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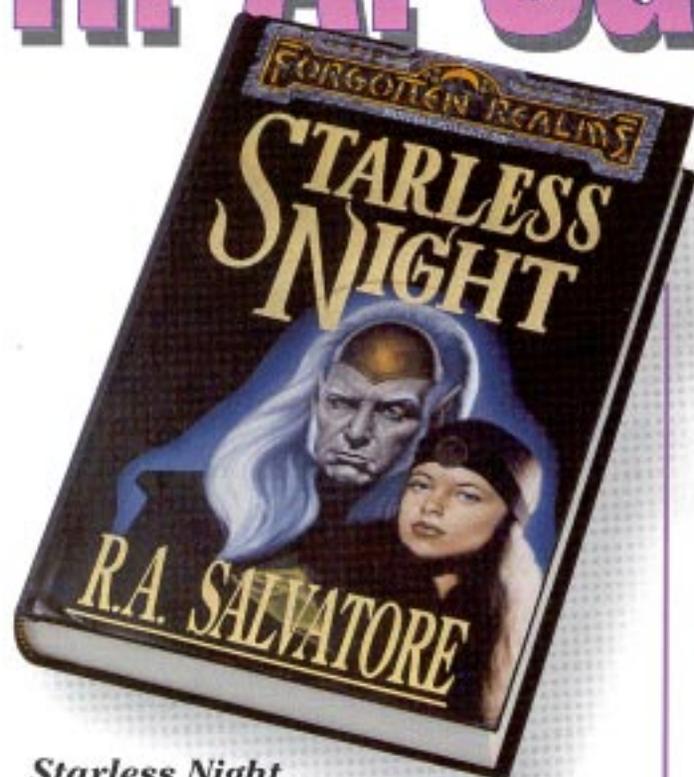
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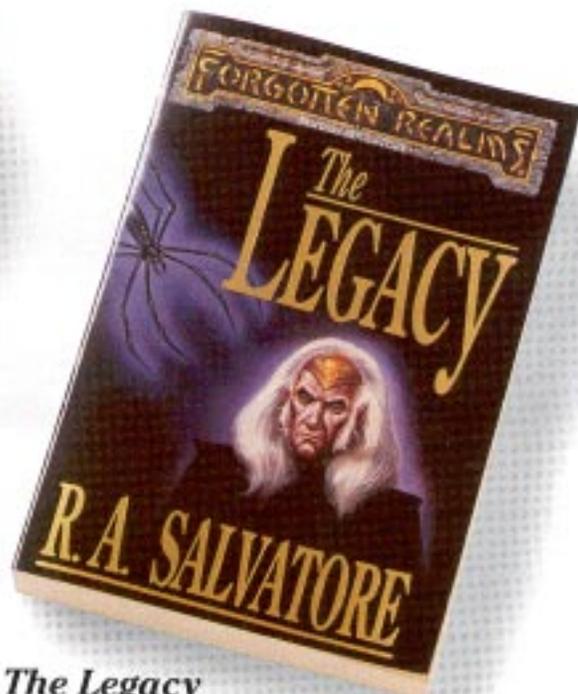


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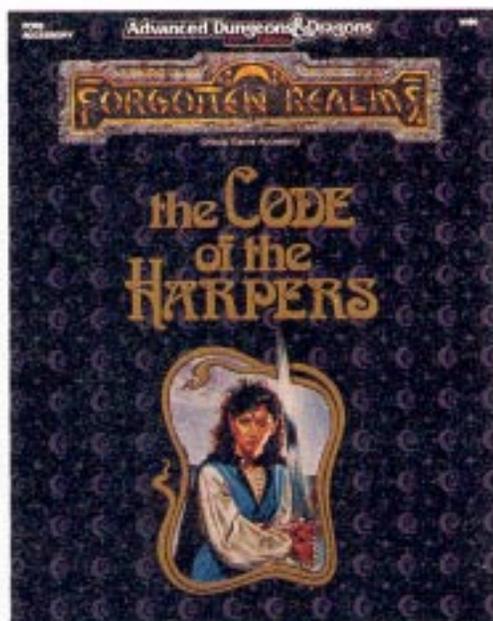
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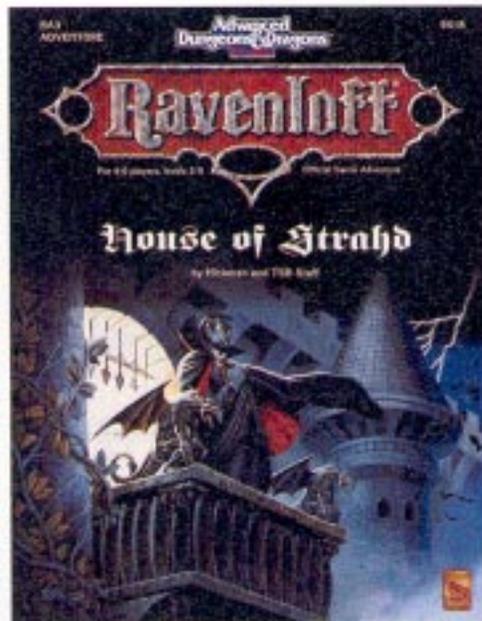
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COVER

Gerald Brom, our cover artist, first referred to his painting as "the elf guy" but later changed the title to the more official "The Bedeviled Met His Fate." He says the title is "open to interpretation." If you have an idea as to why it's called this, please write to us at: Brom's Title, c/o DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A. We're curious, too.

