the road, roaring and waving its club, and Carik leapt off the wagon and ran for his life. Yorman, riding his horse and leading Carik's by the reins, had to ride hard to catch up to him.

Later yet, as the moon was just peeking over the night-blackened line of trees in the east, Carik and Yorman stood outside the ogre's cave.

"Phew!" gasped Yorman, despite the fact that they were trying to be silent. The sour stench from the cave was ghastly.

"Shh!" whispered Carik nervously. "Listen!" Yorman shushed, and as their ears became attuned to the chirp of crickets, distant squeak of bats, and sway of the trees in the breeze, they heard the rumbling snore of the ogre. Carik pulled a candle from a pouch on his belt and handed it to Yorman; he didn't want to dare the noisy tap of tinderstones to light it. Yorman held the candle high and whis-



pered a word of enchantment, and the candle sprang to life. Such tricks were a far cry from the sorceries old Ankzem must have wielded against the dragon, thought Carik, but they had their uses. Then they drew their swords and crept into the cave.

The ogre lay snoring on a pile of untanned skins and furs, and the ox, half butchered and half eaten raw, lay in a pool of congealing blood and stinking offal. All about the cave were gnawed and broken bones and torn peasant's clothes. The empty cask lay on its side next to the ogre's arm, and the brute's breath filled the air with a reek beyond description.

"Go to it!" whispered Yorman, pointing at the sleeping ogre with his scimitar and trying not to breathe. Carik went to the brute's head and raised his sword.

Carik looked down. In the helplessness of sleep, the ogre's face looked less brutish. Its cheeks were sunken, its big teeth were yellow and rotted, and the candlelight gleamed from its bald dome. Carik was suddenly reminded of his old grandfather Ragnor, who had taught him swordcraft in distant Uree Valley. Though he was hearty enough when awake, the years had been easy to see on the old man's face when he slept.

Carik lowered his sword. "I can't," he whispered.

"Remember Armguard!" hissed Yorman angrily. But Carik shook his head.

"You do it!" he whispered. Yorman rolled his eyes and pushed him aside, but in a moment he rammed his scimitar back into its scabbard with a muttered curse.

As the starry Harp and Dragon rose into the sky to follow the moon, Carik and Yorman were on their way back to Weefield. They were walking now, leading the horses that they had tethered to the wagon in the place of the dead ox. And on the wagon was the snoring ogre.

"If the villagers want it dead," muttered Yorman, "let *them* do it!"

"Right!" answered Carik.

The wagon creaked into the collection of huts and hovels that was the village of Weefield. The only good stone-built structures were the smithy and the alehouse. Most of the villager menfolk were gathered outside the alehouse now, listening to Widfut foretell the worst and Griff agree. But their eyes opened wide when they saw the wagon and its contents. Word spread quickly, and sleepers were roused. In three blinks of an eye, every inhabitant of the village was gathered around the wagon, from the oldest grey-bearded gaffer to the youngest girl-child. Huffur the Smith, the strongest man in Weefield, was called upon to finish the ogre off. He lumbered out of his smithy, a pure-blooded son of the old mountainfolk. His head was a shaggy mass of brown tangles and bearish beard, his belly was huge, his arms and legs thick and hairy right down to the fingers. He carried a big forge-hammer in his hand and, being a man of few words, he strode up to the ogre's head and raised the hammer. Carik and Yorman shut their eyes and



turned away.

"Wait!" said Widfut suddenly. "I've a better idea."

While the ogre slept on, the wagon was pulled to the edge of the village beside the huge stump of a hewn-down oak. Huffur came along with his hammer, some enormous iron stakes, a big lock, and a length of thick chain. The villagers worked together like bees in a hive under the whispered directions of Widfut. The stakes were driven deep into the oak stump (all the villagers were ready to run away as Huffur's hammer struck iron, but the ogre never woke), and the sleeping brute was chained to the stakes by one of its scrawny ankles. And just in time. Even as the lock was clicked through the chains, the ogre began to stir at last. It sat up groggily, holding its head in its hands. The villagers backed away and again made ready to flee. After a moment the brute looked around, saw the villagers, and roared. All the villagers fled, with Widfut leading the way, but the ogre's charge was brought up short by the thick chain. The roar turned to a grunt and then an angry howl as its fiercest tug, a tug hard enough to part stone, failed to break Huffur's well-wrought iron. The villagers crept back. Someone hurled a rotten apple, and in a moment a hail of rotten fruit rained down on the chained ogre, hurled by all the laughing, cheering folk of Weefield.

Morning came, and Weefield was busy as an anthill. Two quick-footed boys were sent to the nearby villages of Weedhaven and Stonebare to fetch food and drink (which were in short supply in Weefield) for a feast to celebrate the capture of the ogre. The boys returned with wagonloads of provisions and a trickle of the curious. The trickle soon became a flood of wagons, riders, and walkers, just as Widfut had suspected it would. People flocked to see the novel sight of a captive ogre and pay a copper coin for the privilege of hurling rotten fruit at the monster. The day wore on long and hot, the supply of rotten fruit ran low, prices rose and tempers flared until Widfut, who had taken charge of the operation with the deft hand of the king's own Master Tither, agreed to substitute clods of mud for rotten fruit.

Carik and Yorman stayed in Weefield all day. The big common-room table was hauled outside the alehouse and a generous feast was held in their honor. The two were hailed as Heroes of Weefield, and Widfut, on behalf of the village, gave them a sack full of copper coins—bounty provided by the ogre. The villagers, when they grew tired of pelting the chained brute, came over and slapped them on the back.

Evening fell, and the two heroes were nearly forgotten for more important matters. The menfolk of Weefield were gathered outside the alehouse, holding a council under torchlight.

"Listen to them!" said Yorman disgustedly, sitting with Carik outside the circle of firelight. Carik, sitting glumly with an alesack in his hand, only grunted.

"No one throws stones!" Widfut was saying as he stood on the feast-table. "Not even if they offer gold!"

"Why not?" shouted someone in the crowd.

"Cause ain't no one gonna pay to throw stuff at a dead ogre, y'daff fool!" answered Widfut. The villagers murmured in agreement.

"What we need is a Chief in Charge of the Ogre!" shouted someone. Yorman could have sworn it was Griff.

"Bight!" agreed Widfut. "But whoever shall it be?"

"How 'bout you?" shouted the voice. Now Yorman was sure.

"Well, I don' know," drawled Widfut slyly. "Course, it *was* my idea, and every one hereabout knows me for an honest man."

"I don't!" shouted someone, and the villagers erupted in argument over who would collect the money gathered from people hurling things at the ogre, and how it would be divided up among the villagers. And more important, how were they going to hide the coin from Lord Thargum's tithe-collectors? The argument grew loud and ugly, until at last heavy drinking slowed them down. After a few hours most of the villagers, with bellies full of ale and heads full of schemes, lay about under the summer stars and snored. Widfut used a sack of coins as a pillow. It was, noticed Yorman, a much bigger sack than the one he had given them.

Yorman woke Carik with a kick. "Grab our reward and let's get going," he whispered. Carik took a bleary-eyed glance at their sack.

"You take it," he said. Yorman opened his mouth to argue, but Carik was already up and stumbling for their horses. Yorman picked up the sack; it seemed very heavy, though it wasn't very large. Nevertheless he handled it like it was full of poisonous vipers. The sack jingled as he slung it on his horse, and Widfut clutched his own pillow of coins a little more tightly in his sleep.

Carik and Yorman led their horses away from the snoring villagers and past the ogre. Young Griff, as Second Chief of the Ogre, sat snoring against a tree a good distance from the chained brute. A big key hung from a nail in the tree above his head. The ogre itself sat on the tree-stump, its ugly head hanging down despondently. A mound of squashed and reeking fruit was piled up to its skinny ankles. The Heroes of Weefield, feeling very unheroic, looked away and tugged their horses on.

Finally Yorman stopped. "This won't do," he whispered.

"This won't do at all," echoed Carik, and they crept back.

Griff remained asleep as Yorman lifted the key from the nail. Then, with Carik behind him with his hand on his sword, he crept up to the ogre. The brute flinched, perhaps expecting more abuse, then looked at them with wide eyes as Yorman put the key into the lock. The lock clicked, the chain fell away, and quick as an old lumbering cat the ogre got to its feet and hobbled off for the hills. Carik and Yorman watched until it vanished in the darkness.

"We've just rescued an ogre!" said Yorman.

"Armguard would've done the same," said Carik. With that they mounted up and rode away from the village of Weefield, and they were both grinning from ear to ear. Ω

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GAMERS CENTRES

SAGE advice

By Skip Williams

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

This month, our sage pauses for his annual look at questions that are just a tad unusual. One hundred percent of the questions presented here were submitted—in writing—by the readership of this magazine (you know who you are). The questions have been edited only to improve readability.

What effect does a nilbog have on a spelljamming helm and how many Small-size humanoids can you stuff into a hammership and still sail it? While we're on the subject, how much damage does a spelljamming ship do when it rams a planet-bound target?

Beyond the fact that healing magic causes them damage, nilbogs have no particular effect on the way magical items and devices function. The chief consequence of having a nilbog in the vicinity is that creatures tend to act in a contrary fashion.

Based on the passenger and cargo capacities for a hammership, I'd estimate you could haul about 120 Small creatures (four per ton of cargo capacity) in addition to the crew of 24; however, this wouldn't leave much space for a shipboard volleyball league. If you stacked up the passengers like cordwood instead of letting them sit or stand, you probably could double the passenger load (another 120 creatures). In any case, once you put more than 60 creatures on a hammership you'd better be planning on a short trip because the air is going to run out fast.

If a spelljamming ship rams a structure, use the ramming rules from the SPELLJAMMER® boxed set or the *War Captain's Companion* and the fortifications rules from the BATTLESYSTEM™ Miniatures Rules. Unless the spelljamming ship performs a violent maneuver just before

ramming the structure, assume that the ram automatically hits. Assume the hit ratings on page 82 of the BATTLESYSTEM rules equal hull points.

The basic formula for damage is ship tonnage divided by 10, then multiplied by the ship's SR (Ship's Rating). In an atmosphere, one point of SR equals a movement rate of 24. Treat all ramming attacks against structures as head-on rams (see *War Captain's Companion: Book 3*, page 8); therefore the spelljamming ship itself suffers damage equal to half the damage inflicted on the structure—using your ship as a siege engine can work in a pinch, but it's a losing proposition in the long run. If the attacking ship is not equipped with a ram, use the crash rules instead.

If a spelljamming ship rams a creature, the damage is 1d6 for each hull point normally inflicted by the ram. Therefore, a 50-ton ship moving at a speed of 48 (SR 2, slow for a spelljamming vessel) would inflict 10d6 points of damage. Generally, however, creatures of less than Gargantuan size cannot be rammed by spelljamming ships as they can just step out of the way. In any case, the helmsman must hit the creature's armor class.

What is a ziggurat and why is Kalak building one?

A ziggurat is a stepped or terraced pyramid; you probably can find a picture of one in a book about the ancient Middle East or pre-Columbian Central America or in an encyclopedia. Kalak is an evil sorcerer king from the DARK SUN™ world. Exactly why he ordered his ziggurat built is just one of many nifty little secrets awaiting the fans of DARK SUN games and novels, and I won't spoil it by revealing it here.

Can a magical staff or quarterstaff be made into a morning star and still retain its enchantment? If my character (Intelligence 14) placed several iron spikes into one end of the staff, would this destroy the magic?

No, you can't make a staff into a morning star, no matter what your character's Intelligence score is. A staff just doesn't have the necessary mass. Yes, driving spikes through one end of a staff will ruin it, no matter what your character's Intelli-

gence score is. A staff is thin enough so that it will split if somebody starts driving spikes through it, and it is even more prone to splitting near the ends.

If a character were to cast *flesh* to *stone* on a kender, and then *rock* to *mud*, then molded the mud into the shape of say, a kobold, then cast *mud* to *rock* followed by *stone* to *flesh*, would the end result be a kobold or just a lifeless mess of kender parts?

This is up to the DM, but I'm inclined to favor the "lifeless mess of kender parts." Petrified characters can survive a great deal of damage to their stony forms, but major damage results in injury or deformity (see *stone* to *flesh* spell description on page 181 of the PH). In other words, what happens to the stone form happens to the creature. At some point, abuse inflicted on a petrified creature has to spell death. *Disintegration*, for example, obliterates a petrified creature. Reducing the creature's body to a homogenous, liquid mass is just as fatal as grinding it into tiny bits.

Can you please publish information on which of the new spheres of priest spells from the *Tome of Magic* are granted by the deities from The book, *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures*? If you publish the answer to this question, I'll send you \$20.00. I'm serious.

Gosh, my first bribe.

Okay, try these unofficial suggestions on for size. I picked them mainly to match the spheres with each deity's portfolio, personality, and alignment. Generally, I gave more new spheres to the greater powers than to the lesser and demi powers.

Auril: Major: Time; Minor: Wards;
Azuth: Major: Thought; Minor: Law;
Beshaba: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time;
Chauntea: Major: Time, Wards; Minor: Travelers; **Cyric:** Major: War, Time; Minor: Numbers; **Denier:** Major: Thought; Minor: Time; **Eldath:** Major: Wards; Minor: Travelers; **Gond:** Major: Numbers; Minor: Wards; **Helm:** Major: Wards; Minor: War; **Ilmater:** Major: Law; Minor: Wards; **Lathander:** Major: Thought; Minor: Time; **Leira:** Major: Time; Minor: Chaos; **Lliira:** Major: none; Minor: Thought, Time, Travelers; **Loviatar:** Major: Law; Minor: Time; **Malar:** Major: War; Minor: Travelers; **Mask:** Major: Time; Minor: Thought; **Mielikki:** Major: none; Minor: Time, Travelers; **Milil:** Major: Thought; Minor: Travelers; **Mystra:** Major: Thought; Minor: Time; **Oghma:** Major: Travelers; Minor: Thought, Wards; **Selune:** Major: Travelers, Numbers; Minor: none; **Shar:** Major: Time, Thought; Minor: none; **Silvanus:** Major: Time, Wards; Minor: Travelers; **Talona:** Major: Chaos; Minor: none; **Talos:** Major: Chaos, War; Minor: Time; **Tempus:** Major: Chaos, War; Minor:

Wards; **Torm:** Major: Law Minor: Travelers; **Tymora:** Major: Chaos; Minor: Wards; **Tyr:** Major: as cleric; Minor: as cleric; **Umberlee:** Major: Chaos; Minor: none; **Waukeen:** Major: Travelers; Minor: Wards; **Elemental Cults:** Major: none; Minor: time; **Bane:** Major: Law, War; Minor: Numbers; **Bhaal:** Major: Law; Minor: Time; **Myrkul:** Major: Chaos, Time; Minor: War; **Clerics:** Major: Law or Chaos (depending on alignment, neutral clerics choose one), Wards; Minor: Travelers, War.

Note that pages 14 and 15 of the *TOM* provide detailed guidelines for assigning new spheres. Also, there has been some talk at TSR, Inc. about officially assigning the *TOM* spheres to all previously published deities in a new deities book. The final plans for this project have not yet been made. As for your \$20, keep it; or better yet, donate it to your local children's hospital (your yellow pages should have the address and phone number).

If a spell-casting vampire wielding a staff of power or staff of the magi broke it in a retributive strike and was not sent to another plane, would the explosion destroy the vampire, or just force it into gaseous form?

According to the item descriptions in the *DMG* (page 154), a retributive strike either sends the staff's wielder to another

plane or "totally destroys" the wielder. After total destruction, there's nothing left to regenerate—unless the wielder is a tarrasque (see next question).

Gee, I really like your column, and I never would have begun to wonder what would happen if you turned a tarrasque into a bunny and tried to eat him if it hadn't been for you. So, if the tarrasque were "killed" by a sphere of annihilation, does it still require a wish to keep it dead?

Yes, somebody really would have to use a *wish* to keep the tarrasque dead after it was destroyed by a *sphere of annihilation*. The tarrasque cannot be utterly destroyed by *any* means unless a *wish* is used to keep it dead; otherwise, the critter just comes right back. Note also that the tarrasque's sheer size might allow it to survive contact with a *sphere of annihilation*, as discussed in "Sage Advice," in *DRAGON* issue #180. Contact with a *sphere* might annihilate only a two-foot chunk of the beast, which might not do much more than make it *really* mad.

How much alcohol does it take to make an umber hulk drunk?

Umbra hulks, and just about every other type of creature, can drink an indefinite amount of alcohol without getting drunk—provided the drinking is spread

out over a sufficient amount of time. The real question is how much and how *fast*. The rate at which a creature can imbibe alcohol and still remain lucid depends on a number of factors including general state of health, contents of the digestive tract, and many others. The prime factors, however, are body mass and the strength of the alcoholic beverage. A 150-pound human can expect to be drunk after drinking three ounces of hard liquor or 36 ounces of beer in one hour. An adult umber hulk probably weighs in at about 450 pounds, and probably could put away three times that much alcohol before becoming drunk.

Can a spell-caster teleport or teleport without error inside a dragon while holding onto an arrow of dragon slaying and thus kill both the spell-caster and the dragon? If you can't teleport into the dragon could you teleport onto its back and then stick the arrow of dragon slaying into the dragon?

Generally, an enchanted missile must be fired or thrown for it to work. They cannot be used as melee weapons; however, I have seen DMs allow PCs to stab with arrows when they are desperate. The arrow usually breaks after one attack—hit or miss—and the wielder suffers the non-proficiency penalty for his class.

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creatures from place to place. Although "place" is a term that is not easily defined, a creature generally is not a place. Obviously, a planet-sized creature that houses the whole campaign world is an exception, but anything small enough to attack in a hand-to-hand fight is not.

How far can a fighter who is 6' tall and weighs 200 pounds jump while wearing a girdle of giant strength? I mean, a normal man with the strength of an 18' or 24'-giant should he be able to make flea-like jumps.

Jumping is a feat of strength, but it does take a little agility and skill, too. Otherwise, long-jumpers would look like weight lifters, not runners. I'd suggest using the rules for the jumping proficiency on page 61 of the PHB. If you like, you can increase the maximum attainable jumping distance by one or two feet per point of strength beyond 18/00. The 6' fighter in your example could broad jump a maximum of 36' using the rules as they are written—a pretty impressive leap. Using the modified maximums, the character could attain 38' with a *girdle of hill giant strength* and 48' with a *girdle of storm giant strength*.

The PHB lists the price of a trained falcon as 1,000 gp. This is twice the price of a war elephant! What is the correct price for the falcon?

A trained falcon costs 1,000 gp. Not only are these animals rare, they are greatly prized for use in hunting and as status symbols. Consequently, the bird's market value is extremely high.

What, exactly, is a lair? The *Monstrous Compendium* gives details such as the number of creatures inside the lair and the kinds treasure that can be found there, but they don't describe what a lair is. Are they single rooms? Entire dungeons? Single dungeon levels? If they are just single rooms, how can 20-200 creatures (the common number appearing for humanoids) fit inside? Also, where in a lair would treasure go?

A lair, simply put, is a place where a creature lives. A lair's size, layout, and location varies with the creature's needs. As you point out, large numbers of creatures need more lair space than single creatures do. The "Habitat/Society" and "Ecology" sections in most creatures' *Monstrous Compendium* entries should help you decide what kind of lair a creature will have. You might also want to check out the various *Book of Lairs* products for sample lairs.

Where in a lair will a creature put its treasure? In the most secure place it can think of. Unintelligent creatures, however, probably won't realize their treasure is

valuable and won't take any pains to hide it; instead, they'll drop the stuff wherever it's convenient to do so. Very intelligent creatures probably not only hide the gold and gems in a secure and well-guarded place, but also carry their magical treasures with them, so they can use their magical items against invaders.

If an *enlarge* spell is cast on a creature to increase its size, and then *permanency* is used to make the increase permanent, can *enlarge* be used again to increase the creature size again? If so, can this second *enlargement* be made permanent? If so, how many times could this process be repeated?

There's nothing in the rules to prevent this sort of thing, so technically, a wizard could keep this process going until he runs out of Constitution points (the caster lose one point of Constitution for each *permanency* spell cast). A house rule that limits *enlarge* or *reduce* effects to one per creature might not be a bad idea. In any case, note that a wizard can *enlarge* or *reduce* only 10 cubic feet of material per level. This is not as much as it sounds, 10 cubic feet is 1'x1'x10' or 1'x2'x5', etc.