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LETTERS

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.

"Unfair!" winners

Dear Readers,

The response to our "You might be an unfair Dungeon Master if you hear these quotes" collection has been heartwarming (if that's the right word). It began with a letter in DRAGON issue #193 from Michael A. Vidra (Pittsburgh, Pa.), continued with a letter from Timothy Sallume (San Diego, Calif.), and turned into a flood of mail shortly thereafter. We hereby present, with minor editing, the best of all the imaginary quotes to unfair DMs from frustrated players:

"Each of the kobolds has a wand of Orcus?"

"So, this troll seems to be regenerating our fire damage."

"I know I'm new at playing, but I'm pretty sure that a mace is a metal-tipped club, not a mugger-deterrent spray."

"Fighters can't use edged weapons?"

"I never heard of a sword of party member slaying."

"Since when is Gruumsh a wandering monster?"

"You don't use saving throws?"

"Thanks. I always thought having two arms wasn't challenging enough."

"I was not aware that spells had a chance to backfire."

"But the A-bomb hasn't been invented yet!"

"I thought 25 strength was maximum."

"No, seriously, how much damage did I take?"

"A pack of tarasques?"

"I thought orcs had only one hit die."

"Come on, in a first-level dungeon? It has to be a gas spore."

"That's one tough kobold."

"Tinker gnomes invented Uzis?"

"Exactly what is a 'pantheon,' and why is it mad at me?"

"Just how many 30th-level evil wizards are there in this village?"

"I never knew Tiamat had so many twin sisters."

"That's its forty-third attack. Can we draw our swords now?"

"How did BattleMechs get into this dungeon?"

"Our group decides not to go to the Castle of Ultimate Pain, but instead back into town."

"So you're saying if you cut off their eyes, they grow into little beholders."

"Spontaneous decompression' is a spell?"

"That's okay, the spikes broke his fall."

"Do you think we could use store-bought

modules from now on?"

"Are we all being disintegrated, or is it just me?"

"But I'm already dead!"

You might have a "responsive reading" of the above before the start of your next gaming session. Our thanks go out to Jeffrey Coomans (Mesa, Ariz.), Obaida A. Eld (Cairo, Egypt), Anthony Erdelji (Cerritos, Calif.), Ariel Khazzam and George Cernico (Montreal, Quebec), Scott Krol (Roswell, Ga.), David Larkins, Dennis Slade (Cutchogue, N.Y.), Ryan Vandenberg (Little Chute, Wis.), and Cam Walters. We also thank Scott Haley (Seattle, Wash.) for this authentic quote from his DM, made while rolling an attack against the party: "He hits, and—I'm going to need some more dice."

The editors
Lake Geneva, Wis.

Putting ideas to work

Dear Dragon,

After receiving issue #191 in March and reading the article "An African Genesis," I remembered a letter you published in issue #176. The letter discussed the lack of an African-based campaign in the AD&D® and D&D® games. Brady English sent this letter to you, the same person who wrote "An African Genesis." I would like to compliment Mr. English for putting his idea to work. It's people like him who make this such a great magazine. If all of your readers took the time to send in what they would like to see in your magazine, it would be that much better.

Dusty Harbuck
Roswell, N.M.

Well put!

Paranoia (game & life)

Dear Dragon,

Issue #194 (June 1993) was one of the best I can remember in quite some time. I was very impressed by the "D.R.A.G.O.N.-bot ver 3.1" article for the PARANOIA* game system. Even the trademark comment at the end of the article was in proper PARANOIA fashion.

The reason I am writing is because of that issue's editorial. I thought that people had gotten over the "banning" craze that we went through about 10 years ago. It is disappointing to learn that this is not the case. I am still told how evil my hobby is (playing the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game) by people that I know for a fact know nothing about the game. Their comments about my "evil" hobby are usually followed by questions about how the game is played. I don't

understand how these people can tell me that the AD&D game is evil and bad when they don't know the first thing about it!

Recently, an acquaintance of mine from high school got involved with my old gaming group. His teachers saw that he had new friends and were concerned because these new friends had a reputation for playing AD&D games. The teachers talked to the school counselor (who also knew that those new friends played those "evil" games), and the counselor in turn called up this boy's parents to tell them that their young boy was running around with a bunch of Satan worshipers. The boy's life with his parents was never the same again.