Just before our group's most recent adventure one of our players suggested our characters should cast a *rope trick* spell and a *permanency* so

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that we would have a safe place to hide two pieces of an artifact we were carrying. (This fellow also suggested that we could disguise the *rope trick* as a child's swing.) At the time, our characters didn't have the resources necessary to cast these spells, but would it have worked if we had tried it? Also, does the extra-dimensional space created by a *rope trick* work like a bag of holding? Can it be used as a stationary bag of holding?

In either version of the AD&D® game, *rope trick* is not a spell that can be made permanent. The extra-dimensional space created by a *rope trick* can hold up to eight man-sized creatures, which gives it a volume of about 1,000 cubic feet. There is no weight limit given. Given these characteristics, yes a *rope trick* can be used for storage, at least until its duration expires.

Mapping paper with a hexagonal grid (as opposed to a square grid) seems to be excellent for accurately showing distances north to south (and vice versa), and distances northeast to southwest, or northwest to southeast (or vice versa), but how do I measure distances east to west (or vice versa)?

Just count the columns/rows of hexes between the east-west points, as this produces less distortion than you think.

When a character gains a level and gets a new hit die, are all the character's hit dice re-rolled to get a new hit-point total? Or do you just roll one die and add the result to the hit-point total? Doing it the first way would tend to introduce a significant risk of giving the character a new hit-point total that's lower than the old one, wouldn't it?

Okay, everybody out there who's snickering at this poor fellow can stop it. Heck, when the Lake Geneva group was just starting to learn the original D&D® game rules back in 1974, we rolled new hit points for each character every adventure: "Wow, Noylund, you feel *great* today!" It didn't even occur to us that a character was supposed to have a permanent hit-point total. Anyway, your suspicion is correct. Just roll the new hit die, adjust for Constitution, and add the result to the character's hit-point total.

Why, with the advent of weapon specialization for fighters, school specialization for wizards, and granted abilities for specialty priests, were the THACO numbers for monsters of 1 + 1 hit dice through 6 hit dice increased in the AD&D 2nd Edition game?

I wish you readers could have seen the original version of this question. The letter is written in black crayon (or maybe colored pencil). It begins "From all the hurting hobgoblins." It goes on for a page and a half, and is signed "Chairman of the

Humbled Hobgoblins."

The AD&D 2nd Edition design team looked at the way the old "to hit" number chart was put together and did a lot of frowning and head scratching. The table was arranged in columns of two hit dice, except at the low end, where it essentially was divided into half-hit die increments. THACOs improved one point per column except that they improved by two on every second column. There also was the phenomenon of the "repeating 20" that I won't even try to explain here. The team eventually decided the old chart was illogical and had to go. The new chart is easier to remember and has the advantage of making things a little easier on PCs in campaigns that start out characters with zero experience points and base starting cash. Play balance in your game probably won't suffer much if you go back to the old chart, just remember to give out a little extra experience to PCs who defeat monsters that have the improved THACOs.

If a character wished for an extra set of fully functional arms, located immediately below the first set, would the character be able to wear two sets of bracers, gloves, or gauntlets? Would the character be able to wear four rings?

First, any DM worth his salt should be able to think of all sorts of ways to make a character regret wishing for an extra set of "fully functional" arms. Your mom might read this magazine, so I'll skip the examples that spring immediately to mind. Second, the short answer is no, the character can't wear extra rings, bracers, gloves, and the like. Only two rings, and only one set of bracers, gloves, etc. will work for a single character, no matter how many appendages the character has.

A bastard sword is a size M weapon, so halflings, gnomes, and small dwarves can use it only with two hands. If the sword is used in this way, which speed factor and damage should be used? How about size L and larger creatures using it in one hand? Should the speed factor be lower?

A small creature wielding a bastard sword in two hands has to use the weapon's one-handed damage and speed factor. The character just can't manage the sword's full length. It's up to the DM to decide if a Large creature can get the benefits of two-handed use with only one hand. Since a 5' or 6' human can get the two-handed benefit by shifting his grip on sword's long hilt down toward the pommel, I suppose a nine-foot ogre could do the same thing with only one hand. In this case, the ogre has to use the two-handed speed factor. Note that a giant cannot get its extra damage dice unless it uses a weapon of proportionate size in the proper manner. That is, a hill giant might

be able to use a bastard sword with one hand and inflict 2d4 points of damage (plus a strength bonus of +7); however, the giant has to use a giant-sized bastard sword in two hands if he wants to inflict 4d4 + 7 points of damage.

How does poison work?

Poison "works" by destroying cells or disrupting biochemical processes in a living being. Poisons have no effect until they enter the body through injection, ingestion, inhalation, or contact. The method varies with the poison. For game effects on such things as healing, resurrection, and the like, see the "Character Death" section in the *PH*, page 105.

Can a troll die from starvation? The first *Monstrous Compendium* says a troll can grow a new head in a week if it's decapitated. Where does the material for the new head come from if it can't eat?

Judging from the "Ecology" section of the "Troll" entry in *Monstrous Compendium*, Volume One, it's pretty clear that trolls do have to eat. Troll regeneration can replace body mass destroyed in combat, but it can't maintain the troll's system if it is deprived of food, water, or air. As you point out, they can go at least a week without food or water while regenerating. The DM has to decide how long it takes a troll to starve if completely deprived of food. I'd suggest anywhere from one to six months. In any case, troll regeneration does not need food or a source of matter, it simply replaces lost mass. This could come from thin air, reserves within the troll, another plane, or anywhere else the DM decides—we're talking about a fantasy creature here.

Suppose a player aims a wand of wonder at a target less than 20' away. At that range, the player would automatically be within the area of effect if the wand produces a fireball. Can the user, in the instant the effect is produced, sense what the effect is and re-target safely? I would think so, since wands of wonder produce enough trouble without frying the user with every fireball.

Characters have to take their lumps when they fool around with *wands of wonder*. This item is intended to keep players guessing—one literally "wonders" what will happen every time the *wand* is used. Characters who don't want to be broiled in their own *fireballs* should leave *wands of wonder* alone or at least point them at targets more than 20' away. Note that *fireballs* reshape themselves so as to fill the entire volume when cast in confined spaces, so *wand of wonder* users have to be extra careful when adventuring in dungeons.

Ω



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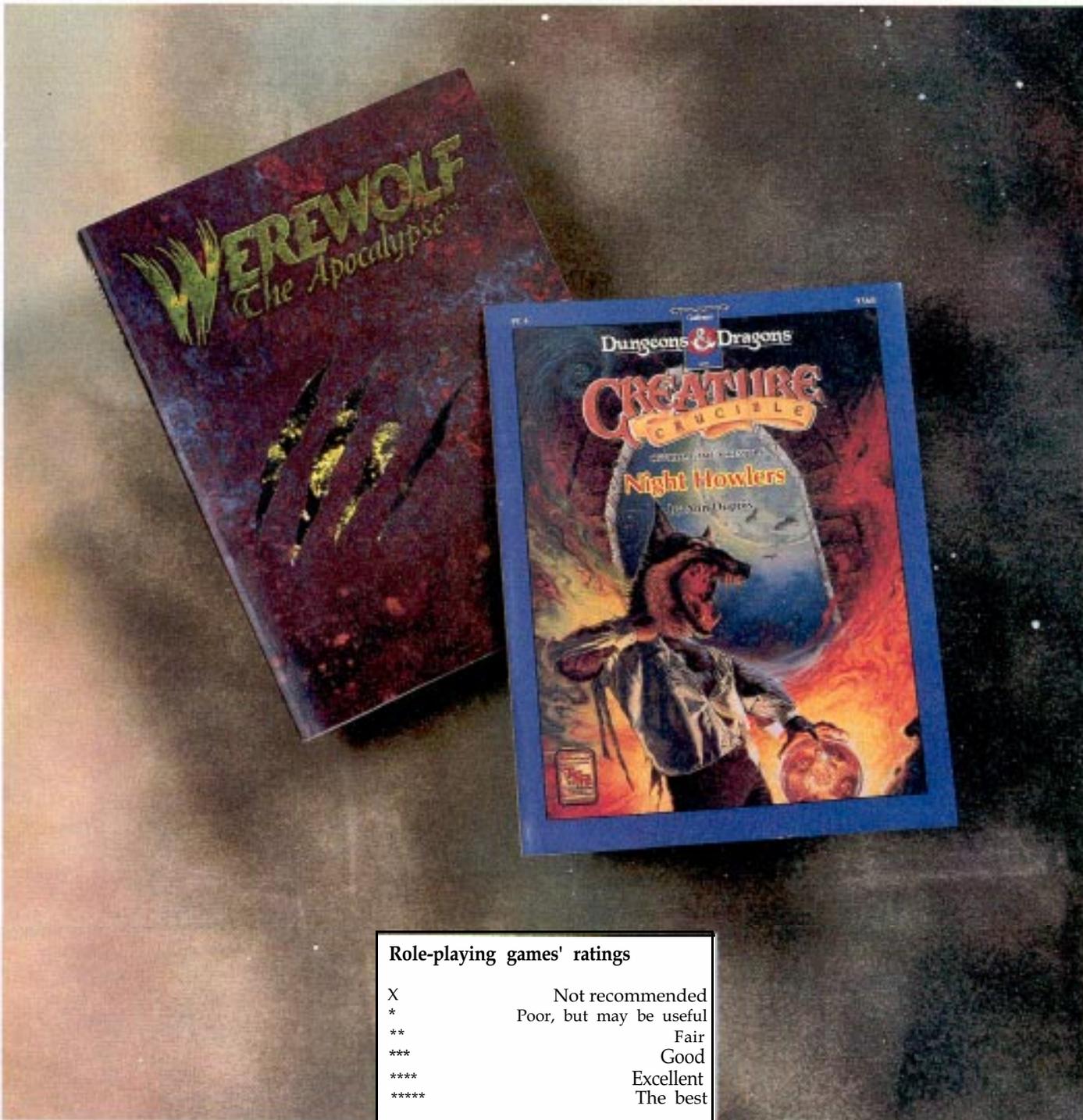
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Role-playing Reviews

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Role-playing games' ratings

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|-------|-------------------------|
| X | Not recommended |
| * | Poor, but may be useful |
| ** | Fair |
| *** | Good |
| **** | Excellent |
| ***** | The best |

Hair-raising games for the animal in you

It took me a while to warm up to these werewolf games. I mean, I like werewolves as much as the next guy—but as player characters? You sprout hair, you growl, you claw up the scenery. What's the big deal? My AD&D® game wizard could accomplish the same thing with a few illusions and a good dagger. For this we need a whole book?

But, in retrospect, I realize that I resisted werewolf PCs because I was thinking of them solely in terms of their physical characteristics. That's just half the picture. Werewolves undergo interior transformations, not just exterior ones. And it's the interior changes that make them interesting.

The challenge of playing a werewolf has little to do with clawing and snarling, and everything to do with juggling personalities. The player must see through the eyes of not one but two (and sometimes more) radically different characters. She must seamlessly shift between conflicting sets of desires and attitudes. She must gauge her responses to other characters according to her current form; a friend of the human may be a meal for the wolf.

Playing a convincing werewolf requires a willingness to dig deeply into the character's psyche. We're just getting a werewolf campaign off the ground and the early results are promising; I've rarely seen my players as interested in figuring out what makes their PCs tick. If you're as skeptical as I was about the viability of werewolf PCs, check out this month's featured products. You may be howling at the moon before you know it.

WEREWOLF:

THE APOCALYPSE* game

276-page softcover book

White Wolf

\$20

Design: Mark Rein • Hagen

Additional material: Sam Chupp, Andrew Greenberg, Robert Hatch, Geoff Pass, Stewart Wieck, Travis L. Williams, Samuel Witt, Wes Harris, William Hale, Josh Timbrook, and Richard Thomas

Editing and development: Robert Hatch and Stewart Wieck

Illustrations: John Bridges, John Cobb, Chris DiNardo, Doug Gregory, Tony Harris, Darryl Midgette, Keven O'Neill, Richard Thomas, Josh Timbrook, and Jennifer Yuh

Cover: Eric Scott and Chris McDonough

WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE features lycanthropes with an attitude and a world I wouldn't want to visit. A blood brother of sorts to White Wolf's equally grim VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* game, the designers do to the werewolf what Frank Miller and Tim Burton did to Batman: They thrust a familiar archetype

into a bleak urban setting, drenching him in cynicism and despair. If role-playing games were people, WEREWOLF would be a brooding grad student with a stack of *Sandman* comics and Metallica albums.

White Wolf calls this approach "Gothic punk," an apt a name as any for a game where atmosphere reigns supreme. Cities are dark clusters of decaying buildings and gloomy streets. Political corruption and corporate greed are taken for granted. Outcast youths find solace in street gangs and death-rock music. In this world of hopelessness, "the end is not coming, it is here."

Characters: WEREWOLF envisions lycanthropes as a unique race called the Garou, spawned from an all-encompassing life force known as Gaia. The antithesis of Gaia is the Wyrn, a manifestation of evil represented by vampires and other dark entities. It's all kind of vague and mystical, allowing referees the freedom to develop storylines as they fit and, not incidentally, enabling White Wolf to publish supplements to fill in the blanks.

WEREWOLF casts its lycanthropic protagonists as outsiders, neither fully human or animal, potential enemies of both normal citizens and Wyrn-ridden vampires. They can shift between human and wolf forms more or less at will. They heal with superhuman efficiency and are prone to mad frenzies where their animal instincts run rampant. And while the wercreatures may not have much of a sense of humor, the designers do, evidenced by their assertion that characters are easy to create: "It takes only a few minutes to work out all your traits and your basic personality, to get down all the numbers . . ." Ha!

Character creation begins with each player choosing his PC's breed, auspice, and tribe. Breeds include Lupus (characters raised by wolves), Metis (raised by Garou), and Homid (raised by humans). The PC's auspice relates to the phase of the moon under which he was born; the Regabash auspice, for instance, encompasses Garou born under a new moon, while the Philodox auspice covers those of the half moon. There are 14 different tribes, ranging from the benign Stargazers, a faction of scholarly truth-seekers, to the radical Red Talons, zealots dedicated to extinguishing the human race.

Aside from a few minor restrictions—characters of the same pack usually belong to the same tribe; the referee may exclude certain breeds. Players can choose whichever breeds, auspices, and tribes they like. But these choices should be made with care, as they have profound effects on other aspects of the character. The choice of breed, for example, limits the PC's abilities, while the auspice helps

establish his special powers. The tribe awards a varying number of Background Points that can be spent on allies, contacts, and resources. New players will want to study these options at length, and rightly so. But unless the referee enforces a time limit, selecting breeds, auspices, and tribes can take a good half-hour. Add another half-hour if the referee exercises the Prelude option, where players are led through a series of questions to help them flesh out their characters' backgrounds.

Moving on, players determine their PCs' core statistics by assigning ranks to Physical, Mental, and Social attribute categories. If a player wants his PC to be exceptionally bright, of average strength, and antisocial, he makes Mental the Primary Attribute, Strength the Secondary, and Social the Tertiary. Each category comprises three Traits; Mental, for instance, includes Perception, Intelligence, and Wits. Traits are rated by lines of dots; the more dots, the better the Trait. The Primary Attribute Traits receive the most dots, the Tertiary Traits get the fewest. I'm not convinced that players should have so much control in ranking their Attributes—I think a high IQ is more an accident of birth than a personal choice—but it's clever system all the same. And I like the dots, a welcome change from the usual numerical ratings.

The player also assigns Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary ranks to three categories of Abilities. These include Talents (intuitive Abilities), Skills (practical Abilities), and Knowledge (learned Abilities). The player spends a fixed number of dots on Abilities in each category, with Primary Abilities receiving the most. There are options per category, among them Athletics Talent, Firearms Skill, and Computer Knowledge: High Ability ratings allow the player to select a specialty; a PC with a lot of Computer Knowledge dots may specialize in Hacking or Virus Programs. A specialty gives the PC a second chance at success when attempting an action relating to his area of expertise.

The designers go to great lengths to provide players with a broad range of choices to help customize their characters. I wish they'd have taken as much care to define those choices, as many of the descriptions are annoyingly vague, some of them downright sloppy. The Wits Trait, for example, is defined as "your ability to react quickly and correctly to new situations . . . shrewdness, sagacity, and capacity for understanding problems in the most basic terms." So who's someone with exceptional Wits? Inexplicably, the text says, "Stand-Up Comic." I was thinking more along the lines of Robin Hood than David Letterman. In the Etiquette entry, knowing "how to be liked" rates four dots;

knowing "how to be admired" rates only two. Isn't that backwards? Lars Ulrich represents the top rank of the Performance Skill, but that's only meaningful if you recognize the name (he's Metallica's drummer). I don't share the designers' assumption that all readers know Ulrich any better than, say, Chad Wackerman (Frank Zappa's old drummer, and a good two dots better than Lars).

A PC also receives 500 Renown points (to divide among Glory, Honor, and Wisdom Traits), a variable number of Background Trait points (for allies, contacts, and kinfolk) and a set of Gifts, determined by his breed, auspice, and tribe. Gifts are WEREWOLF's equivalent of magic spells, a benefit of the PC's intimate relationship with the spiritual world. Typical Gifts include Eye of the Cat, which lets the user see in the dark, and Kiss of Helios, which grants immunity to fire. They're fun, and there's a lot of them, but too many suffer from inadequate explanations and fuzzy rules. The Head Games Gift enables the user to "steer the emotions" of a victim. But what does that mean? Are there limits? How long does it last? The Assimilation Gift, which allows the PC to interact with anyone from any culture, is only useful if the players and referee agree on what an interaction entails. The designers say, "Gifts are highly variable in effect, and largely depend on the whims of the spirits who grant them." But that's a cop-out. Effects this vague rely too much on guesswork and burden an already over-worked referee.

Mechanics: The game mechanics are refreshingly simple, reflecting the designers' intentions to accommodate storytellers rather than rules lawyers. To resolve most actions, players roll against the applicable Attributes and Abilities; if a character listens for a prowler, he rolls against his Perception and Alertness. For every dot in the relevant Attribute or Ability, the player rolls one lo-sided die; if he has a three-dot Perception and a three-dot Alertness, he rolls six dice. The referee determines the Difficulty Level of the action; listening for a prowler might be Challenging, which has a Difficulty Level of 7. Every die-roll that equals or exceeds the Difficulty Level results in a success. The more successes, the better the result; a single success might mean the PC barely hears the burglar, while six successes might mean he identifies him by the sound of his footsteps. A similar system resolves most Gift effects.

PCs shapeshift by rolling a number of dice equal to their Stamina and Primal Urge dots. Each success reduces the time required to shapeshift by one second. Forms include human, wolf, and an intermediate stage called the Glabro ("Near-Man"). A Garou keeps his same statistics in his human form, but boosts his Strength, Stamina, and Dexterity as a wolf. The

Glabro also benefits from increased Strength and Stamina, but suffers an Appearance penalty.

As with any game using skill rolls, WEREWOLF requires the referee to make a lot of subjective judgments. But veterans ought to get the hang of it without too much trouble, particularly if they study the examples in the text. One of my players noticed that PCs seem to succeed a lot more than they fail. He's got a point. However, I don't think the success rate is out of line, since WEREWOLF presumes that exceptional skills are necessary to survive in the game's hostile setting. Besides, the referee can always beef up the Difficulty Ratings if he thinks his PCs are getting off too easy.

Remarkably, the basic combat rules (called "Narrative Combat") fill less than a single page. Players begin a combat round by rolling dice to determine who strikes first. In order, attacking characters make skill rolls based on the type of assault; a fist attack uses Dexterity and Brawl, a shotgun might use Perception and Firearms. The referee sets a Difficulty Level just as he would for any other action. The target may attempt to dodge, making a roll based on his Dexterity and Dodge scores. Each successful dodge is subtracted from the attacker's number of successes. The remaining number of successes is added to the weapon's damage factor; the sum is subtracted from the target's health level. Characters automatically heal one health level per turn from normal damage. Aggravated wounds, caused by special attacks such as silver weapons or vampire claws, resist automatic healing. If a werewolf suffers an aggravated wound when he's down to one health level, he dies.