My parents were more understanding than this, for which I am thankful. When I took up the hobby seven years ago, I was asked by my mother, "Are you planning to kill yourself?" I answered, "No," and she has had no problem with my hobby since then. I would guess it is because she has been on hand for several of the adventures we played at my house, and she saw that we were not Satan worshipers but were just a bunch of high-school chums having fun.

When will these people who try to ban everything and call our hobby evil ever grow up? I can only hope it is before I have children and they think their father is worshipping Satan when he rolls those dice and says, "Twenty! Critical hit!"

Allen Reeves
Ingleside, Tex.

Thank you for the comments on the "Dragon Project." We have some very bizarre dragons coming in future issues, and we hope you enjoy them as well. It's nice to see what other people can do with the topic—a mind-expanding experience, if you will.

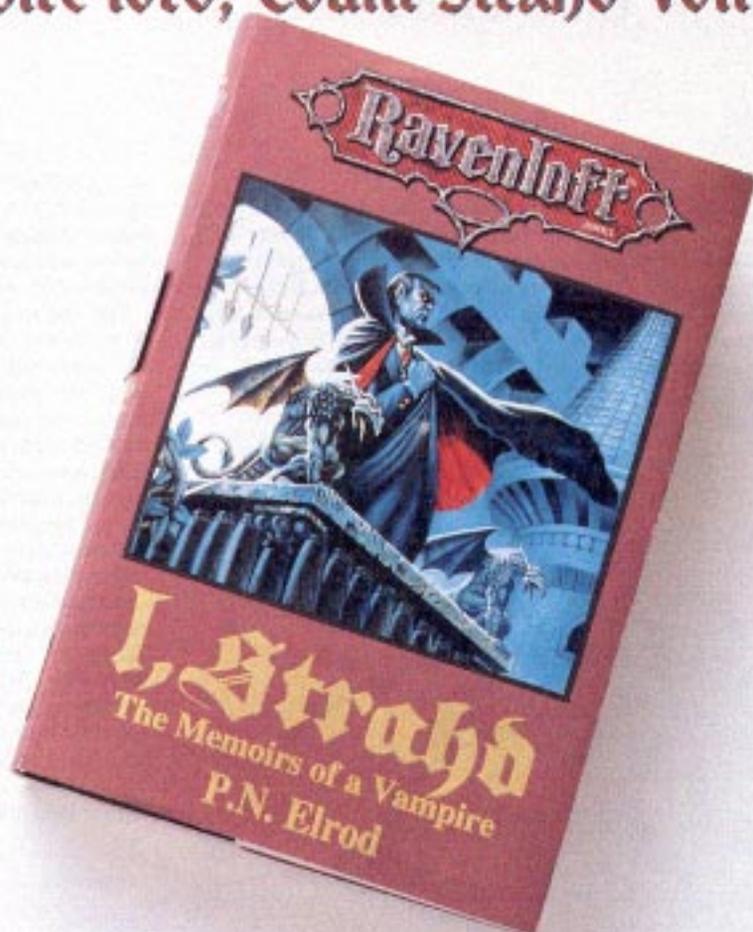
As for your second point. . . It was funny that just as I was about to start this paragraph (and I mean, at that exact moment), I got a phone call from the executive area of TSR to come down and pick up a fax. I did so and discovered that an unknown person had faxed me a copy of a newspaper column, "My Turn," that appeared in the Mesa Tribune (Mesa, Ariz.) on June 30, 1993 (page A 11). The writer, Anne Meade, was "disturbed" to discover that the Mesa Public Library was allowing kids to play D&D games there. She states that after her son expressed an interest in playing the game, she made some phone calls ("to clergy vice principals, mental health agencies, counselors, co-workers, and other parents") and was told by all that the D&D game "empowers evil." She then lists a host of horrible things said to be connected with the game, and concludes her column with a warning that "young people can innocently find themselves deeply involved with influences of evil power."

The person who sent the column to me had scribbled a note across the bottom of the sheet: "Write the Tribune today, or you'll be playing only checkers and 'go fish' tomorrow." That was

Continued on page 8

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Once upon a time . . .

Fairy tales are generally quite predictable. You know perfectly well from the first few sentences in each story just how things are going to go. The princess will be rescued, the kingdom will be saved, etc.

Tragically, many role-playing adventures are like that, too. Here is the most basic, trite, cardboard-cutout, stereotypical plot for a fantasy role-playing adventure that I can think of. Does it sound familiar to you?