That's pretty much it. An Advanced Combat chapter services players demanding more detail, but I never used it. The basic system treats combat as just another role-playing opportunity, and—with an imaginative referee and cooperative players—it resolves violent encounters as satisfyingly as a book full of tables. Blood junkies who demand to know the diameter of every entry wound won't like this. But for those who've had their fill of initiative modifiers and range factors, WEREWOLF combat provides a refreshing alternative. My only gripe: Why do all PCs have the same number of health levels? Are all werewolves equally fit?

Campaigning: The designers delve into the culture of werewolves with the fervor of anthropologists. The Garou were once a proud race with the run of the world, but the present day finds them confused and insecure. Human cities have expanded into territory the Garou originally had to themselves. Sacred sites have fallen, casualties of human greed. The influence of the Wyrms continues to grow. Garou packs must compete for limited

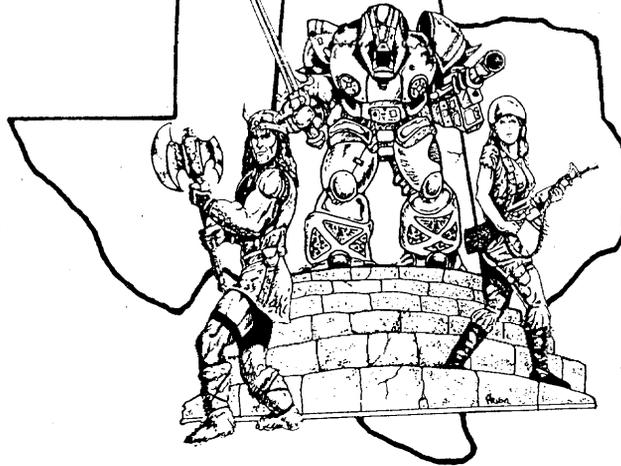
resources while struggling to maintain their dignity in an increasingly oppressive environment. Rather than succumb to despair, the Garou cling to virtuous ideals, formalized in a code of ethics called The Litany. Among its tenants: "Accept an honorable surrender," "Respect the territory of another," and "The leader shall not be challenged in time of war." Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but I found parallels between the plight of the Garou and that of Native Americans, as both represent spiritual cultures ground down by the onslaught of capitalism. Intentional or not, the real-life subtext makes WEREWOLF unusually resonant.

Seeking refuge from humans, the Garou have fanned across the world. The text notes settlements in the jungles of South America, where Garou align with weresnakes and were-alligators to stave off the destruction of the rain forest, and in the Antarctic wilderness, the rumored home of a lost Silver Fang tribe. A radical pack known as the Green Knights engages in guerilla warfare against corporate polluters throughout Europe and Asia. A mystical group called the Wagnerians seeks solace in the spirit world, attempting risky excursions into alternate planes of existence.

The rich background provides limitless campaign opportunities. Though the book has no formal scenarios, there's an abundance of staging tips, ranging from suggestions for structuring stories to advice for maintaining an ominous atmosphere. To set the scene, the referee might describe "how the cities border on a sullen, shadowy realm of gnarled pines, brooding hills, and dark, muttering brooks." Players are reminded that while the Garou are not inherently cynical, "the young scorn the old and the old revile the young as a lost generation." A section on advanced storytelling techniques tells the referee how to use dream sequences and flashbacks. An 11-page description of a Garou-ridden Central Park, complete with map and sample characters, provides an enticing springboard for an introductory campaign.

Evaluation: Most of WEREWOLF's problems arise from shaky editing and slack development. We're often told to "see pg. XX," but somebody forgot to replace the XXs with numbers. On page 84, we're referred to the following page for an example of a completed character sheet, but it's not there. Much of the book is haphazardly organized; the section on storytelling precedes the chapter on character creation, breed types are introduced in Chapter Two but not detailed until Chapter Six, and I had to search three chapters to round up all the pertinent material about Renown. Skills lack adequate descriptions; specialties are barely described at all. And the writing could be toned down a notch, as it sometimes bor-

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ders on the embarrassingly lurid. "Quiet! Hear the wind? Does it laugh at you, listening to its secrets? . . . Look at my eyes—can you see their laughing faces?" That's enough to make a romance novelist flinch.

But these are minor objections, easily corrected by a thorough revision and a merciless editor. WEREWOLF boasts memorable characters, an enticing background, and innovative game systems. With its emphasis on storytelling over mechanics, WEREWOLF gets closer to the heart of what role-playing's supposedly all about than any new game I've seen in a long time. This edition, which may have escaped from the publisher prematurely, hints at a breakthrough design. With a second edition, we may get a masterpiece.

Night Howlers

Supplement for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game: One 32-page *Werewolves' Manual*, one 64-page *DM's Guide*, one 32"X21" color map sheet
TSR, Inc. \$11
Design: Ann Dupuis
Editing: Jonatha Ariadne Caspian
Illustrations: James Crabtree
Cover: Fred Fields

After the cast-of-thousands, Dolby-enhanced, wide-screen production of WEREWOLF, *Night Howlers* seems like a home movie. But it achieves its modest goals quite successfully, providing slick, straightforward guidelines for incorporating lycanthropic PCs into DUNGEONS & DRAGONS campaigns. A copy of the D&D game *Rules Cyclopedia* is required, as is a high tolerance for the system's eccentricities. D&D lycanthropes, you may recall, can't be harmed by ordinary weapons, and include such oddball variants as weresharks and devil swine.

Characters: The D&D game presents lycanthropes as disease victims rather than members of a unique race. In theory, any human PC qualifies as a potential wererecreature, regardless of whether he's a wizard or warrior. Players opting for lycanthropic PCs must keep two sets of statistics, one for the human form, another for the beast. It sounds like a chore, but the Wererecreature Character Record Sheet, a single-page form that comes with the package, makes it snap.

The *Werewolves' Manual* provides detailed descriptions of the D&D game's ten standard were-types, outlining their restrictions and special abilities. The weretiger, for instance, can speak with great cats and can magically *roar* to paralyze its enemies with fear. Wererats are protected from normal weapons when in human form. Wereseals have access to the clerical *truesight* spell. Most special abilities are received as level advancement bonuses; weretigers can't *roar* until 7th

level, wereseals don't acquire *truesight* until the 10th. It's a nice touch that encourages players to stick with their lycanthropic PCs though a campaign.

The D&D rules require lycanthropy victims to assume the alignment of their beast-form, which as often as not is Chaotic, the most difficult alignment to play effectively. *Night Howlers*, however, allows a PC lycanthrope to make a saving throw vs. spells when transforming. A successful throw enables a bestial PC to retain the alignment of his human form. It's a good rule, strongly recommended; I'd go so far as to boost the throw by +1 or +2 to maximize the chances of success.

Role-playing tips address only the most obvious aspects of a wererecreature's split personality. The insights don't get much more profound than "some of these individual traits stem from the character's human personality, others from his lycanthropic nature." Telling us that "a lycanthrope should be role-played as two very different characters" is sound advice, but how do you pull it off? Designer Ann Dupuis seems more interested in physiology than psychology, making the book less useful than it could've been.

Mechanics: Aside from a few minor nips and tucks, new rules are kept to a minimum. Normally, an infected PC automatically transforms during the full moon. But *Night Howlers* enables him to resist the change with a successful saving throw vs. spells. Conversely, he may transform voluntarily by making a Constitution check, modified by the phase of the moon (+2 the week of the full moon, -2 when the moon isn't out). At 9th level, a lycanthrope can change into an intermediate "beast-man," combining the special abilities of both his animal and human forms. The combat section clarifies the effects of damage—an injury suffered by the active form can affect the inactive form as well—and suggests Strength reductions and other penalties for lycanthropes who don't get enough rest. "Lycanthropic Procedures" tackles some of the more puzzling aspects of shapeshifting. Can a lycanthrope transform while wearing armor? (Yes, but it can be painful.) Can a lycanthrope ride a horse? (Not without a few lucky die-rolls.)

Campaigning: As in WEREWOLF, the strongest material in *Night Howlers* deals with staging adventures. The *DM's Guide* covers the basics of converting existing characters to wererecreatures, setting the tone of the game, and adapting published scenarios. A handy table compares the relative levels of human and wererecreature characters, useful for designing balanced encounters (a 4th-level werewolf is roughly equivalent in power to a 5th-level wererat and a 10th-level human). The "Valley of Wolves" chapter presents an intriguing setting that ties neatly into the *Principali-*

ties of Glantri D&D Gazetteer. Best of all are the scenario outlines, designed to take optimum advantage of lycanthropic characters. "A-Hunting We Will Go" cleverly illustrates the problems facing wererecreatures on hunting expeditions, while "The White Wolf of Morlay" challenges the PCs to rescue a white wolf from Dame Genevieve, a magic researcher who uses lycanthropes for lab rats.

Evaluation: *Night Howlers* lacks the atmosphere and spectacle of the WEREWOLF game, but it delivers the goods to D&D game players who want to shake up their campaigns. Unlike WEREWOLF, *Night Howlers* accommodates a wide range of playing styles, from high fantasy to low comedy (humor is about as welcome in WEREWOLF as a whoopee cushion at a funeral). The clear, direct writing and clutter-free presentation enables DMs to incorporate lycanthropic characters with a minimum of fuss. I suggest going easy at first—the powerful shapeshifting PCs tend to give their uninfected companions inferiority complexes—but used judiciously, *Night Howlers* can produce some of the wildest D&D sessions you've ever experienced.

Short and sweet

How much for the death cheese? Acquiring obscene amounts of equipment ranks right up there with pounding monsters and saving the universe as one of role-playing's greatest joys. But since RPG rulebooks tend to skimp on equipment descriptions, it's not always easy for referees to generate a steady supply of gaudy treasures and exotic gadgets. A good equipment guide can be a frazzled referee's best friend. It can also double as a mouth-watering wish book for avaricious players. Not all guides, however, are created equal. Here's a rundown.

For AD&D game players baffled by the differences between chain mail and brigandine armor, and who don't know a bardiche from a barbell, the *Arms and Equipment Guide* (TSR, Inc., \$15) has the answers. Grant Boucher, Troy Christensen, Jon Pickens, John Terra, and Scott Davis probe the mysteries of the *Player's Handbook* equipment lists in lavish detail. Practical applications complement the colorful descriptions, making this particularly useful for players who want to know exactly how weaponblack or stirrups affect the game (weaponblack boosts a thief's chance to hide in shadows by 5%, mounted fighters without stirrups must save vs. paralyzation to avoid falling when struck in combat). Too many unlabeled illustrations—neither the flails on page 69 nor the maces on page 77 are individually identified—and the absence of an index mar this otherwise first-rate reference.

Where the *Arms and Equipment Guide* concentrates on the AD&D game's reality-

**THE TIME OF DARKNESS
IS OVER...**



based wares, *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* (TSR, Inc., \$7.95) focuses on the whimsical stuff. Aurora, the fictional proprietress of a medieval Wal-Mart, offers an eclectic inventory that includes bard's instruments, (lyres, birdpipes, fanfare horns), household items (dinner bells, snuff boxes, water clocks), and 14 types of cheese (Arabellan cheddar, Turmish brick, and death cheese, which costs a hefty 5 gp). Anne Brown and J. Robert King modeled the book after an actual turn-of-the-century mail-order catalog, meaning that a dose of none-too-subtle salesmanship accompanies each product description. Death cheese, for instance, is "a rich, delicate addition to the dining table, exotic both in its taste and the method by which it is acquired" (it's made from catoblepas milk). Better suited for browsers than hardcore gamers, *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* is among the least essential of the equipment guides, but it's one of the most entertaining.

Back in the "real" world, the *Compendium of Modern Firearms* (R. Talsorian Games, \$20) takes a comprehensive look at 20th-century weaponry. Kevin Dockery, a former armorer for the President's guard in Washington D.C. and creator of the MORROW PROJECT* game, examines dozens of contemporary pistols, rifles, and machine guns with expert precision. Each entry features authoritative descriptions of the weapon's physical appearance, its intended use, and a lengthy list of statistics. Probability charts give accuracy ratings at various ranges, while damage tables show the results of targeting living creatures (referees who allow PCs to walk away from machine-gun fire would do well to study this book.) The appendix features a thorough index, metric-to-English conversion formulas, and suggestions for converting weapon statistics to the AD&D game, Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game, and other popular RPGs. The staggering amount of research makes this the definitive resource on modern weapons for serious players.

Also recommended for serious players, and a nice companion volume to the *Compendium of Modern Firearms*, is *GURPS High Tech* (Steve Jackson Games, \$17). Crisply written by Michael Hurst, *High Tech* traces the history of arms from the late Middle Ages to the end of the 20th century, with an emphasis on gunpowder weapons and high explosives. Though intended as a combat supplement for the GURPS* game, most of the material is sufficiently generic to accommodate players of other systems. Packed with lucid descriptions, sharp illustrations, and fascinating trivia (early military engineers not only designed weapons, they also distilled brandy and taught chess), *High Tech* is a dazzler.

Guns, Guns, Guns (Blacksburg Tactical Research Center, \$13) bridges the gap

between fact and fancy, covering weapons from assault rifles and grenade launchers to laser blasters and particle beams. However, instead of a straight, encyclopedic listing of various weapon types, Greg Porter gives step-by-step instructions for designing weapons from scratch (RPG weapons, that is, not the genuine articles). For example, he shows how to create a pistol by computing damage values, projectile velocities, range limits, and barrel lengths, all with maximum realism in mind. To translate the results into game terms, Porter provides conversion notes for the GURPS* game, West End Games' TORC* game, and a half-dozen other RPGs. It's fascinating but demanding, as the approach has more in common with physics texts than game books. Want to calculate the energy of a projectile in Joules? Here's the formula: Projectile mass in grams x (velocity in meters/second x 3.28) squared, divided by 21,630. That can be scary if you're still using your fingers to keep track of hit points. But for the mathematically inclined, *Guns, Guns, Guns* is worth investigating.

Weapons are also the primary focus of the Tom Dowd's *Street Samurai Catalog* (FASA Corporation, \$12), a collection of futuristic gadgets for the SHADOWRUN* game. Cyberguns and shock gloves are among the better listings, but too many mundane items (such as precision arrows and—yawn—survival knives) result in a less-than-memorable volume. Worse, each entry fills an entire page, much of it empty space, which hardly makes this a bargain.

Cyberpunks are advised instead to stick with Karl Wu's *Shadowtech* (FASA Corporation, \$15), a more imaginative SHADOWRUN equipment guide that forgoes traditional hardware in favor of synaptic accelerators, tracheal filters, and other biotechnic contraptions.

Kanawa Land Vehicles, (West End Games, \$13) uses the same one-entry-per-page format as the *Street Samurai Catalog* with equally disappointing results. A vehicle guide for the TORC* game, *Kawana* doesn't manage anything more interesting than an armored carriage or a Chevrolet Sportvan. The dry text doesn't help, nor do the Evaluator's Comments, which offer stillborn observations along the lines of: "It must be said that the Lennox is a very fine automobile. I have driven automobiles that use steering wheels, and I have become familiar with this system of steering." A curiously flat effort from the usually dependable Nigel Findley.

Despite its lifeless illustrations, Phillip McGregor's *Rigger Black Book* (FASA Corporation, \$15), another SHADOWRUN supplement, makes a better vehicle showroom than *Kawana*, thanks to a fanciful selection that includes rotodrones and Luftschiffbau zeppelins. With its help-

ful customizing tips and revised combat rules, *Rigger* belongs in the glove compartment of every SHADOWRUN motorist.

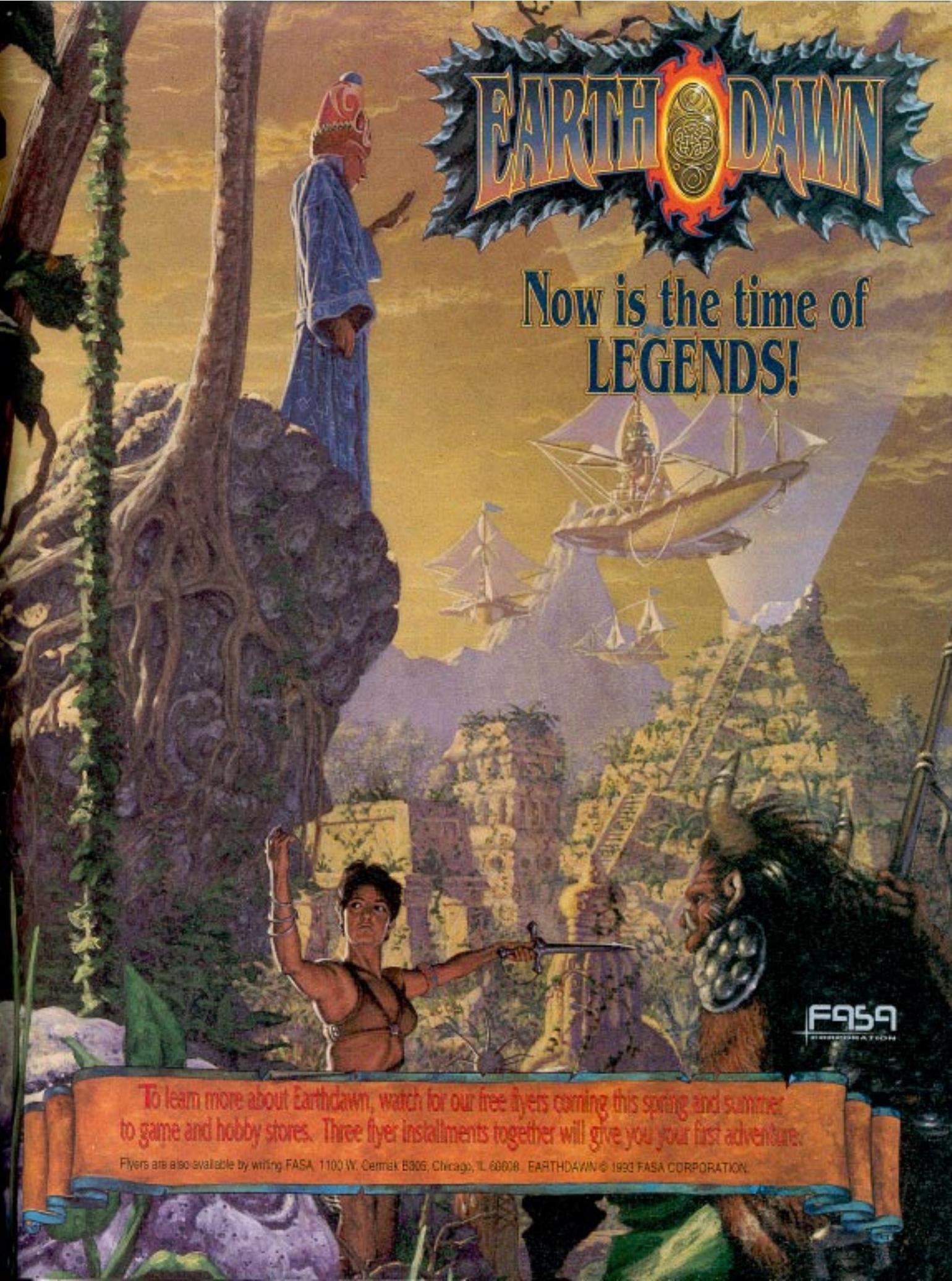
Drivers planning trips into the Twilight Zone might want to take along a copy of *Uncle Albert's Catalog From Hell* (Steve Jackson Games, \$20). Compiled by Craig Sheeley, this is an exhaustive collection of bizarre accessories for SJG's CAR WARS* game taken from the *Car Wars Compendium* and back issues of *Autoduel Quarterly*. Because the descriptions contain a lot of rule references, the devices don't readily adapt to other game systems. CAR WAR-riors, however, should find this loony catalog indispensable. Where else can you pick up an Existential Blue Crayon Gun?

Rick Swan has had his hand in more than 40 role-playing products as designer or editor, and has written game reviews for the better part of a decade. You can reach him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines IA 50310.

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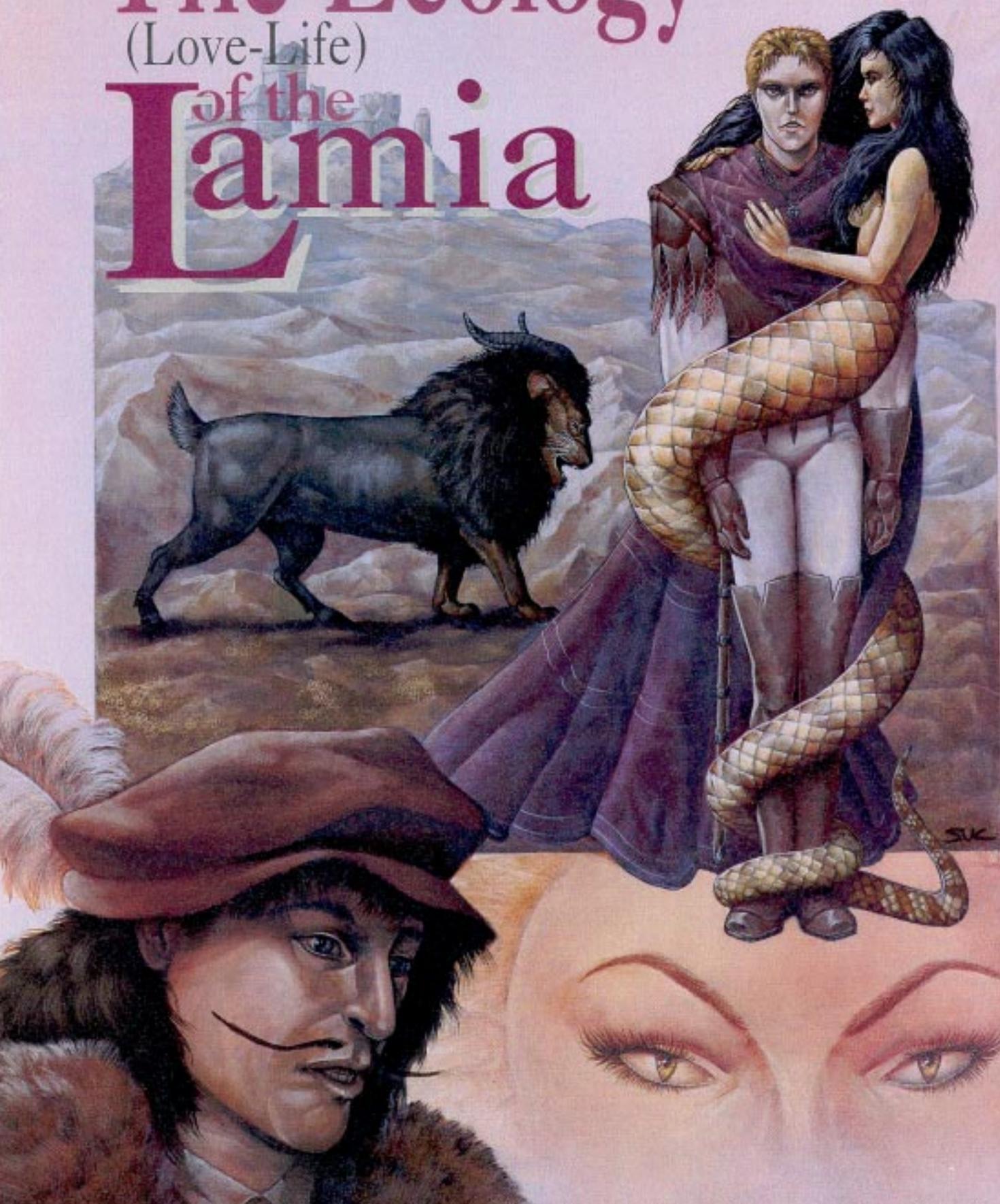
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The Ecology

(Love-Life)

of the Lamia



A story told after the kids were sent upstairs

by Spike Y. Jones

Artwork by Susan Van Camp

"Brendan," the innkeeper began, "you've sent my children to bed with their faerie story. Now earn your keep. Tell us a tale."

"And make it a good one," a patron said, "with lots of adventure."

"Yeah, fightin'!" specified a more inebriated patron.

"And women," suggested a quiet young man.

"Big, lusty women!" clarified the less-restrained drunk.

"Wantons and weaponry, the measures of good entertainment as far as the outspoken Kennan is concerned," sighed Brendan. "Yes, I must know at least one such tale. So, if Iain fulfills his obligations as innkeeper" —he glanced at his empty beer mug— "I shall fulfil mine as housebard.

"I'm sure that those of you beyond your first beards have heard of the pyromancer, Taircon Firesoul, who alternately seduced the women and looted the villages of Delitan for many a year some half a century past. But, while you have *heard* of the man, I was an intimate of his for a time, and I was one of the few men privileged enough to see him die."

Brendan Farwanderer took a deep draught from his refilled mug, then leaned back to pull out a pipe, carefully fill it, and light it from the candle on his table. He looked up and noticed the circle of anxiously waiting men, and seemed only then to recall that he had been telling a story.

"Actually," he continued, "I overstate the case. Last I was to see him, but as for the 'man', I was only a lad the age of our host's son Aidan. After being wrongly accused of a number of improprieties" — here he paused for the chuckles of his audience— "exorbitant fines were set. When I could not pay, I was declared the bondsman of the first who would pay my fines. This happened to be Firesoul.

"I was an imaginative boy, and I wove wondrous tales to amuse my fellow servants. Taircon heard of this and demanded that I tell my tales to him, to amuse him and distract him from worldly concerns. I did this gladly, thankful for an appreciative audience."

"To get yourself out of doing real work is more like it," muttered the innkeeper.

"To improve my storytelling from Taircon's point of view, I was made to accompany the pyromancer on a number of his adventures, in which he and his cutthroats burst upon sleeping hamlets, emptying them of valuables faster than a

purse dropped in Cassard. After each ride, I was required to retell the events for my master's entertainment, attempting to make the litany of atrocities more palatable and less boring in its repetitiveness.

"This continued for some months until Firesoul's band happened to set upon an inn much like this one in a village some days travel from the cities of the western coast. As usual, their attack was hardly opposed, but Firesoul was incensed to discover that one of his men was killed and another two were severely injured in capturing a young man who had attempted to flee the scene.

"An examination of the youth's armor, weapons, and decorations revealed to his captors that he was a paladin serving one of the major temples of far-off Mardukan, and his other accoutrements and the quality of his steed suggested that he was a messenger of some sort. While religion was not a subject of any importance to Taircon Firesoul, he had had more than one encounter with paladins set on capturing him before and had developed a distaste for the whole breed. Moreover, he was interested in discovering what important message had cost the life of one of his henchmen. Firesoul inquired politely of the young paladin the nature of his mission, and when the boy refused to mouth even a single word, the wizards temper flared.

"At first the paladin resisted Firesoul's attempts at interrogation, refusing to utter a syllable while the pyromancer danced finger-fires within inches of his captive's eyes, then burned him lightly upon the cheeks and hands. This torture grew more intense until the young man was clearly and gravely injured, but he still refused to speak. Firesoul was frustrated until he thought to use subterfuge to break the paladin's resistance. After casting *fire charm* spell, the wizard suggested to his captive that his spells not only singed the flesh, but also subjected the soul to the fires of damnation; if the paladin were to die as a result of these flames, his soul would similarly perish.

"Under this magical persuasion, the paladin finally broke his silence. He was a courier, carrying a message from a small temple in Varga to the north, describing the story of a merchant from that place who had recently attempted to navigate the eastern deserts by a northerly course through the Desolation of Ptarn, bypassing the taxation of the central Rama-Resh oasis. This merchant had later been found

by some pilgrims on the outskirts of the Desolation, ragged, near starvation, and half-mad.

"Much of the merchant's story was incomplete—for example, the fate of the other members of his caravan. But the central episode, concerning a desert citadel festooned with gold, littered with jewels, and graced by most intriguing occupants—namely women of surpassing beauty—was fully described.

"While it had obviously been the treasures of the citadel that had sparked the temple's interest in the story, the references to the beautiful but isolated women intrigued Firesoul. Abandoning the tortured and dying paladin to his fate, the band made its way northward to the way-city of Pa-Dedun, and thence to the wild.

"After seven uneventful days of travel across the Desolation, we advanced over one of an endless series of rolling hills and saw in the distance a squat borderfort, long in need of repair, with a small group of what looked like wild goats grazing where they would on the surrounding plain. This little outpost matched the fabulous citadel described in no respect but its anticipated location, and Taircon Firesoul's dour mood turned suddenly foul as he made for it.

"The goat-creatures hardly took notice of us as we advanced through their field, but once we were in the approximate center of their foraging formation, their nature changed. Of a sudden, they sprang at our camels, with one camel and its rider falling immediately under the onslaught."

"In a similar change of demeanor, the dust-coated riders of the surviving camels burst into action, throwing aside desert cloaks to reveal gleaming weapons and armor. The goat-beasts had no more success in the end than the villagers these same raiders had fought in the past. Little could stand up to the savagery these thugs had penned up during the crushing boredom of the journey. Without Firesoul having to cast a single spell, all the goatbeasts soon lay dead or dying on the waste, with no further loss to the reavers. The men quickly stripped the valuables from their fallen comrade and, leaving his body to the wind, turned back to the fort."

"That's it? That's all the fighting? What kinda story is it when the . . ." began the drunken Kennan, before someone put another mug in his hand to occupy his mouth.

"Somehow," continued Brendan unper-

turbed, "the caer looked different now than it had before. The gates hung straight on their hinges, the walls appeared taller and firmer than they had from a distance, and the whole seemed to have exchanged its image of disuse for that of a strong, competently cared-for citadel—the very thing we had sought from the first.

"While this seemed to me very strange, Taircon Firesoul appeared to take it easily in stride as he hailed the fortress and was answered by the opening of the gates. Fearlessly, he led the band into the grounds, dismounted, and strode imperiously towards the solid-looking keep, leaving his camel to wander the courtyard.

"Once through the keep's door, the a powerful fortress gave way to private apartments. We followed a corridor decorated with flamboyant frescoes, passing by numerous side chambers furnished with soft beds and couches strewn with cushions and partially curtained with hanging sheets of cloth-of-gold. Shortly, we arrived at the heart of the keep.

"The audience hall was of such dimensions that it seemed larger than the outside walls could have held. Moreover, it was decorated more sumptuously than the alcoves had been. Every inch of the walls was covered with gold and silver-woven tapestries, with gem-laden ornaments hanging from the rafters like bundles of drying herbs. Jewels lay scattered like so much sawdust on the carpeted floors. As with the other rooms, there were couches and cushions scattered about the hall; all was, soft, padded, comfortable, and inviting."

"The women, bard, tell us about the women!"

"Ah, thank you, Kennan, for reminding me of the crux of this tale. At my age I sometimes digress from my topic, then have difficulty finding my way back without assistance.

"As I was saying, all was soft, padded, comfortable, and inviting, and that included the occupants of the hall. Arrayed about the room were almost a dozen young women. At that age, I was only beginning to gain an appreciation of the fair sex, but even I recognized that these women could have commanded the attention of princes, let alone any other man they desired.²

"One of the maids was so beautiful as to make the others seem like the lowest harlots of Plinth. She lounged across a throne at the hall's far end, looking regal and alluring at the same time. When the pyromancer strode towards her, his mage's robes fluttering behind him, she took notice and properly took her seat to meet him. There followed the niceties of introduction, during which we all were invited to a grand banquet, but it was obvious throughout that the mistress of the citadel had her eyes set upon the pyromancer.³

"Crusted with the grime of our week-

long journey, our party took gladly to the bathing chamber. When all were refreshed, we found our trail clothing now as fresh as ourselves. We returned to the audience hall and found platters of exotic meats and fruits and fluted bottles of strange liquors placed about the floor. The women reclined next to the refreshments, while their mistress sat at a table set with two chairs.

"Our party needed no urging, and all set upon the food, drink, and women with equal energy—excepting Firesoul, who strode to the chair opposite the mistress's to engage her in conversation. I was ignored by all, including the guard charged with keeping me from escaping, although there was nowhere I was likely to wander on my own in the middle of that waste. I walked about, admiring everything and partaking of the viands as I wished.

"As the supper continued, some of the men drifted out of the hall, accompanied by the young ladies.⁴ I eventually ate, drank, and admired my fill, but when I looked for one of the ladies to talk to, I found myself alone but for the pyromancer and our hostess. I wandered up to their table and broke into their conversation.

"Before I could complete even half a sentence, Firesoul casually slapped me across the face and, without even looking my way, ordered me out of the hall. Tears streaming down my face, I ran out into the courtyard and cried myself dry.

"That done, I sulked as a hurt child will, rehearsing complaints about how unfair my life was and concocting various schemes for revenge. I know not how long I sat there, but as I did, a strange transformation came gradually over the caer, and I quickly forgot my own small troubles.

"Slowly at first, but then more rapidly, pieces of the walls and buildings began to disappear from sight. I do not mean that the parapets crumbled to the ground, or that something blocked the outbuildings from my view. One moment the parapets were full and strong, and the next they were gone, the wall itself a tumbled pile of ruins. Again, a few moments later, one of the outbuildings vanished, to be replaced by the remnants of its cornerposts and a few wooden slats, enabling me to see where some of our camels had wandered.⁵

"Of more dire concern, if that could be possible, I saw through a newly vanished wall a great cloud of dust in the distance. While it might have been sign of a storm or other natural phenomenon, seeing it combined with the magical deterioration of the caer caused me to fear for the worst, and I ran back into the transformed keep to warn someone of the army I felt sure was approaching. I first attempted to alert my assigned guardian, but as I looked into the sumptuous cham-

ber the man had entered some hours before, I saw only a shabby cell. As for the raider, he and one of the . . . young women were there, in some disarray. Shocked anew by what I saw there, I ran to the next chamber along the hall."

"A bit new you were to the ways of men and women, eh bard?" Kennan quipped.

Brendan paused for a moment, as if trying to craft a proper reply to Kennan's comment, but then continued. "Seeing a variation on the same thing in the next chamber, I was sure this scene was repeated in the other niches. I abandoned hope of alerting the men, and I stumbled to the audience hall where last I had seen my master.

"When finally I arrived, I was relieved to see that this chamber at least had not lost its opulent appearance, and Firesoul had not succumbed to the temptations that had claimed all of the others. He was sitting at a table while the citadel's queen stroked his forehead and shoulders, attempting to force him to relax.

"Rushing in, I attempted to warn Firesoul of the strange occurrences piling one upon the other. Before I could get more than half of my words out of my mouth, my speech was befuddled by some spell cast by the caer's mistress.

"'Taircon, darling,' she cooed in his ear, attempting to turn his attention away from me, 'why do we not go to the couch? It is late, and all of your companions are already abed.'

"'Later,' the mage gasped. He seemed half asleep and struggling for both air and full consciousness. 'The boy said something about attackers approaching the fortress. While he isn't above lying to interrupt my pleasures, I think he's telling the truth this once. If the outpost is being attacked, we'll have to quickly set up some ambushes, and then—'

"'That can wait,' she said, nuzzling the back of his neck. 'I have been patient and more than patient. Kiss me again.'

"'Later, I say,' he barked, suddenly shrugging away from her.

"'Now, I say,' she almost screamed. Showing a passion I have never seen matched, she clasped him to her and began to hungrily kiss."

"At first, the pyromancer struggled in her supernatural embrace, but after a time a change came over both of them. He relaxed and finally seemed to be enjoying her attentions. Silently I watched, engrossed and repelled by what I saw, and I knew then that Taircon was doomed.

"I stated earlier that the bandits and women were in some disarray when I came upon them, the women suffering the most in this regard. When unclothed, the upper half of the woman my guardian had embraced was unchanged from that of a beautiful woman, but below her waist she resembled a lioness; the whole was not unlike a grotesque centaur. In the sec-

ond room had been a woman with a goat's body parts, and I had no stomach to discover the horrors of the other side-rooms.⁷ Before me, however, I watched a greater horror unfold.

"Once the woman had Firesoul securely in her embrace, the illusion that had been dissolving elsewhere about the fortress disappeared from there as well. The elegant fixtures of the room vanished in an instant, as did sections of the hall's roof and walls. As the room changed to join the rest of the fort in appearance, so too did its mistress become as bestial as her sisters. While her upper half retained most of the beauty of her previous form, this was now joined to the body of an immense and horrible serpent whose tail lashed like a living whip.

"Oblivious to this change and to the urgency of the situation all around them, Firesoul and she continued their activities for a time. When that was finally done, she spoke again.

" 'We've disposed of the essentials,' she said, loosely uncurling her serpent's body around his waist and pulling her long, pointed nails from his throat. 'Now, slave, defend me.'

"She must then have released him from a part of the spell she'd held him under, for I heard him gasp in horror. His eyes cast desperately round the room, looking for salvation, and he squirmed in her light embrace. He saw me then, and for a moment his eyes beseeched me, calling for me to do something that he could not. But then she caressed him casually on the cheek, and a crazed smile spread across his face and his struggles ceased.⁸

"Firesoul leaped up and rushed from the room, followed by his mistress-monster, who had resumed her human form. Drawn as much by despair as by fascination, I too followed the rushing pyromancer. From room to crumbled room throughout the ruin he ran, commanding his men to arms, an order that each followed only after the monster's queen commanded *her* subjects to release their prey for the moment.

"Soon Firesoul had his entire command assembled in the debris-strewn courtyard to see the approach of a company of men sitting upright on their horses in gleaming armor. At another time, I would have laughed at how inappropriate horses and heavy armor were in the desert, but this was not that time. The knights carried a number of banners proclaiming to all that they served the same god as that paladin the reavers had tortured and abandoned weeks before, and they were but moments away.

"Being supremely confident of his men's abilities, as much from his own ego as from the compulsion to defend his 'lady,' Firesoul ordered those men who could find their camels to charge headlong against the holy attackers, while

those who were stranded, including the pyromancer, would lend their support from what few of the battlements still stood. The monster-women seemed content to merely watch their 'lovers' fight, while I thought it best to seek a sheltered corner where I could watch and yet remain protected from the brunt of what was to come."

"This should be a laugh," chortled Kennan, "ev'ryone knows that paladins fight fair. That's why Firesoul lasted so long before."

"The battle was a spectacular thing to behold," Farwanderer continued, his eyes bright, 'with Firesoul's cavalry harassing the paladins from all sides as those other raiders rained arrows on the knights from above. When the pyromancer began to lend his own arm to the struggle, throwing spears of flame and clouds of burning gnats at the armored attackers, I thought at first that the raiders had won again. But to my surprise, for all their energy the thugs seemed to have lost all the skill at slaughter they had exhibited earlier in the day against the goat-beasts.⁹

"Within minutes the paladins had fought their way into the courtyard and were engaging the last of the human defenders on foot. When finally Taircon Firesoul was the sole reaver left in the fight, engaging the leader of the paladins in melee with a sword of solid fire, the ladies of the fortress stepped forward to end the battle.

"While I could see the monsters for what they were, apparently they had resumed their guises as human maidens to the eyes of those others, for the paladins neither bolted nor attacked at the sight of them. After their queen ordered Firesoul to put up his arms, they all came forward and attempted to beguile the paladins in much the same way as they had the raiders in their turn. For a moment all seemed to go as before. I was about to cry out in despair when a look of instant revulsion appeared on the face of one of the gallants, and he slashed at the creature nearest him with his sword.¹⁰ Within seconds, all of the holy fighters had freed themselves from the grip of illusion. In less time than they had spent on Firesoul's men, the paladins slew the beast-women, cutting off their heads to ensure that these apparent demons would not return from the grave.

"The last of the group to be defeated was their queen, for once it was obvious that her plot had failed, she commanded Firesoul to defend her anew. Again he fought in the lacklustre manner of the possessed, but this time there was no armistice to save him, and he fell but moments before the leader of the monsters was slain. But even in death her bond was strong, for the last action of the seducer of the most beautiful women of Delitan was to crawl the few feet it took to

expire in the same bloody pool as his 'lady-love'."