THE PLOT

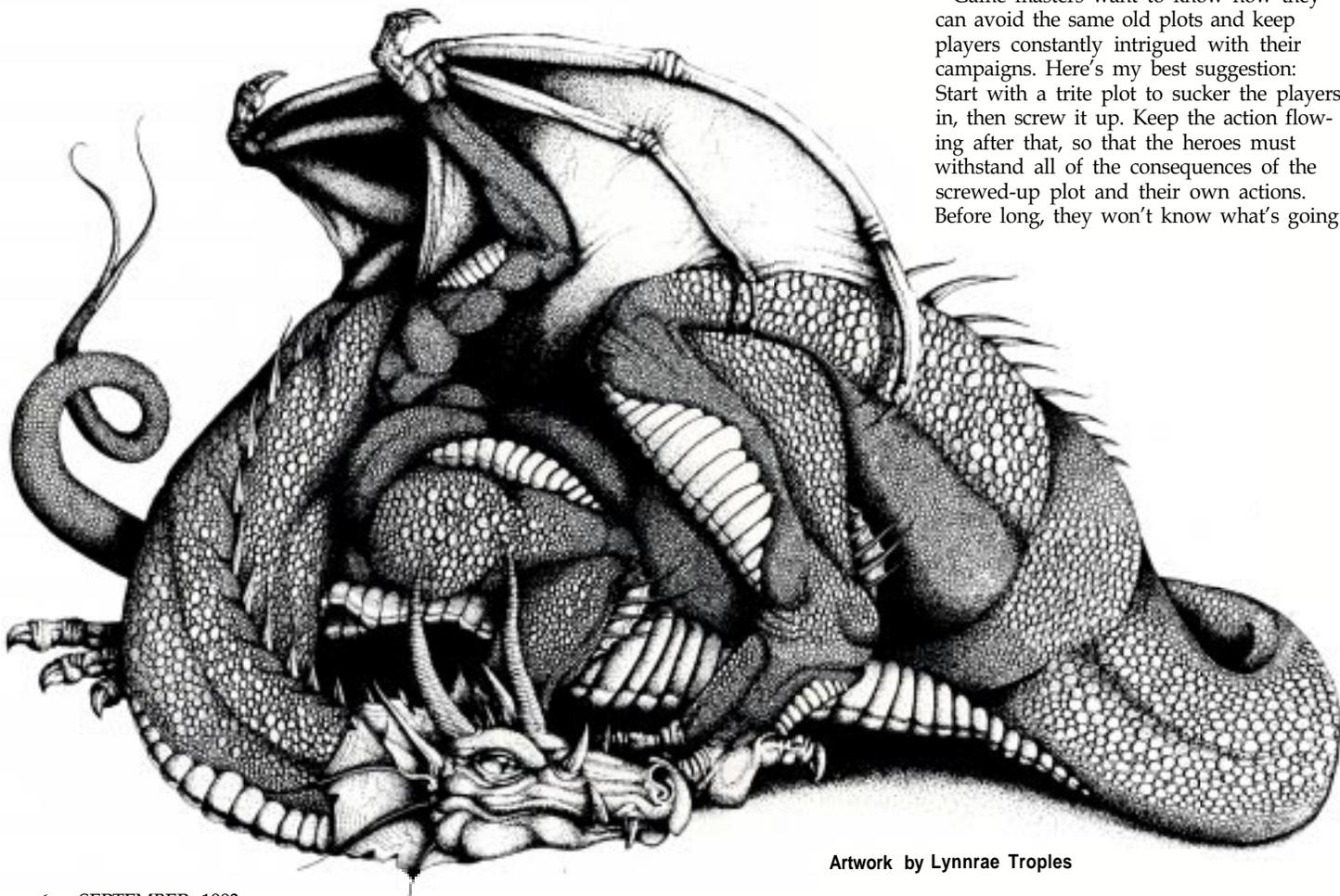
Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They kill a few orcs along the way, find the dragon's cave, kill it after a huge battle, take all its treasure, and go home to divide it up. Everyone goes up a level. The End.

The problem here is that the story is entirely self-contained. It has a beginning and an ending, and whatever action oc-

curs between those two points has no relationship to anything that happened before or happens later (except that the heroes win, gaining more treasure and power). This leads to predictability.

The real world, on the other hand, has no particular finish. You might win, but you might not. Cause-and-effect relationships take place. The unexpected happens. Adventures start out one way, get side-tracked, and end up somewhere else entirely. New adventures are spawned directly from the old ones, so nothing ever ends. Things are much less predictable—and thus more exciting.

Game masters want to know how they can avoid the same old plots and keep players constantly intrigued with their campaigns. Here's my best suggestion: Start with a trite plot to sucker the players in, then screw it up. Keep the action flowing after that, so that the heroes must withstand all of the consequences of the screwed-up plot and their own actions. Before long, they won't know what's going



Artwork by Lynnrae Tropes

to occur next, but they'll be so pleased and excited that they won't care. They'll be all over you like a cheap gelatinous cube, begging for more.