Silence fell across the room. Brendan Farwanderer looked around to see most of his audience confused, not knowing how to react to the strange tale. Taking pity on them, he added a postscript. "Finally, I stepped from my shadowed vantage and strode toward the commander of the paladin's company. It took some quick thinking and smooth words on my part to convince them that I was not another trick of the ruins heaped around us; but once I'd accomplished this they gladly welcomed me to their troop, giving me a horse and such equipment as I desired from among that lying about. I rode away with them to start my new career—as a paladin-in-training."

Again, the audience was stunned, but only for a moment. Once Kennan began to roar with laughter at the thought of Brendan Farwanderer, paladin, the rest of the taverners were not long to follow.

Footnotes

1. Lamias come in three varieties: lamia nobles, common lamias, and sa'ir. Solely because of the appearance of sa'ir and common lamias, there is conjecture that chimerae and wemics are also part of this family.

While no one knows how lamia nobles came to be (the curses of both demons and gods have been cited in explanations of the lamia's origins, but the truth could be something different from either), they are now produced only as the offspring of matings between other lamia nobles and humans. Common lamias are produced either as a result of noble-noble pairings or by human-common lamia matings. The purely animal sa'ir are only produced by the mating of common lamia pairs, as they are unable to propagate their own sub-race.

Lamias and sa'ir go into heat annually, a week-long period when the urge to reproduce outweighs almost all other desires and at which time they are the most fertile. The intelligent lamia types prefer to mate with humans in order to produce offspring of their own sort, but if none are available they will mate with their own kind. If they encounter a human outside of the summer mating season, the human's presence may cause them to come into heat out of season.

Common lamias are hermaphrodites; any two of them can mate, with either of the pair being impregnated in the process. This also means that they can mate with both male and female humans. If a common lamia mates with a male human, the lamia can be impregnated, but if the lamia mates with a female human, the unfortunate woman bears the cubs. Noble lamias, having differentiated sexes, mate only with humans of the

opposite sex, and they kill humans of the same sex without a second thought.

Lamias produce litters of 1-4 cubs eight months after a successful mating. Most cubs will not reach maturity (at age four years) because of the deadly competition among the young and the fickle emotions and hair-trigger temper of its parents, who are likely to claw a cub to death if it so much as playfully bites the tip of a parent's tail. The lamia's mating urge is strong but its maternal instinct is not, thus the lamia population is never large.

Sa'ir

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Arid plains and hills

FREQUENCY: Very rare (common near lamias)

ORGANIZATION: Small groups

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day

DIET: Omnivore

INTELLIGENCE: Animal

TREASURE TYPE: Nil

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

NO. APPEARING: 1-6

ARMOR CLASS: 5/6

MOVE:12

HIT DICE: 4+1

THAC0:16

NO. OF ATTACKS: 5

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-3/1-3/1-3/1-3/1-6 (two claws, two horns, one bite)

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Surprises prey

SPECIAL DEFENSES: -2 to be surprised

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: M (4'-5' long)

MORALE: Steady (11-12)

XP VALUE: 420

Prowling deserts, ruins and other desolate wastes, sa'ir are the offspring of common lamias, almost always found in the vicinity of their parents although they have no ties of affection to their sires.

A sa'ir has the hindquarters of a goat and the foreparts of a lion, including a male lion's mane for both sexes of sa'ir. Its head is leonine with the addition of a goat's horns and dangling beard.

Sa'ir understand simple commands in

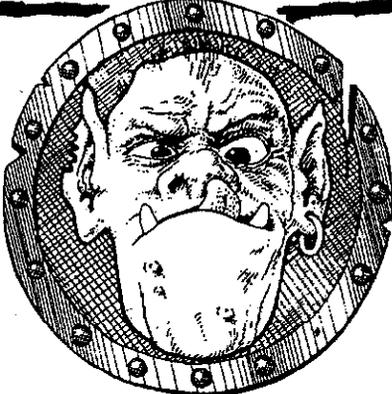
the common tongue but are unlikely to obey if they issue from any but a lamia. Their own speech capabilities do not go beyond an odd, bleating roar.

Combat: The sa'ir hunting style takes full advantage of their dual goat and lion natures. Sa'ir stalk prey in the guise of a grazing herbivore until they get within pouncing range of 20'. This tactic is very effective, and as a result the prey get a penalty of -1 on its surprise roll.

When attacking, it strikes with its two lion paws and two goat horns and its bite. Its armor class is 6 overall, but the thick mane protecting its-neck and forequarters make those areas AC 5.

Habitat/Society: Although not directly related to lions and goats, sa'ir behave in some ways like these creatures. They live in small groups structured like lion prides, but no sa'ir has ever been seen to give birth (they are believed to be sterile). They are territorial in nature, attempting to kill or chase away other predators that

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encroach on their hunting grounds.

Sa'ir are omnivores, able to survive by eating plants as easily as animals. They do have a strong preference for meat, turning down fresh vegetation even for day-old carrion. A group of sa'ir would try to take down a large creature like an elephant if one were presented to them, but the areas they inhabit usually present smaller game. This means that they must forage daily for meat or vegetation, but if they make a big kill they will gorge, then bask in the sunlight for a few days while digesting their meal.

Ecology: Few sa'ir are ever found far from the lamias that sired them. While they are *de facto* protectors of the lamia's lair, they cannot be trained to serve as watchdogs for the lamias. Thus, the population of sa'ir is as much controlled by the mating habits of the local lamias as it is by their own success.

2. Lamias do not usually form stable groups, but roam over a broad territory as

individuals, overcoming their hatred of their own kind only to exploit a rich find (such as an entire caravan of humans) or when they enter into heat and must mate. The urgency of heat temporarily assuages the lamia's murderous tendencies, so lamia pairs break up immediately after heat leaves them (captured human mates are rarely as lucky).

If a region provides only limited resources, such as a single watering hole or a solitary pass through a mountain range, then lamias will be crowded more closely together there. But when even living and hunting together in the same area, it takes the influence of a stronger creature, such as a lamia noble, to force any form of peace on them and coordinate group efforts.

3. Lamias possess four spells they can cast once each daily: *charm person*, *illusion* (as per the wand), *mirror image* and *suggestion*. In addition, noble lamias can cast 1d6 (if male) or 2d4 (if female) levels of wizard spells, with two restrictions on

what spells they can use: availability and suitability.

Lamia nobles can neither make spell books nor copy spells from one spell book onto a blank page in another. Thus the spells they can choose from each day are limited by the spell books they have at hand. For this reason, human wizards are considered valuable prizes by nobles; two encountering a magic-user would fight over him, possibly to the death.

As lamia nobles are naturally competent in the casting of illusory and mind-control spells, and reticent about using high-damage spells such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt* on potential human mates, they tend to select only deceptive spells from those available to them. Their preferences include most illusion/phantasm and enchantment/charm spells, but those of other schools are also chosen, even those not available to illusionists and enchanters such as the necromantic *feign death* and the invocation/evocation *wall of fog*.

Against nonhumans or in an emergency, lamia nobles are willing to use

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destructive spells if they have any in their spell books. Their lack of skill with this type of spell gives victims a bonus of +2 on saving throws vs. non-deceptive spells.

4. Lamias of all sorts prefer not to engage in combat, as it is dangerous and provides only food; subtle snares can gain them information, treasure, and mates who can serve as food when they've outlived their other uses. To accomplish this, lamias use their illusion-creating powers to lure victims into situations where they can employ their Wisdom-draining power.

The draining of Wisdom can't be accomplished by the stab of a knife or the slash of a claw. The lingering touch of a lamia's hand against the victim's bare skin for most of a minute will drain 1 Wisdom point. This is difficult to do during battle, but is not as hard to accomplish in non-combat settings such as seduction or a wrestling match.

If forced into combat, common lamias can use the hooves or claws of their lower bodies, and all lamias can use hand-held weapons. Weapon choice is partially dictated by whatever they have at hand, but male nobles tend to use swords while common lamias and female nobles prefer daggers. If their treasure trove contains magical weapons, these will probably be used.

5. Lamias usually disguise themselves as humans in order to lure real humans into their traps. Common lamias cast *illusion* for their disguises, while noble lamias have the ability to actually change to human form and back to lamia noble form at will and as often as they desire, saving their own *illusion* spells for such things as decorating their lair and hiding the remains of previous victims.

The *illusion* spell requires constant concentration to remain in effect. Minor activities such as moving or talking are possible, but the greater the activity level of the caster or the more distracted she is, the more difficult it is to maintain the spell. As the amount of attention given the maintenance of the spell drops, its effects are similarly reduced: Intricate details disappear from scenes, the radius of effect decreases, and patches of reality can "shine through" the layer of illusion covering them.

6. One of the greatest difficulties a lamia is likely to have during the Wisdom-draining procedure is impatience. If the lamia was unlucky or uncreative enough to only make occasional short draining attempts spread out over a period of hours or days, it would be likely to lose its temper and force the issue by seizing the victim or otherwise attempting to enforce contact, which would probably alert the victim. Every hour that a lamia spends attempting to drain a victim, it must make an Ability Check on 1d20 against

its Intelligence; if it fails the check, it loses its temper. A threat to its carefully laid plans is another reason for a lamia to abandon subtlety in favor of speed.

7. While the upper body of a common lamia is that of a human woman, its lower body can resemble a lion, goat, deer, antelope, or other creature. As to sex, it's hermaphroditic—each common lamia is both male and female. What beast makes up the lower body at birth is random. As each body has advantages or disadvantages, the least powerful types, deer and antelope, are rare among adults, while the lion form is quite common. Fully 60% of all adult lamias are of the lion-type, with 25% goat-type and only 15% of deer/antelope-type.

Lamias prefer to avoid pitched combat. If forced into melee because of a threat or their chaotic natures, they can attack with spells, weapons, and the armaments of their animal halves. Lion-type lamias make two claw attacks per round for 1-4 hp each; if both of these attacks hit, they can rake with their hind claws for two attacks of 1-6 hp each. Goat- and deer-type lamias can make two hoof attacks for 1-3 hp each, but deer lamias are somewhat frailer than the others (only 5 HD, compared to the 9 of the lion and 7 of the goat lamias). Deer lamias are fleet of foot (MV 24), but in combat their bloodthirsty nature usually prevents them from fleeing, so they tend to be slain young by other lamia types. Experience points for defeating lamias are: 650 XP for deer-, 1,400 XP for goat-, and 4,000 XP for lion-type lamias.

8. A victim fully drained of Wisdom loses his self-control and judgment, forming an irrational emotional bond to the lamia who drained him. He doesn't lose his other faculties, which can lead to a horrible torture. In the control of the lamia, a victim can be conscious of his slavery (if the lamia doesn't take pains to maintain its illusions once the prey has been snared) and can frantically cast about for a means of escape. However, even if given a chance to leave, he will be unable to take advantage of it. As with an addiction, the thought of escape might be appealing, but the thought of leaving his "beloved" would be almost unthinkable.

This torture is usually short-lived unless the victim has been taken by a lamia noble who has other needs besides mating and eating, including the desire for more and stronger spells, the urge to rule over others, and even a longing for companionship. A common lamia usually kills a human mate immediately after its period of heat ends, but a lamia noble keeps its catch as a play-toy for as long as the prey pleases it.

While it is unlikely a lamia noble's prey could survive for long without being killed

for some imagined slight, some rare victims are eventually released unharmed if they have been witty, charming, and "good company" for the duration of their imprisonment. While this is the result of the lamia noble's lingering affection for its prey, it must be remembered that all lamias are somewhat insane, and such gentle treatment is not to be relied upon.

9. Because Wisdom includes one's judgment, guile, and common sense, draining someone of these capacities does more than make him a slave of a lamia. A man with no common sense or ability to make sound judgments finds it difficult to perform in a hectic situation such as combat (including commanding one), and thus will suffer a penalty of -6 on all "to hit" and saving-throw rolls (including but not limited to saving throws against mind-affecting spells). Because of this, a man controlled by a lamia and sent into combat is often little more than cannon-fodder designed to weaken the lamia's opponents before the lamia makes its own attack.

10. No matter what spell was used to create it, a lamia's human disguise can be penetrated either by the very experienced or the very young. Adventurers have a chance of 5% per level above 6th (e.g., 5% at 7th level, 10% at 8th) of spotting inconsistencies in the disguise, such as forgetting to create adequate illusory clothing when playing a role that would normally require it.

Lamias adopt a number of forms, such as those of children, confused peasants, foreigners, or the like, so that they'll have a ready excuse to cover up any minor errors they make in their disguise. Erotic guises are also quite effective and often used. Persons untempted by this sort of illusion have a bonus to their chance of seeing through it, ranging from 15% for paladins and some clerics to 90% for the very young, for whom these illusions would hold no attraction.

Lamia nobles are more adept at illusion generating (-10% to the chance of spotting them), and because of this are more successful at infiltrating human society. They will sometimes be found in crowded cities as opposed to barren wastes, gaining the simple companionship they tragically desire along with a greater supply of prey.

The author would like to thank Phil Masters for his many suggestions during the writing of this article and for creating the lamia noble (in the FIEND FOLIO® tome) in the first place.

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FORUM

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments. We will print your complete address if you request it.

This letter is in response to Brad Allison, from issue #184. He expressed concern that psionic powers [in the AD&D® game] have very few limits upon them, as does magic with its saving throws, magic resistance, and various protection spells.

My group and I have been playing in the new DARK SUN™ campaign world for quite some time now, and it does seem there is no protection against many psionic powers. There are no protective spells, no resistance, and seldom a saving throw. As Mr. Allison mentioned, it would not be too difficult for even a low-level psionicist to wipe out even the most powerful monster or nonpsionic character. I became concerned when I threw the party up against what I thought was an almost unbeatable opponent, hoping to force the group into retreat or parlay. The enemy was a high-level mage/psionicist. When the moment finally came when party and foe were face-to-face, the two psionicists in the party merely ganged up and smashed the psionic foe. Since there is no allowance for one to get better at psionic attacks or defenses as level increases, he was quickly dispatched with little trouble.

Many psionic powers that are very powerful can be acquired at very low level, should a psionicist choose to do so. Take Dimension Door, for example. A mage must be 10th level to acquire the spell, yet a psionicist can gain it as low as 3rd level. The psionic version of the power allows your whole party to follow the psionicist through the doorway, which the designers wisely left off the mage spell.

My point is that, though it seems a lot of effort was put into designing the new class, not much time was spent playtesting it. While we are still up in the air on a solution, my players and I agree some kind of balance must be established, lest this new class dominate the game. Our best bet is to establish many of our

own limits and changes, as did Maurice Sprague in issue #184. I look forward to see everyone's opinion on the psionicist class.

Phillip Edwards
Arlington TX

Several people have noticed and pointed out in "Forum" (issues #178 and #184) that psionic powers were just too powerful in some areas. After taking a look at the *Complete Psionics Handbook* (CPH), I feel I must agree. Here is my proposed solution to the "problem," using some ideas and examples put forward in "Forum" letters and introducing several new twists and ideas:

Certain powers now have prerequisite levels assigned to them to prevent situations where low-level characters can crush high-level monsters. Other powers have been altered slightly. Monsters without levels are obviously not affected by prerequisite levels, but their psionic powers are altered by the other guidelines.

Clairsentient, Psychometabolic, and Psychoportive disciplines: There are no game-unbalancing powers in these disciplines.

Psychokinetic discipline: Disintegrate now has a prerequisite level of 7, and its range is reduced from 50 yards to 10 yards; a Power Score result has no additional effect, but neither does a roll of 20. Control Body now has a prerequisite level of 5 and a range of 40 yards. Inertial Barrier now has an initial cost of 10 and a maintenance cost of 10. Molecular Manipulation allows magical items a saving throw vs. crushing blow to resist being weakened.

Telepathy discipline: Domination has a prerequisite level of 7. Mass Domination has a prerequisite level of 10. Invincible Foes allows the victim a save vs. spells when the power is first initiated. Contact can be resisted by nonpsionicists without their realizing it (a little like a saving throw). Take the average of the target's Charisma and Wisdom (representing force of personality and willpower) and subtract 5. A successfully initiated Contact is then resolved like a psychic contest, the defender rolling against his Contact resistance score and the psionicist using his Power Score. The highest successful result under the power score wins the contest; a psionicist failing to win has alerted the defender that some force is trying to enter his mind. The psionicist can try again next round, but at a -2 per round cumulative penalty to his power check. If the psionicist

succeeds in the Contact resistance battle the first time, he has entered the defender's mind without being detected. The DM should take note of all his PCs' Contact resistance scores so contests can be rolled secretly.

Metapsionic discipline: Psychic Drain can be used only against willing targets; it is a psionic enhancing tool, not an attack form!

Similar changes can and should be made by DMs worried about the power of other psionic powers. Please note that "Other Considerations" on page 27 of the CPH states: "Unless the description states otherwise, psionicists require a line of sight to their target when using a psionic power." Careful use of this rule prevents some of the situations pointed out in these letters.

Furthermore, all psionic powers now have an initiative modifier of one-third their initial cost (round fractions up), to a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 12. During this time, a power can be disrupted by a successful attack against the psionicist (as with a magical spell), causing the power to fizzle and the psionicist to lose the full number of PSPs needed to initiate the power. The failure of a Power Score roll results in the loss of half the number of PSPs, as before.

Psionicists receive only a +1 bonus (not +2 on saving throws vs. enchantment/charm spells, and wizardly enchanters receive a +1 bonus on saving throws vs. telepathic powers.

Psionicists still gain a saving throw to detect magical illusions or phantasms, but only if they use psionic powers against the latter (see CPH, page 110, for the full rules).

PSPs can be recovered only while the psionicist is meditating (rejuvenating) or sleeping; other sorts of physical or mental exertion prevent this recovery. The rates at which these PSPs are recovered remains unchanged at 12 per hour, or two per turn. The expending of any PSPs in that hour negates any PSP gain that would have occurred. The sleeping or rejuvenation must be continuous and unbroken for PSP recovery to occur.

DMs may also wish to consider not allowing psionicists to become multiclassed with thieves (at least, outside the DARK SUN world) for reasons of game balance and realism. (Would a character be able to devote all his spare time to meditation and self-awareness when he was already doing the same in practicing his thief skills?) Fighter/psionicists would seem to be

feasible and not overly powerful.

The DM may wish to limit the powers that a PC psionist can learn by making the acquisition of psionic powers more like the choice facing a wizard: psionics (and especially psionic sciences and new disciplines) can only be learned from someone else who possesses the talent, not simply chosen from the list by the player. Finding a tutor for a particular power could be an adventure in its own right.

Certain magical devices and natural resistances to magical forces also applies to the preternatural forces of psionics (since magic differs from psionics only in that magical forces drawn upon are external to the wizard, while psionic forces are internal). Therefore, the magic resistance of creatures is also applied to psionic powers used against them. Certain magical spells that protect the caster can also affect psionics:

Anti-magic shell stops the use of all psionics in or passing through the shell.

Globe of invulnerability causes a -8 penalty on the power checks of psionists using devotions against those protected by the spell, and a -4 penalty to sciences. These penalties do not apply, however, to powers from the psionist's primary discipline.

Mind blank must be overcome by psionic attacks; six tangents are required to break through (this is an eighth-level spell, after all!) Treat the *mind blank* as if it were a *tower of iron will* for purposes of attack-mode modifiers.

Minor globe of invulnerability causes a -6 penalty on the power checks of psionists using devotions against those protected by the spell, and a -3 penalty to sciences. These penalties do not apply to powers from the psionist's primary discipline.

Misdirection affects both magical and psionic detection.

Spell immunity provides a +7 saving throw bonus against psionic devotions, and a +4 bonus against sciences. In cases where a saving throw is not allowed, the spell provides no protection.

I hope these guidelines correct any problems caused by psionics. I believe the system is an excellent one—a true alternative to magic, rather than a limp duplicate. One thing I personally would like to see is a set of Psionics Cards, as suggested by the CPH itself. We've got Wizard and Priest Spell Cards, so how about game aids for the poor psionist's players?

Could you please print my full address if this letter is printed, as I would love to hear from other DMs with character kits, spells, or anything else to share.

Jon Winter
6 Florence Place
Falmouth, Cornwall
UNITED KINGDOM TR11 3NJ

I am writing in response to Geof Gilmore's letter in "Forum" of DRAGON issue #178. Mr. Gilmore pointed out in his letter some game-unbalancing effects of the psionist character class, and I would like to suggest some ways to counter those effects.

There is a way to prevent a low-level psionist from defeating dragons, and it's called "the optional rule of training." By using this rule, the DM has complete control over the powers that the psionist gains until he reaches the 7th-level (after all, nobody said that the mentor must teach his student everything).

Likewise, the DM can rule that the psionist must "research" any new power that he wishes

to know by meditating for a number of days equal to the power's initial cost. The percentage of success can be calculated by using the following formula: $95\% - [(\text{power's initial cost}) - (\text{power check modifier})] + (\text{level}) + (\text{Wisdom magical defense bonus})$. For example: Brand is a 5th-level psionist with 16 Wisdom. He wishes to learn Precognition (a Clairscience science), which has an initial cost of 24 and a power score of WIS-5, so his success percentages are: $95 - (24 + 5) + 5 + 2 = 73\%$. If a psionist fails to "learn" a power, he can't try to learn it again until he had gained another level of experience.

Mr. Gilmore noted that psionic powers are unaffected by such spells as *anti-magic shell*. This is true, but one must bear in mind that although psionic powers are new in the AD&D 2nd Edition game, they have been in existence for ages (unknown to the player characters). So, there surely are spells like *detect psionics* and *protection from psionics*, 15' radius, along with magical items such as a *ring of psionic power turning* and *amulet of proof vs. psionics*.

As you can see, making the psionist a better-balanced class is quite easy. I have suggested only few ways of doing so, and I'm sure you can come up with more. After all, all you need is an open mind.

Shlomi Chetrit
Ness-Ziona, ISRAEL

I am writing in regard to Maurice Sprague and Brad Allison's letters about psionists in DRAGON issue #184.

When I first heard about the psionist character class, I was a bit skeptical. Everyone I knew that had seen the *Complete Psionics Handbook* had said that the psionist was way too powerful for a character class. I believed this until I decided to read the CPH and playtest a psionist. My views changed about the psionist character class, and it has become one of my favorite ones to play, which brings me to my opinion on what Maurice and Brad had to say about the psionist.

First, Maurice's ideas for limitations on psionists made constant reference to wizards and their spells. As stated in the CPH, psionics is in no way related to magic. There should be no restrictions placed on psionists because mages are subject to them. The reason mages don't add Dexterity adjustments to their armor class is because they must go into a trance to cast a spell. Psionists only need varying amounts of concentration to use their powers, which makes it possible that their concentration could be broken. Still, they are aware of what's going on around them and can take action, so that there shouldn't be any significant effect on armor class.

Psionic powers work like nonweapon proficiencies, so matching a power score should produce some sort of special bonus just like matching a proficiency's ability score. I should also add that rolling a 20 has an adverse effect and should make up for this advantage. Wizards don't get "super" *fireballs* because magic abides by certain laws and isn't dependent on the luck of the caster but becomes more powerful with the rise in levels.

About Brad Allison's letter, first I'd like to point out an impossibility pertaining to the Disintegrate science. There is no way that a 2nd-level psionist could have this power. Listed under the prerequisites for Disintegrate are Soften (a devotion) and Telekinesis (another science). A 2nd-level psionist receives only one

science, meaning that he has to be at least 3rd level before he can use Disintegrate.

Also, in defense of psionists, I'd like to add that most of the destructive psionic powers require saving throws against their effects, and the power scores are harder to beat. If the psionists in Brad's group rarely fail power checks, they must have extremely high ability scores that would make any character powerful.

All of this doesn't go to say that I think the psionist is equal to all of the other classes. I think that it should have restrictions along the lines of fewer powers, especially at the lower levels, changing certain devotions into sciences, upping the PSP cost of some powers, allowing powers that need 10 or more PSPs to be maintained to be disrupted in some instances, and giving a few creatures psionic resistance. As to the latter suggestion, I think that a reasonable system would be that especially dumb or smart creatures have resistance because the psionist has trouble understanding their minds (this would work only for powers used against a creature's brain, not for those like Project Force). Try a 5% psionic resistance per Intelligence point below seven and for every point above the psionist's Intelligence +3. Beings with no minds would have complete psionic resistance, and those with alien intelligence should have resistance according to just how differently their minds work.

In conclusion, I would like to see TSR come out with supplements on expanded psionic powers, psionically imbued items, and new animals that feed on or use psionic powers.

Jason Jex
Fairbanks AK

I am writing this letter to aid DMs like Jackson Caskey (issue #183), who suffer from the relentless antics of number-fudging, die-tipping, eraser-happy players. As a DM with more than 10 years of experience, I am in complete empathy with Jackson. In a few campaigns with rookie DMs, I became quite familiar with the opportunities players are wont to take. I would like to offer some crafty tactics to help alleviate uncomfortable gaming situations.

1. Use two character sheets. Let the players have theirs, but as the DM, distribute 5"x7" index cards where attribute scores, hit-point rolls, magical items, experience points, and other pertinent information are recorded in ink. Hand the cards out at the beginning of each gaming session so the players can give confidential updates to the DM. This also gives the DM the opportunity to give experience points privately.

2. Never, ever, accuse a player of cheating in front of the group. This can only lead to bad feelings. If there's one thing I've learned, players take *everything* personally. I have been informed, thankfully years later, how close I came to dying over an off-the-cuff remark about a player's gaming tactics.

3. With the advent and subsequent popularity of clear dice, it has become impossible to verify every player's rolls. If players seem to hit all the time, don't worry—just keep sending more and bigger monsters until you have an idea of the group's power. Just keep encounters challenging. After a point, players don't like cakewalks, either.

4. The one exception to not witnessing die rolls are life-and-death rolls. These are times when players and DMs are most excited. Initially, I required these rolls to be witnessed by myself. My players moaned and groaned that

this gave me too much control, as they couldn't witness my rolls. So I gave in: They saw my important rolls and I saw theirs. Surprisingly, it worked extremely well; the players were vindicated, and I, of course, gave no important information away by admitting what my monster's saving throws were.

5. This is perhaps the most important and most difficult: Fit the game to the players' style of gaming. Give up trying to make your players do everything your way—simply put, they have numbers on their side. Players' will eventually make a DM do what they want. The trick is in making them want what you want.

6. Lastly, in conjunction with Donna Beales's letter (issue #183) —incidentally, she gives nothing but great advice—give thoughtful critiques concerning how players handled situations. However, make sure that you not only ask questions about how or why, but let the players question the DM's motives. Some of my fondest gaming memories occurred after the game, when we were all relaxed and trying to figure out how things got so colossally screwed up.

Remember, the D&D game is only a game (possibly a passive lifestyle for some), but it's far better for somebody to selectively misread die rolls, pad their characters' bank accounts, or enroll in a crash health spa (one point of Strength per day) in a gaming situation. The real world is bad enough, and sometimes a little guilt-free conceit goes a long way.

Charlie Frye
Manhattan KS

I'm writing in response to the letter sent in by Jackson Caskey in "Forum" in issue #183. In his letter, he wrote regarding the fact that most

players of the AD&D game concentrate solely on obtaining magical items (scrolls, swords, wands, etc.). I, too, think that gamers nowadays are involved in personal gain and power over their fellow adventurers. More than one time have I heard utterances from players of "You had better shut up, Phil, 'cause I can kill your character with one spell" or "Well, either the town council gives me all their money or my second-level mage blasts them with her *staff of the magi*."

In my gaming group (in which I play a 6th-level firbolg priest with AC -6, near maximum hit points, and 12 magical items totaling 29,900 xp value), the players are definitely overpowered. Just recently, our mage (3rd level) sold his *rod of the lightning gods* (10d6 hp lightning damage instantly) because it was "below his level of items." Currently, our 7th-level minotaur fighter has a *maul of the titans* and a *scimitar of holy minotaurship* +5 as a useless backup weapon. Note: None of the characters in my party has an ability score under 11.

Due to my vast knowledge of Monty Haul super-characters that destroy castles while exhaling, I can offer advice on the subject:

1. Don't try the classic loss-of-weapons-during-battle or deity intervention warning the characters that all their weapons will explode in one minute. This just angers the players (and their characters!). Most of the time, players get frustrated at your decision and begin to get bored with the new, non-Monty way of adventuring. Players hate directly losing their weapons. Being both a player and a DM, I can provide both sides of the story without favoring either one.

2. Try having the characters encounter a situ-

ation in which giving up a magical item is the only way to save their skins. For example, have a character fall off a cliff; while hanging there, one of his/her magical items or weapons begin falling out of its holding place. If the character chooses to save the precious items, the character falls to his/her death. This should send across a modest hint that your items are not worth dying for.

3. Try one of these formulas for figuring out an adequate level of magical items for the party. First, average out the levels and experience points of the party. Then, when you give them magical items, don't let the characters have any more magical items than their level average. Divide the level average by three, and don't let characters have weapons having magical bonuses over that amount. Divide the experience points by five, and don't let the characters have any magical items over that new XP value. Also, obey strict magical-item limitations by character race and class (e.g., don't let the storm giant player character use that *knife* +3 without a penalty).

4. In order to control the ability scores, have each gamer roll up his/her new character in your presence. While they are creating the characters, copy down each new character's ability scores, items (normal and magic), proficiencies, XP totals, and other things that can be altered to increase the power of that character. (In my first gaming group, one of the characters kept on lying about having the Spellcraft proficiency.) Also, update your records as the characters change, and keep the character sheets at your house after each gaming group!

5. On the characters' next quest, have a toll booth where the gatekeeper only collects magical items. If these characters are all Lawful or Chaotic good, have a weak town collect magical weapons to defend against an evil tyrant (so far, the townspeople have had no luck finding weapon and item donors to aid their cause).

6. After the weapons and items levels have been brought down to normal, encourage players to use abilities, proficiencies and role-playing to solve their problems and work out sticky situations.

I hope that my ideas will aid Jackson and all DMs out there in defeating the Monty Haul demon that lurks inside every gaming group, waiting for the right chance to strike.