The best example I can find to illustrate these points has been appearing continuously in this magazine for many months: the "Yamara" comic strip, by Barbara Manui and Chris Adams. With every installment, a new twist appears in the plot and the heroes are mired deeper and deeper into trouble. You have no idea what's going to happen next, and neither do the heroes. Isn't it wonderful?

Using the tired old dragonslaying plot noted earlier, let's invent some screwed-up new plots and leave the endings incomplete—just like in real life:

THE PLOT, ver. 1.1

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. On the way, however, the adventurers become gravely ill because someone in the bar poisoned their drinks. They are attacked by orcs using nets, sleep-gas grenades, and clubs; some of the adventurers are captured and dragged away. The orcs (and the tavern staff) work for the local dragon, who rewards them for bringing in fine specimens of adventurers for the dragon to talk to, torture a little bit, then eat. The dragon, who runs an extensive extortion and protection racket across this region, goes so far as to offer to ransom the captives to the other heroes (sending messengers around with the news), but it is lying and intends to eat all the heroes it can find. The captured heroes must escape becoming next week's barbecue. The heroes who escaped earlier must get their friends out of trouble.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.2

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. When they get to the dragon's lair, the cave is empty but shows signs of having been inhabited within the last week. All of the treasure is gone, too, except for the cheap stuff like copper pieces. The group finds some kobolds stealing the copper to make arrowheads and bracelets, and the kobolds panic and confess that they saw an old man walk into the lair, then leave a day later. The old man turns out to be an evil wizard who trapped the dragon within a thing called a spirit crystal (he dumped the dragon's valuables into a magical sack). The old man, however, is disguised as a harmless tinker. He catches wind of the heroes before they figure out who *he* is, so he arranges for the heroes to receive the spirit crystal from a trusted ally of theirs, with instructions to break it to bring luck upon their group. Of course, breaking the crystal will release the dragon, who is simply *furios* at being captured.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.3

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. When they get to the dragon's lair, however, the dragon is already dead—a skeleton picked clean by scavengers months ago. The treasure is gone (taken by the earlier heroes who killed it), except for some lead pieces and sign with a snide comment on it. The adventurers have been made the butt of a local joke played on passers-by. Probably quite enraged, the heroes return to town but find that it has been burned to the ground in their absence. The mate of the slain dragon has returned, and she's brought along Mom, Dad, and Grandpa Dragon to help kill the puny humans. The wilderness within a fifty-mile radius is being turned into one big firestorm. The heroes are asked by refugees from the lost town to lead them to a place of safety, a hidden valley some distance away. The dragons would love to find them first, however.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.4

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They kill a few orcs along the way, but discover that when the orcs die, they turn into the bodies of bears and goats. The dragon has found a magical artifact that allows it to magically change any being into some other being, and it's having the time of its life turning peasants and all local wildlife into orcs. The closer the heroes get to the dragon's lair, the more orcs they meet, until there's practically a small city of orcs living on the lands immediately around the cave, inhabiting crude shelters and tents. If captured, the heroes are taken to the dragon, who steals their equipment, turns them into orcs, then lets them go (all of the heroes' former abilities are lost while they are transformed). The orc-heroes must now figure out how to get untransmogrified. To make matters worse, human and dwarven armies are massing near the dragon's cave to kill all the orcs, who are overrunning the countryside. The dragon takes its artifact and flies away, leaving the heroes and their orc pals surrounded by legions of orc-hating soldiers.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.5

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They almost reach the dragon's lair when they hear a terrific racket. The dragon bursts from its cave, madder than an army of banshees, and roars, "WHO STOLE MY CUP?!" It flies off in a rage, vowing vengeance. If the heroes investigate, they find the dragon's lair full of treasure; they also find a frightened leprechaun who had "borrowed" a cup from the dragon and now wants very

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much to put the cup back and leave. Before the heroes can depart the lair with the unguarded treasure, however, the dragon returns, senses intruders, and starts an avalanche to seal the cave entrance. The heroes do find a secret passageway leading into a tunnel system beneath the cave (the leprechaun secretly goes along to play some jokes). The dragon had sealed up the tunnels because they were inhabited by an evil underground race of great power. The heroes don't know this, so they set out to explore the area and run straight into a large patrol of these evil creatures coming up to investigate what the dragon was roaring about.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.6

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They kill a few orcs along the way, find the dragon's cave, kill it after a huge battle, take all its treasure, and go home to divide it up. However, all of the treasure is cursed and gives the heroes fits, if it doesn't eventually kill them outright. To make matters worse, one of the items draws hostile opponents to the heroes (it secretly drew the heroes to the dragon), and they are soon attacked daily by a wild assortment of hungry, greedy, savage monsters with no treasure. The heroes manage to learn that the only way to "turn off" the cursed items is to bath them in the waters of a fountain in a ruined city about 1,000 miles away in a dense jungle. The fountain is guarded by another dragon.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.7