Justin D. Somma
New York NY
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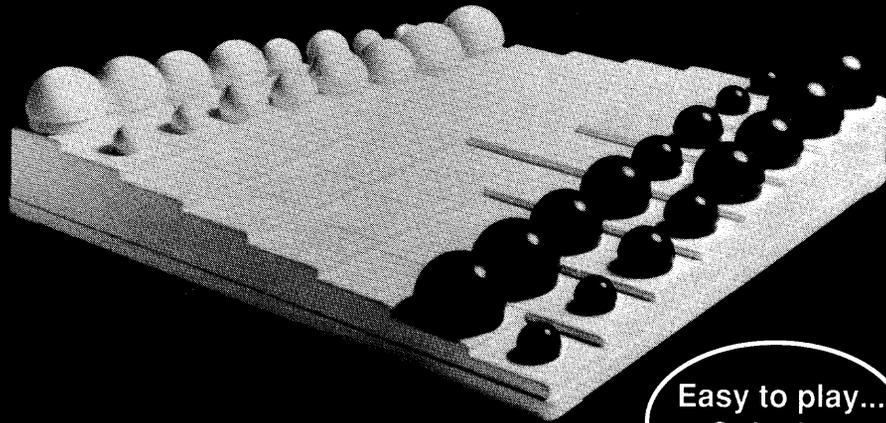
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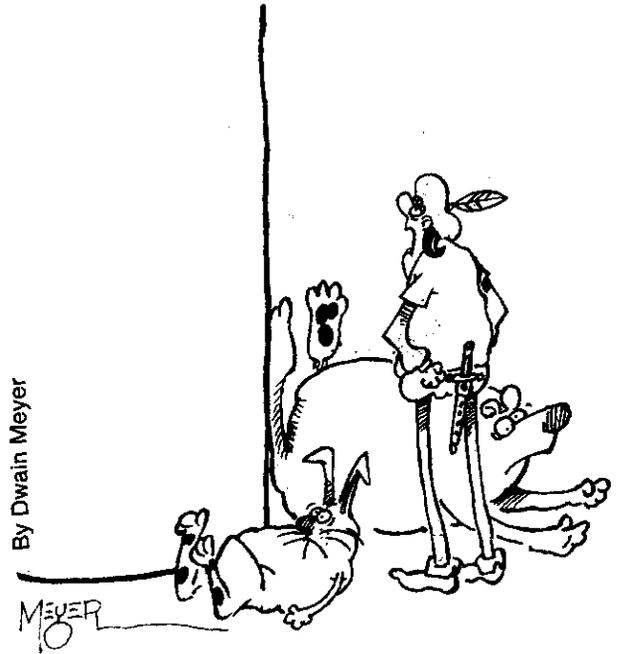
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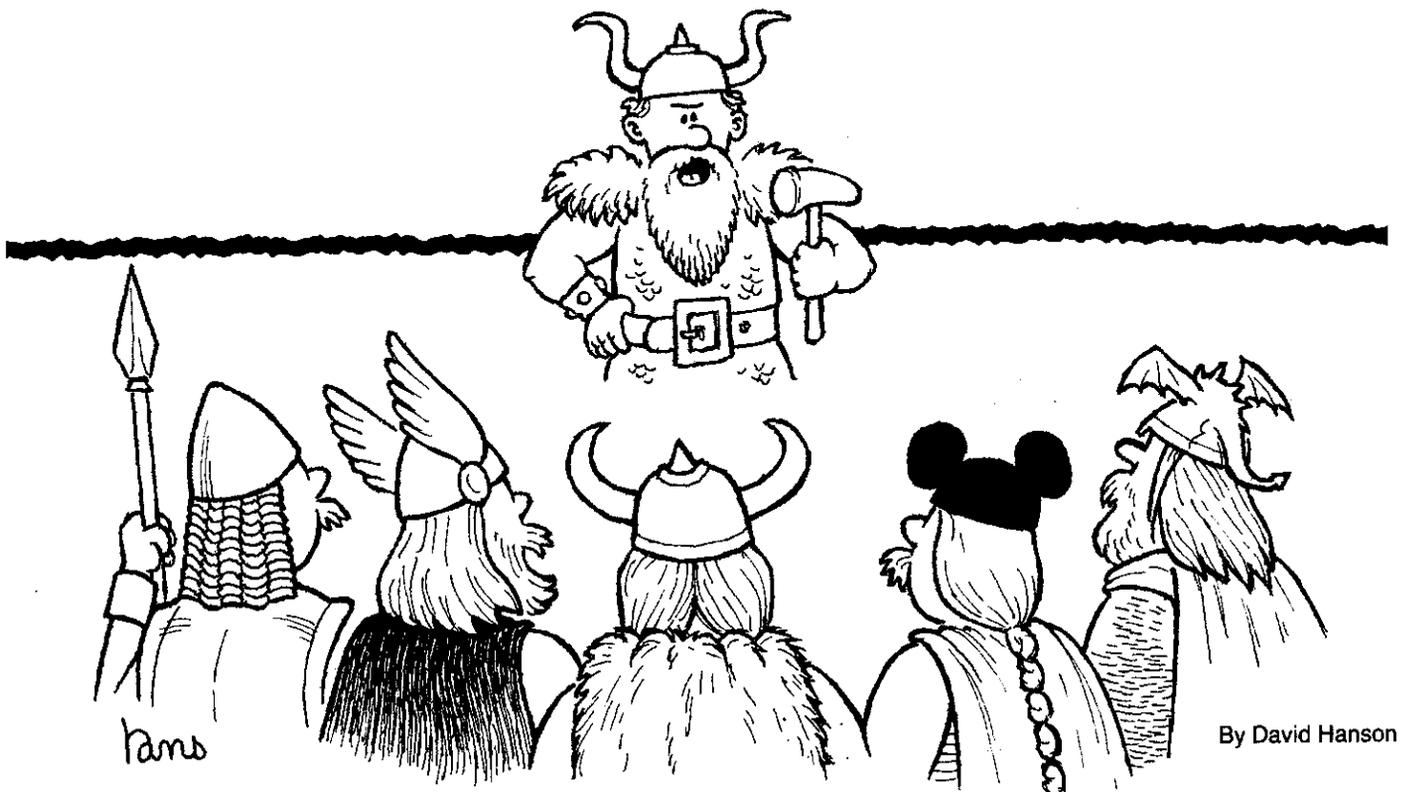
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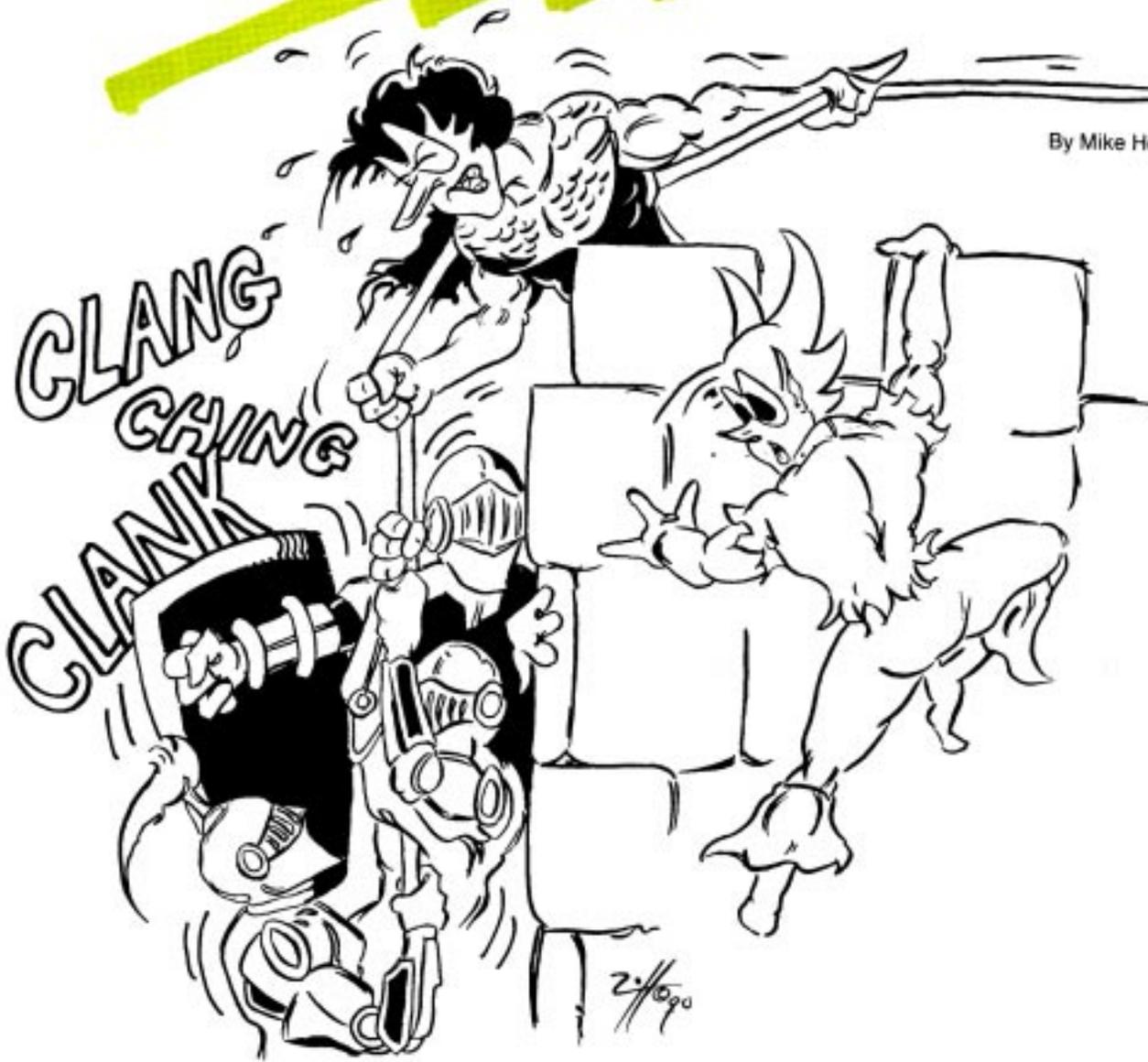
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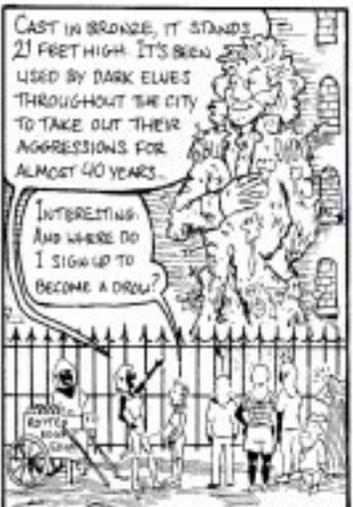
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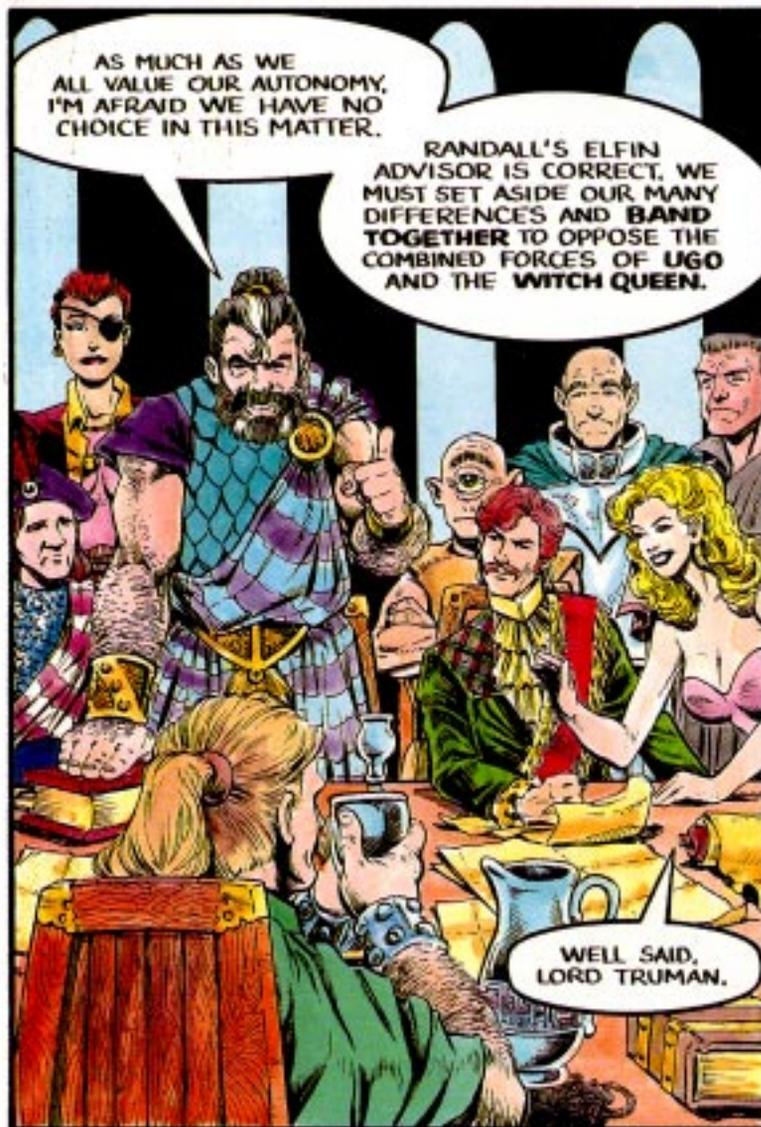
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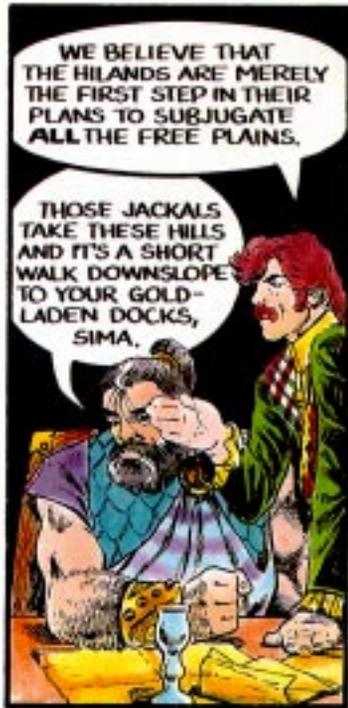
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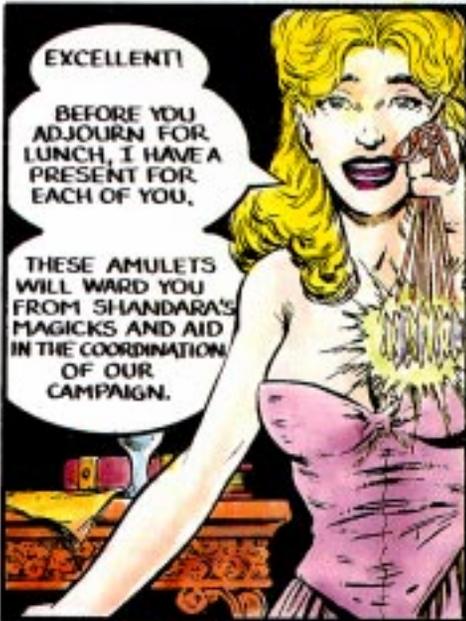
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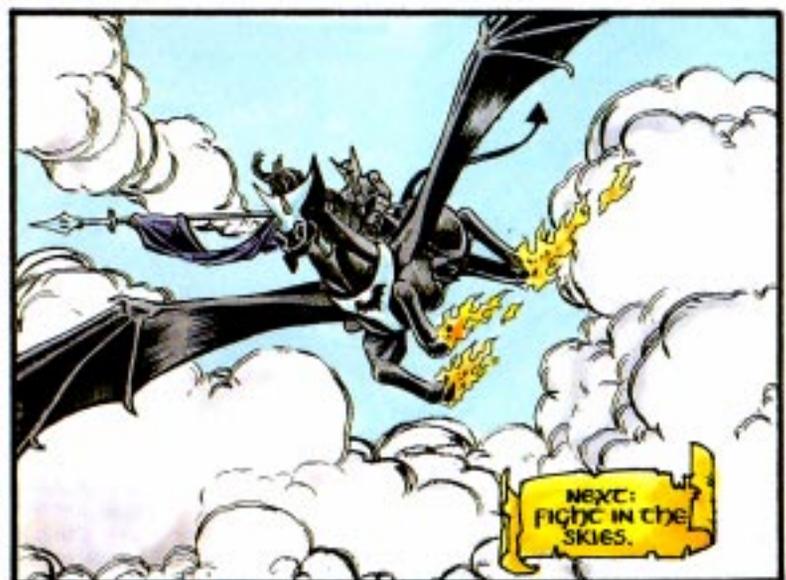
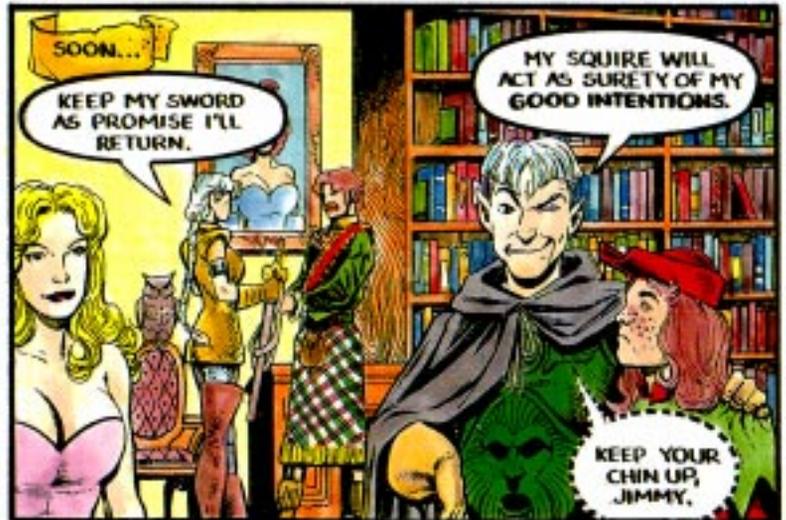
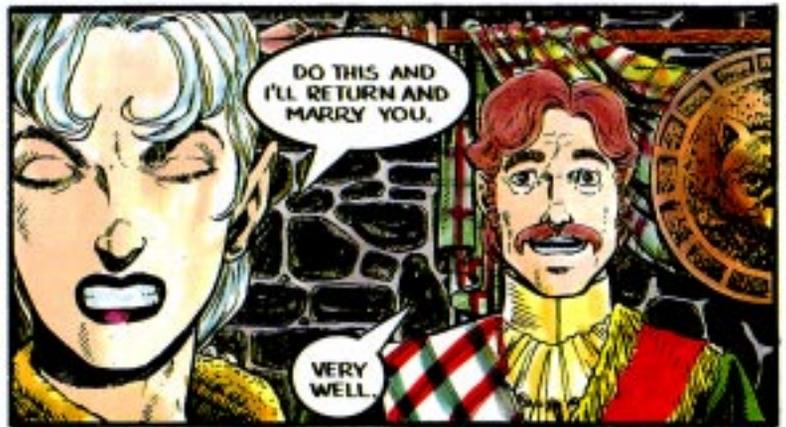
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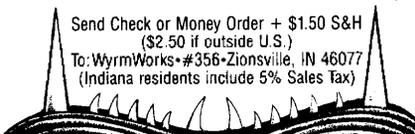
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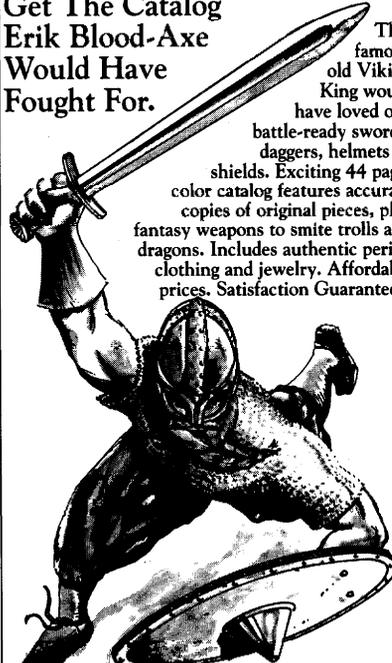
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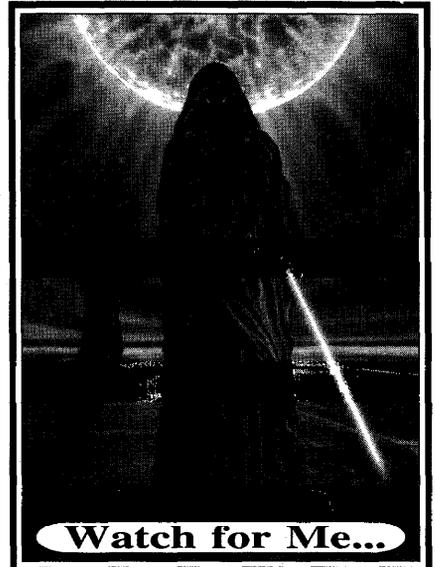
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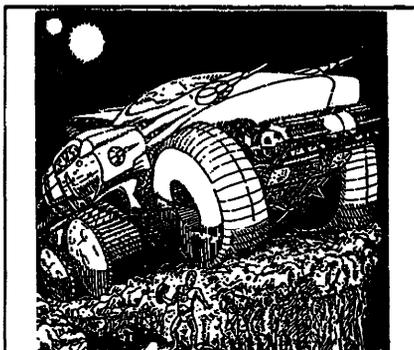
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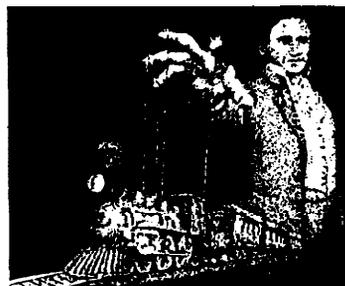
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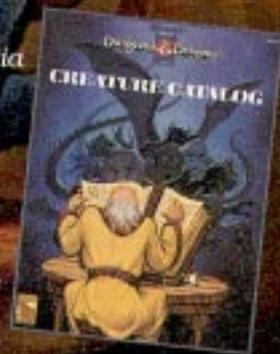
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New From TSR!



Through the LOOKING Glass




Pigatus (Fortress Figures)

When pigs fly! Oh, they do?

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Photos by Mike Bethke

This month, I have two areas of concern that I feel must be covered. By now, many of you have learned of the cruel April Fool's joke that overzealous, over-protective government agencies have forced upon us. Effective this month, the price of many of the miniature figures made in this country will increase greatly as companies are forced to go to a tin-based or pewter-based compound, to avoid liability or pressure from unfair laws or insurance companies with cold feet. The funny thing is that this same set of rules designed to protect Americans from themselves could harm Americans connected with the miniatures industry. At a time when our government is trying to create new jobs, it has once again made

it easier for foreign products to under-price American goods and reap a bigger market share.

This means that many new members in the hobby will not be able to afford to build miniature armies as we presently know them. This cuts down on competition and playing as people find it harder to locate new opponents. On the positive side, now

Miniatures' product ratings

| | |
|-------|---------------|
| * | Poor |
| ** | Below average |
| *** | Average |
| **** | Above average |
| ***** | Excellent |

is a good time to start a nationwide series of interlocking clubs that can provide armies and opponents for miniatures players. In a club, even if each person has only a couple of units, there will be a wealth of different scenarios that you could become involved in without huge outlays of money. A large number of these clubs, acting with one voice, could also provide the industry with a certain amount of clout. If you are interested in starting a miniatures organization that encompasses all types of miniatures, or if you have a group now, get in touch with me at the phone number that appears at the end of the column. You could also drop me a line and name your group, the games your group plays, the units your club has available, etc., and we will start a file.

I also want to address an issue that has come up frequently in my mail. More and more I hear, "Why can't your photos be clearer?" Many of the gaming magazines and companies have full-time art departments with staff members whose only job is to paint figures and present them in the best possible way. These companies usually have full-scale light and photo booths to take their pictures. Since their primary business is the sale of miniatures, this is to be expected.

I do this on a part-time basis in the best way I know how. Health restrictions limit my painting, so I rely on club members to paint. The original pictures are shot on a desktop with a backdrop. Pictures tend to lose from 5% to 15% of their clarity in publication, and occasionally we encounter color shifts, such as gray to sand.

We will continue to present the best column we can, and we want to thank DRAGON® Magazine for giving us this space. We would also like to thank Tina Druce-Hoffman for her excellent work on Lord Soth's Charge, a club member for his work on Idol Theft, and Soldier and Sword for submitting painted figures. Now, on to the reviews.

Reviews

Fortress Figures

P.O. Box 66
Jonesboro IN 46938

XL-20 Pigasus

For a long time, people have said "when pigs fly!" to mean "never." This month's star figure, the Pigasus, brings this saying to life.

The pig is actually more of a boar, scaled for 25 mm. The miniature is made of lead and supported by a lead column and tapered circular stand, both of which needed to be trimmed slightly. The pigasus is molded so that the rear legs are straight back and the front legs are tucked forward and up. Cloven hoofs are evident, although the joints are somewhat knobby. The pigasus is somewhat skinnier than a regular pig but has some fat. The ears are tucked back, and a wrinkled, elongated snout sticks into the wind. This pigasus has an irritated expression with its open mouth. But what sets this miniature apart are the two feathered wings with a 35-mm wingspan. The sculptors did an excellent job of blending, so the wings look like they belong there, though they are a bit short.

This piece is worth its \$3 price tag just for the possibilities. Got a klutzy, nerdish, male character that has no luck with the ladies? Here is his new pet. Need an airborne courier? Pigasus Express! Even with the mold-line cleaning needed, you'll still enjoy the figure.

Heartbreaker

Paoli Tech Ent. Center
19 E. Central Ave.
Paoli PA 19301

Gamecraft

A16 Gardners Row
Business Center
Liverpool, L3 6TJ
UNITED KINGDOM

5005 Elf Veteran

5002 Elf War Mage

Both of these figures are part of the new Heartbreaker singles line: While they are currently made of lead, April is the target date for the complete line to become lead-free. The figures are made for 28-mm scale and have large, square plastic slotted bases. Both figures have bases with them that need only minor trimming.

The Elf Veteran wears a sharp, angular breastplate that extends to a flat backplate. His right arm and hand are bare; on the left are shoulder plates, a chain-mail sleeve, and a large gauntlet. His pants are studded leather on the left and regular leather on the right. Both feet are clad in soft boots with studded folds. His shirt has a high collar; his pointed ears are very obvious against his short hair, even with a



Elf War Mage and Veteran (Heartbreaker)



Wizard's Familiar and Wizard at Study (Black Dragon Pewter)

ponytail. The face is well defined and angular with a stern expression. The primary point of attention is the plain two-handed sword held by the character. There was light flash on the base and around the right arm, and care should be taken when removing the light mold line.

The War Mage wears long, flowing robes with the right sleeve missing from the shoulder. In his right hand he holds a twisted staff with a jewel and power symbol, while his right hand fires a spell. A huge belt covers him from pelvis to diaphragm; a pouch is at his right rear. Except for some light flash, this was a very good figure and could be used as a magic-user in almost any game system.

Both of these figures are highly recommended and could be used with any other

large-scale figures. The current price is \$1.75 each.

Black Dragon Pewter

2700 Range Rd.
North Bellmore NY 11710

9651 Wizard at Study

Wizard figures are usually posed in a fighting stance, and we frequently forget just how much work is involved in learning the arts. This 48-mm scale pewter wizard reminds us vividly of the toil.

The wizard stands 60 mm to the top of his slightly crumpled hat. His long robes hang from the shoulder to ground, gathered at the waist by a woven sash with tasseled ends. Hanging from a beaded belt is



Idol Theft (Thunderbolt Mountain)



Idol Theft (Thunderbolt Mountain)

a component pouch in the back and a set of mystic symbols in the front. The figure has a slightly gaunt, wizened face framed by a long, bushy beard, moustache, and long hair. His left hand clutches an open book with engraved runes on the pages, while his right hand rests on a tall pile of books. The figure is very thin and is either emaciated or sculpted like an old-fashioned flat piece. This is not as obvious from the front or back, but is painfully evident when viewed from the side. There are some pits and flat spots on the figure as well.

The figure stands on a 33-mm diameter

base engraved to resemble stone. On this base is a crystal ball loosely fitted to a silvered base. A pile of six, thick-paged magical books, each with pages etched and some bent covers, soars upwards.

The wizard is still an interesting piece and worth the \$20 price, even with the problems.

1013 Wizard's Familiar

The previously described wizard figure takes on new possibilities alongside this new figure. The familiar is in scale with the wizard but sold as a separate pewter piece. The figure is of a large cat sitting on

a book. The cat's body is nicely done. Its facial features are a mixture of regular cat and bobcat, including the bobcat's larger ears (although some people have said the face looks like that of a gopher or other rodent). What would scare most cat owners is the well-done set of wings this cat possesses. Feather detail is good, and the size of the wings look about right for the cat. The book is a magic book bound by a lock on the front and straps. The book also has a small, yellow faceted crystal in the corner by the cat, a small ball of string on the top, and five raised bumps in a design on the bottom corner. No pitting or other molding problems were visible on this figure. It is well worth its \$12 price.

Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

656 East McMillan
Cincinnati OH 45206-1991

Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

70 Harcourt St.
Newark, Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM NG 241 R4

#1025 Idol Theft

This diorama is a seven-piece 25-mm lead kit. The base of the kit is a 60-mm circle with square stone engraving and a set of stairs leading to a dais. The floor appears to be breaking apart, and parts of seven skeletons can be seen rising from their graves to protect the idol. The skeleton parts are well-molded, but care must be taken when painting to avoid bleeding paint onto the floor. Assisting in the idol's defense are two separate skeletal figures that connect to the base with pegs. The skeletons are 25 mm though slightly bent over, have excellent bone structure, and are anatomically correct. Both are advancing and armed with bladed weapons and shields. Remnants of armor cling to their bones, including torn chain with excellent link detail. There was flash on these skeletons, but it was easy to clean.

The adventuring thieves consist of a female fighter, a male thief, and a halfling. The female fighter is dressed in tights, soft boots with decorations, a shirt with hood, and studded leather armor. Facial detail is very good, and you can see a worried look in her eyes. Her gloved hands hold a sword and dagger. The male is dressed in pants and an armless jerkin/shirt. He wears scabbards on right and left hips and a large pouch on the left, held by cross-chest straps. The right hand holds a sword back as if preparing to thrust, while the left holds a dagger. His facial expression is that of grim determination to fight off the menaces. Both figures are attached to the top of the dais by pegs and need slight bending to fit flat.

The halfling is curly haired on both

head and feet. He is dressed in pants, a loose long-sleeved shirt, and a buttoned vest. His ankles and feet are protected by well-sculpted spats, and his hands are bare. A dagger is sheathed on his left, while both hands are occupied with trying to remove the gem from the idol with the use of a crowbar. This figure has no tabs or guides, so in order to match the box illustration, you must place the gem, then place the halfling in the correct spot and carefully glue him in place (paint the idol first).

The thieves' target is a six-armed idol. This figure is almost a "flat," measuring only 5 mm thick by 47 mm tall in its squatting position. Its eastern influence is evident in its facial features, pose, and displayed weapons. The book it is holding displays page detail and symbols. The forehead of the idol has a small pit to hold a jewel as illustrated on the cover but there is none in the kit. You could use a jewel from an HO-scale rail lantern to fill the hole. There was also easily cleanable flash on the arm and harp. Note that the idol is tilted slightly back. Do not put the idol on straight, or you will not be able to place the thieves. Muscle detail is very well done.

The only other problem we had with the kit was a missing skeleton and a duplication of another skeleton. We called Thunderbolt Mountain, and it promptly replaced the part with no problems. We have received no feedback about poor service from this company, so it seems to be normal policy. This is a nice diorama piece and worth its \$11.95 price tag.

FASA Corporation

P.O. Box 6930
Chicago IL 60680

1604 BATTLETECH* 3rd Edition game

There has been a long-running debate as to whether the BATTLETECH game is a miniatures game or a board game that can be used for running miniatures. While the game plays to both groups, FASA has clarified its intent with the game's third edition and its inclusion of plastic 'Mechs with the other components, including:

- Two 22" x 17" numbered hex sheets. The hexes accommodate the regular hex base used with the lead and plastic figures. The sheets are multicolored and depict landscape features such as lakes, hills, and trees. Unfortunately, both my maps are identical, as they are apparently supposed to be according to the instruction book. This setup would be ideal for a double-blind game, but there are none listed in the scenarios in the instruction book.

- Two six-sided dice.
- A 50-page instruction book with a large number of well-done black-and-



Monks and Judges (Soldiers and Swords)

white illustrations. The book begins with an explanation of the game and the basic rules and moves, well illustrated at every step. The explanations are clear, concise, and to the point. The book then moves on to advanced rules and immediately offers good advice that the players should agree as to which rules to use before they start the game. This section is also supported by illustrations, tables, and graphics and extends the scope of the game to hand-to-hand combat and ranged weapons. The book then moves on to a training section and introduces a number of scenarios designed to sharpen a new player's combat skills. These scenarios directly relate to rules posted earlier, so they also act as reinforcement teaching. The rest of the book is devoted to the explanation of the BATTLETECH universe as it stands now and how it got that way, and it introduces the Clans and their equipment and tactics. Some House tactics are discussed, and the mood of the BATTLETECH universe is set by the brief story on the dispossessed. The book presents a section on developing and building 'Mechs by design and finally offers a generic data sheet. This book is excellent and brings a new player up to current history and story line.

- A booklet of 14 'Mech sheets, one for each of the 'Mechs included with the box, plus a reference section with all the game statistics for the 'Mechs. As with other games, I recommend that you make copies of these sheets, then put the originals away. You can further increase the life of each copy by using a clear document protector and writing on the sheet protector with dry or water-based markers or a grease pencil. I saw no obvious problems with the sheets.

- If you don't count the catalog and other company info, the last items in the set are 14 plastic 'Mechs. All of these miniatures are molded in a silver-gray, flexible plastic. Every 'Mech is molded with a regulation-size hex-shaped base with an alphanumeric code for each hex facing. The 'Mechs need to be carefully cut off the sprue; if you twist them off, you

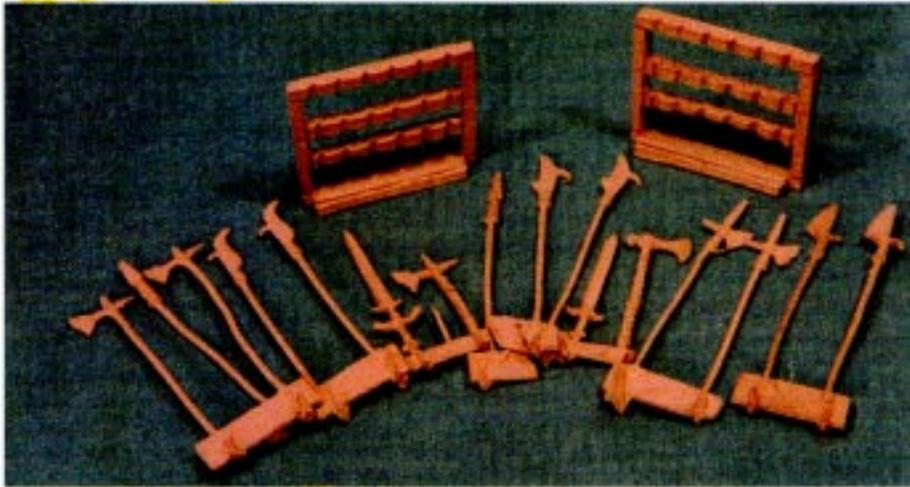
will damage the piece. Every 'Mech needed extensive work with a very sharp knife to remove excess flash along the very visible mold lines. Because the plastic is flexible, it is very easy to cut detail while cutting flash. Nine 'Mechs had problems with flash only; these were a Rifleman with three parts, a Warhammer with three parts (all simply snapped on), a Griffon, a Wolverine, a Crusader, an Archer, a Wasp, a Phoenix Hawk, and a Stinger. The four-part Locust, actually looking more like the book picture than the lead version (though with slightly longer legs and a somewhat fragile gun), rounded out the "problemless" group.

The rest of the 'Mechs all had some defect. The Battlemaster has a small defect in the upper torso, extrusion marks in several areas on the back, and a hole in the left leg that detract from the detail. The Shadowhawk has the laser on the wrong arm (should be right, not left). The "backpack" could be upside-down if the gun, which is molded solidly on, is on the left side; otherwise, the gun would be pointing down in the stored position. There are also marks on the rear. The Thunderbolt has a rear torso hit molded on, and extrusion holes are recessed just far enough that filling is not an option. Worst of all is the Marauder, which is more trouble in plastic than it was in lead. The upper body comes in two halves; the left half came twisted and missing part of an area and the chain gun. By heating the plastic slightly, I got the body to bend into the right shape and stay in place. I then melted part of the sprue and filled the hole.

Clean these models well before priming, and let the primer sit before painting. I would like to be able to give you lots of painting tips, but after doing about 20,000 Airfix and Esci figures, I have never found any paint that sticks to a soft-plastic figure subjected to regular game handling. I recommend a heat-type superglue for plastics to permanently assemble these 'Mechs, as regular plastic cement is ineffective. If you can find them, latex-based



M-8 and M-20 (RAFM Co. Inc.)



Weapons and Weapon Racks (Fantascenes)



Tabletop Accessories (Fantascenes)

paints are the best as they flex slightly and last longer than inflexible acrylic. This set is worth the price for someone just getting started; otherwise save your money. The rating is based on the majority of the contents and was lowered by the quality of the 'Mechs. The set is available for \$25.

25 Fayette St.
Binghamton NY 13901

H005 Monk
T008 Judge

Soldiers and Swords was one of the first figure companies to convert to a 100% lead-free formula, starting in January 1993. The figures are scaled for 25 mm,

but the monk is short at 25 mm to the top of his head. This is not a bad thing, as people come in all sizes and shapes and I like variety. The bases on both figures are basically identical, and both have undetailed tops with slight mold lines. The two base-placement stubs on the bottom of the figures were missing; they showed signs of quick grinding. We were also provided with painted figures by the company.

The monk reminds me of Friar Tuck of Robin Hood fame. His garment consists of a simple robe and flaps secured by a knotted rope belt. A mace hangs head down from his belt by a thong, and a pouch is on his left hip. His left hand clutches a chunk of something that appears to be a leg of meat; his right hand holds a twisted staff to which is tied a mug and a wine container. His feet wear rope-tied sandals, and a fringe of hair surrounds the bare top of his head. His face has little deep detail. If well painted, the figure is very nice and well worth its \$1.35 price tag.

The judge is a figure that could strike terror into fantasy-game adventurers, especially the thieves. During medieval times to the late 1700s, these judges were frequently law unto themselves and worked closely with town guards. This judge stands 25 mm at the eyes and is slim and narrow in build. He wears an undergarment and robe of office with detailed hem. The back of the figure is almost vertical, with only small indentations to mark the body below. His head is covered by a wig in the curly style of English judges of old. His arms are crossed, with his right hand holding a gavel and the left holding a scroll in a tube. The face has a stern set, but features are slightly shallow. However, all the detail can be brought out with careful painting.

These figures are recommended as inexpensive figures to provide color to dioramas or to practice your painting skills in bringing out details. At \$1.35 each, you can afford lots of figures.

RAFM Co. Inc.
20 Park Hill Rd. East
Cambridge, Ontario
CANADA N1R 1P2

6865 M-8
6866 M-20

During any war, there is a need for specially trained men who can find the enemy and determine their strengths. In medieval times, these scouts rode horses and were frequently unarmored. During World War II, the battle moved quickly, and scouts had to find a way of moving fast and living to tell the tale. The solution was a line of lightly armored vehicles that would allow the forces to explore quickly. The American version of these were usually six-wheeled vehicles. The M-8 was armed with a turret-mounted 37-mm can-

Al-Qadim

CAMPAIGN

A Dozen and One Adventures Sourcebox

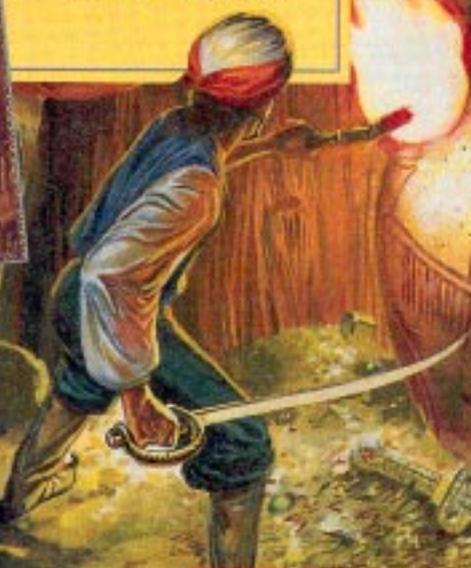
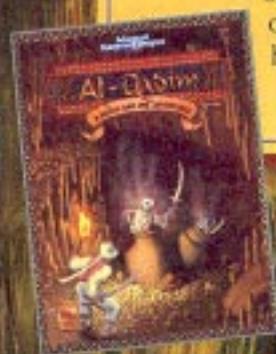
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This sourcebox, recommended for use with the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook, contains a 64-page adventure book, a 32-page campaign guide, new magical items, a poster map of Muluk and Krak al-Niraan, six map cards, and four MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™ pages.

But, enough talk - thy fate calls at book, game, and hobby stores everywhere.

O brave readers, thy fate is to traverse the realms of danger



New From TSR!



non and machine guns. The M-20 carried troops and was armed with a heavy machine gun on a circle mount. Both vehicle kits are scaled to 20 mm and work well with the plastic figures from Esci, Airfix, Revell Germany, or other companies (including RAFM) that make lead troops.

The vehicles are multipiece lead castings that share a common chassis. The outside hull is one piece and includes nonfunctioning lights, viewports, tool boxes, engine covers, tools, and vents. The interior shows very low seats, boxes, and floor; it is glued beneath the body to form a well. (One problem with these pieces is the lack of a driver's seat.) The front suspension is represented by an axle and springs that mount well to the body, and a pair of one-piece castings showing military rims and tires. A light mold line around the tires must be cleaned up. Next are the exhaust and rear fenders, which fit nicely. Last are the side wheels and tool boxes, which come cast in one piece for each side. The small tool boxes fit well, but the wheel assembly almost certainly needs filler. The M-20 has a five-piece machine-gun mount that includes a ring, clamp, machine-gun holder, machine gun, and ammo box. All are well done and fit together nicely. The turreted version requires a flat plate base; the hole for the

turret must be increased and filler used around all sides. The turret itself has a 37-mm gun that fits through the front and a top piece that helps to secure it. The final vehicle size is 67 mm long, 38 mm wide, and close to 40 mm high.

These vehicles have a number of functions even in modern-era games. Those of you who watched the movie *Die Hard* may remember the police riot-control vehicle that was destroyed: It was an M-20 chassis with a slightly different upper deck. For espionage and modern-warfare settings, these could represent the patrol vehicles of several small nations, as several dozen are still in use. These vehicles could even be used as light-corporate security or police vehicles in SHADOWRUN* or CYBERPUNK* games, with a few small conversions such as a Gatling gun or minigun in place of the 37-mm gun. These vehicles are highly recommended at \$10.95 each.

Fantascenes

Box P
Pine Plains NY 12567

This was one of the first manufacturers to be seriously wounded by the lead directive, because the company is based in New

York. The firm has bowed to the pressures exerted on it and is changing its materials to a lead-free pewter. This will eventually lead to an approximate \$1 per pack price increase on all its lead accessories and figures.

1-01 Weapons and Weapon Racks ****

Most castle kits today come in the "bare walls" variety, with no furnishings included. This 25-mm scale piece, currently made of lead, fills out an empty spot in either a tower area or an armory. Frequently, these areas would have weapon racks to repel attacking troops. This set includes six different weapons in group of two, and four other single weapons. These include: two spears, two beaked axes, and three types of halberds in pairs. Also included are a horseman's axe, a long sword, and a two-handed sword. All weapons bend easily, but there was no flash on them. One weapon was damaged when it was packed and broke when it was straightened, but it was easy to repair. Two weapon racks complete the set. The racks are made to appear rough hewn; one looks like the mold halves were slightly misaligned, and it required filing and trimming. For dioramas or game-play on vinyl mats, this set is worth the \$4.95 or future \$5.95 price tag.

1-10 Tabletop Accessories *****

This and those table sets described in earlier installments of this column can help you stock most miniature libraries, sitting rooms, or taverns. The set includes three open books complete with page detail, lock sets, and book markers; three sets of six books meant to be placed on shelves, each with an easy-to-fix mold line; and four tapers on round bases that include burning wicks. Bar patrons will appreciate the four bottles, four wine gourds, four tankards (these will require some work, as each model appears to be slightly off-center), four cups, and four closed lanterns. The cups might have been better with a hollow space to denote a fluid level. These items may also be used in bar fight scenes as available weapons. This set is well recommended at either the old \$4.95 or new \$5.95 price.

That's it for this month. If you want to talk to me, you can reach me at: (708) 336-0790, MWThF 2 P.M.-10 P.M. or weekends 10 A.M.-5 P.M., or write to me c/o: Friend's Hobby Shop, 1411 Washington St., Waukegan IL 60085. Ω

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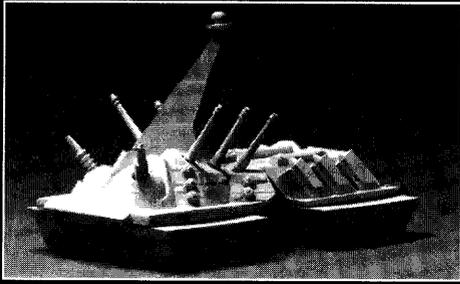
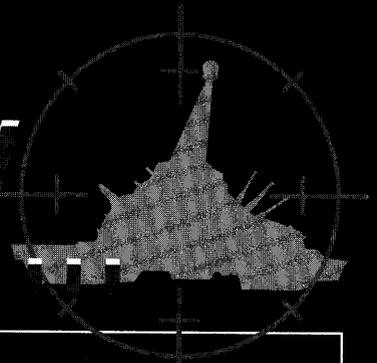
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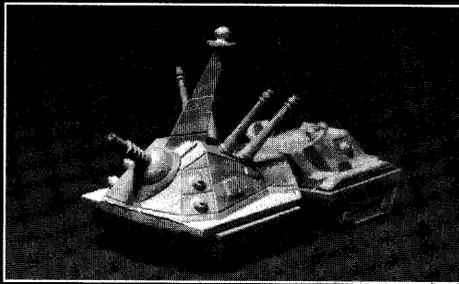
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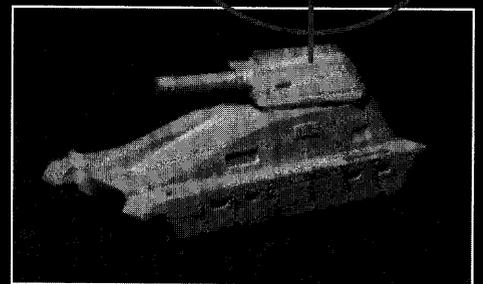
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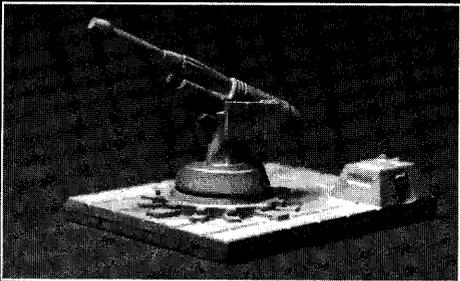
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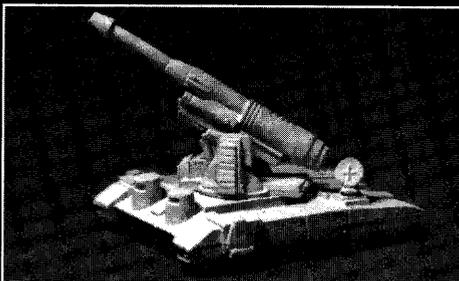
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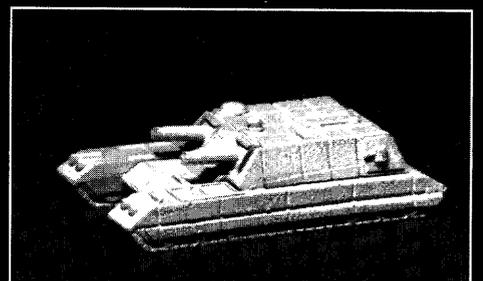
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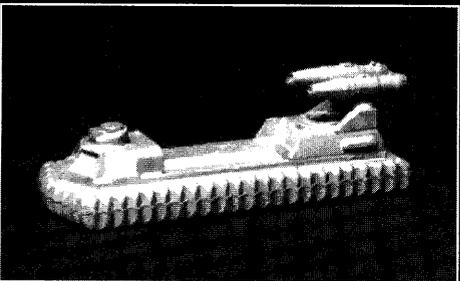
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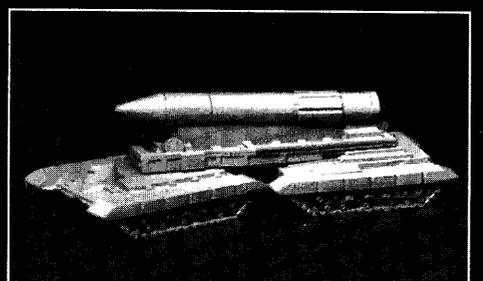
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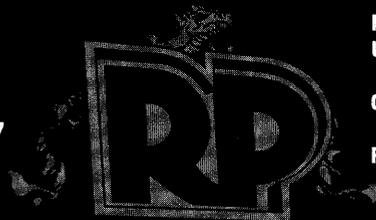
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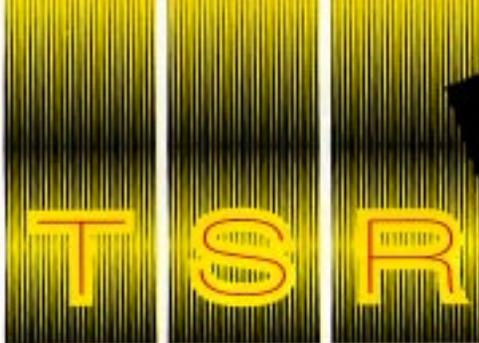


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