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They kill a few orcs along the way, find the dragon's cave, kill the dragon after a huge battle, take all its treasure, and go home to divide it up. A few days later, however, the dragon is back—as an undead ghost dragon. Leaving a wide path of destruction and fear in its wake, the dangerous monster searches far and wide for the heroes to recover its lost treasures. Worse, the dragon cannot now be killed unless a complicated ritual is performed, involving the destruction of some of its treasure and the acquisition of a magical spear. Unfortunately, no one can find the spear (it's been taken to a museum on an island overrun with mind flayers), so the heroes must stay on the run from both the ghost dragon and frightened townspeople who don't want the heroes anywhere near them.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.8

Some Adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They find the dragon's cave, but the dragon inside is a statue covered with illusions—a decoy. The cave

is actually the workshop for a pair of spell-casting smithy-giants who are forging a set of magical weapons for a minor demigod. If the group interferes in any way with the giants, the demigod's avatar appears in a few days to angrily send them off on an involuntary quest to bring back a real dragon to give to the giants as a pet. Of course, no real dragon would ever want to be a giant's pet.

THE PLOT, ver. 1.9

Some adventurers meet in a tavern, hear a rumor about a dragon living nearby with a big treasure hoard, and set off after having a few brews. They find the dragon's cave, but the dragon inside is not very big, can't breathe fire, and refuses to fight, pleading for its life. The dragon says it is a princess who was turned into a dragon last Friday by her lover, who turned out to be a dirtball wizard working for a foreign country. The dragon has no treasure. If the heroes kill the dragon, the body turns into a lovely but very dead princess. If the heroes help the dragon-princess, they must protect her from numerous squads of knights wanting to kill the "dragon" and liberate its nonexistent treasure. Once back at the princess's family estate, the adventurers discover that the royal family refuses to believe that the dragon is their daughter—because the princess (or someone who looks just like her) is still living with them, newly married to the nice wizard she's been dating. The heroes must now figure out if the dragon is lying (it isn't) and what they should do about the situation, before the wizard decides to kill them as well as the rest of the royal family and take over the kingdom legitimately.

With a little effort, even the most trite story line can be bent and remade into a real adventure. Consider the following examples of other trite plots: stopping an evil wizard before he conquers the world with an army of demonic beasts; rescuing the kidnapped daughter of the mayor from an occult group; fighting back an invasion of goblins from underground caves; searching a haunted mansion for a secret treasure there. What would you do to fix these situations? Think about it, then run the resulting adventure for your group's player characters. They might develop a remarkable fear of dragonslaying in time.

And they'll never be bored again.



Letters

Continued from page 4

very well put. I spoke with an editor at that paper and learned that the "My Turn" column (in which Ms. Meade's remarks appeared) was open to submissions from those in the general community; many newspapers have such forums for public opinions. I spoke with another editor at the Tribune who said the paper had received and published many letters in support of gaming, these coming as a result of Ms. Meade's column. If you see a similar antigaming opinion expressed in your local newspaper and you decide to write a rebuttal, I would be happy to hear about it. So would your fellow gamers.

In looking over that particular column, I was sorry to read that Ms. Meade was presented with such a mass of negative evaluations that she decided to oppose playing the game, but I was angered that the accusations she heard against fantasy role-playing games were the same distortions and lies that have been heard for the last decade. The current hysteria about satanism lurking in every dark corner has gotten completely out of control. I think my greatest disappointment is that so many people have not taken the time to listen to both sides of the issue; Ms. Meade, for instance, said nothing about contacting any game company representatives for their views and does not appear to have even bothered to read any of the game books themselves. She might also have taken the time to examine other materials published by those who oppose gaming. When I did this, I was shocked by the degree of bigotry and intolerance that one antigaming publisher displayed toward other religions, toward science, and toward our basic American freedom of thought (see the editorial in DRAGON issue #182 for details).

If involvement with role-playing games leads to Satan worship and the "influences of evil power," then I suppose that after 10 years of working here I should be one of the top evil high priests, which would probably come as quite a surprise to my family, my many friends, and those with whom I attend worship services. Though I've not conducted a poll here, it's been my experience that my 100+ co-workers at TSR, Inc. are predominately Christian, either Catholic or Protestant, with an assortment of other religions. From overhearing random conversations, I know that church-going is a part of the lives of many people here. It's interesting that in all the negative antigaming crap that I've seen, I've never seen anyone accuse TSR people themselves of being satanists—only the people who play the game are bad, not the ones who make it. A peculiar distinction, no? Ignorant rumors are like that.

Lots of people at TSR also have families, as is evident when happy mothers bring in their newborn babies or tired parents enlist their older children to help stuff envelopes or sort papers. No one here would tolerate or condone the publication of material that we felt was harmful to the public—and especially material that was harmful to our own families!

Lots of people like our games. Some don't and that's fine, but to accuse us of producing satanic material is worse than ignorant; it is crudely destructive and insanely stupid.

But, of course, that's just my opinion. What's yours? Write and let us know.

Ω

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The Ecology Of the Giant Scorpion

by Ruth Cooke

Artwork by Tony DiTerlizzi

The little ones are dangerous enough, but the *big* ones . . .

Brandi remained hidden among the rocks until the sun had been down for almost an hour. Then she slowly began to make her way back across the mountainside to the others, her scouting of the ancient mine entrance complete.

Her slipper-clad feet were silent as she invisibly traversed the rocky ground. She was very careful not to dislodge any loose stones. A single sound could be fatal, revealing her whereabouts to the denizens of the mountainside. Goblins might be

living deep in the old mine, but goblins were the last things on Brandi's mind.

Brandi's keen elven eyes spotted several faint red glows ahead of her, weaving among the rocks. She froze instantly, watching. After a moment, she sighed



with relief. A fire beetle, she thought to herself. Not terribly dangerous, certainly not something she would have difficulty dispatching, but to be avoided nevertheless. She didn't want to forego the benefits of her spell of *invisibility*, and any fight would attract more powerful predators.

And there were many such predators in these mountains. She watched with interest as the fire beetle neared a pile of loose stones, for she knew from research and experience that such places were seldom uninhabited in the Dragon's Teeth Mountains. Her vigilance was rewarded in an unexpected way. As the beetle passed the stones, a pale and unmistakable shape the size of a pony arose from behind the stones in the twilight. It rushed over and down the rock pile with lightning speed and great silence, tail high and pincers outstretched.

A giant scorpion. Brandi gasped in horror, resisting an urge to run. With an effort of sheer will, she forced her emotions into detachment and began to observe what transpired.

Barely a dozen yards away, the scorpion hurled itself upon its intended meal. The fire beetle became aware of the danger too late to scramble away, and the scorpion caught it easily, holding the beetle down with both pincers. Brandi watched, disgusted and fascinated, as the scorpion cracked open the struggling beetle's carapace. Then, when all resistance had ceased, the pale monster proceeded to tear its meal into small, twitching pieces.

Brandi was widely traveled, but she had never heard of a scorpion living outside the desert.¹ And this scorpion was white, not green like the other, smaller versions she had seen. Overcoming her fear and revulsion, she approached the feeding scorpion as closely as she dared. The thing stank with a bitter smell, one she couldn't identify. With her heat-sensing infravision, she soon noticed that the monster was drooling on the pieces of the beetle before it ate them. Probably helps with the digestive process, the elf thought to herself.²

She was only six or seven yards away when she made a second unpleasant discovery. The scorpion's white carapace had appeared to be moving or rippling before, and almost seemed furry. Now she saw that the giant scorpion was not actually white itself, but was covered by what appeared to be white baby scorpions with their tails up.³ She shivered. This was definitely something to ask about when she and Ortega and Michael returned to the village!

Brandi could see that the scorpion would be occupied for some time, so she withdrew and gave the beast a wide berth as she continued on her way, carefully observing potential hiding places before she passed them. She had heard that

scorpions hunted in swarms, and she fervently wished to avoid this one's companions.⁴

The elf had crossed a few hundred yards when she recognized the great rock where her companions were awaiting her. She could barely see at all now except with her heat vision and the faint starlight overhead. Brandi smiled as she approached the rock. Wait until she told Ortega about the scorpion. He was always teasing her about her fear of spiders. She started to giggle.

In the next second, the monster had her. A terrific force crushed the wind from her lungs. Two of her ribs snapped and stabbed into her chest. She tried to scream but the pain was blinding, and she choked. She looked down as she struggled. A crablike claw three feet long held her from behind. The air reeked of the bitter scorpion-stink.

Brandi's right arm was pinned down in the pincer's vise-tight grip. Nearly overcome by panic, she fought to reach the sword hilt at her side. The pincer clamped harder into her chest. She couldn't pull the sword free. A second giant claw appeared from her left and seized her one free arm at the shoulder, tearing her skin. Brandi drew in a shallow breath and shrieked, her lungs on fire with agony. "Ortega! Michael! Gods help me!"

A roaring sound was building up in her ears. Brandi's vision grew dim at the edges. She kicked backwards, striking nothing. With her left arm, she pounded at the ceramic-like surface of the two huge claws. It was almost impossible to breathe. Use a *magic missile*! cried the sane part of her mind. She half-turned in the claws' grip to prepare the spell. The claws shoved her forward. Brandi stumbled and sank to her knees, her shin striking a sharp rock outcropping. The pain erased the spell's words from her mind. She twisted again and tried to kick upward for the giant scorpion's claw-arm, but couldn't connect. She remembered the scorpion's tail stinger, but it hardly seemed to matter now. The roaring in her ears was louder, now louder, now louder, now—

A wild battle-cry split the night sky. Boots scrambled over rock shards on the giant scorpion's right side. Brandi dazedly felt the giant claws shiver from some great impact, then abruptly release her. She fell forward on the rocks, barely conscious. In moments, the pain in her chest forced her back to wakefulness. She took a gasping, burning breath and opened her eyes. The air was filled with Ortega's maddened war screams and the whir of a long axe slicing back and forth.

Help had arrived.

Perhaps too late.

A sob escaped Brandi's lips. With an effort, she mentally forced the all-consuming pain aside and concentrated on breathing slowly and with shallow

breaths. Did she have enough strength to reach the healing potion in the pouch on her belt? She tried to move her hand, but her whole right arm felt like lead. The claw had cut off all circulation from her elbow down. She tried with her left arm, but her fingers fumbled with the potion's stopper.

Bootsteps quickly came up and stopped in the dust and gravel beside her head. Someone was kneeling over her.

"Just lie still," a deep voice said, calm but tight with concern. "I'll take care of you."

Thank Corellon, she thought, Michael made it in time! She closed her eyes and lay quietly as the half-elven priest cast a healing spell. She felt a warm hand press down on the center of her chest. The burning pain in her lungs was lessened, then—abruptly—was gone. She raised her arms and covered her face with her hands, giddy with relief and exhaustion.

"I thought for a minute there I was doomed," she gasped, then shivered violently. "It could have stung me!"

"Scorpions have little venom in their stingers," Michael murmured as he checked her over, "so they only use it if their prey is able to effectively resist—which you obviously weren't."⁵

Michael quickly got to his feet. "Stay back," he warned, and was gone himself. She struggled to sit up, eyes focusing on the furious battle taking place barely fifteen paces from her. Heat images danced and dodged in her vision.

Ortega had managed to wound the scorpion severely, judging from the warm ichor splattered about the place, but he was now caught in the giant scorpion's pincers and unable to act. The dwarf roared with pain as he fought to escape. Brandi looked up and saw the huge tail curl forward, the venomous sting ready to strike. If it hit home, her best friend would be dead in just seconds. She knew that although the poison of the smaller species of scorpion was seldom fatal, the sting of a giant scorpion almost always meant death.⁶

The tail struck down; there was a dull clanging sound. Brandi flinched, then realized that the stinger had hit a plate of the dwarf's heavy armor. She could even see a large splash of warm poison dribbling down Ortega's armored back.

Energy surged through her. Before the thing could strike again, Brandi was on her feet, the words of a spell on her lips. She fired off several *magic missiles* from her fingertips, the glowing bolts lancing into the beast's side. The giant scorpion jumped wildly from the attack. A moment later, Michael came in and dealt it a solid blow with his mace. The scorpion's carapace split from the impact. Ortega, using his enormous strength, managed to free himself from the pincers and roll out of harm's way.

Brandi raised a hand and shouted the words to another *magic missile* spell.

Power bolted from her fingers into the monster. The creature's tail and pincers suddenly flailed about spasmodically as the scorpion danced in a tight circle. Without warning, it fell on its side, limbs shivering. Then the legs, pincer arms, and tail stiffened—and slowly, very slowly, fell back against the rocks. They did not move again.

It was dawn before the three adventurers could bring themselves to examine the dead scorpion from close range. Each kept a weapon ready and one eye out for further trouble, but none came.

"No wonder I didn't see the thing," Brandi said, running a hand through her golden hair. "I always thought scorpions were green, but this one's the same color as the rock."

"Maybe scorpions in different environments have differently colored shells to help them hide," Michael said.⁷

"That's possible," Brandi admitted. "I don't think they have the ability to change colors automatically, so they must gain their coloration at birth."

"What are those hairs for?" Ortega asked, pointing with his axe handle. "They're all over the thing's body."

"I believe the hairs help the scorpion detect prey by sensing vibrations in the air," Michael answered.⁸ "Think of them as being like a cat's whiskers."

"So that's how it found me!" Brandi exclaimed. "I was invisible when it attacked me, and I swear I wasn't making any noise, but it knew exactly where I was."

"Next time, you'd better fly," Ortega advised grimly.

"I don't think flying would have helped her, unless she was high enough to be out of the scorpion's reach," Michael told them. "My brother once captured a few normal scorpions so that he could study them, and I watched one of them grab a fly from midair."

Ortega shook his head. "And I thought scorpions were just big stupid insects!"⁹

"They're not insects," Michael said quickly. "Insects have only six legs, but scorpions have eight. They're arachnids."

Ortega grinned wickedly at Brandi, his old humor returning. "That means they're related to spiders, you know."

Brandi pretended to shiver, but her act was no longer as forced as it once was. "Don't mention spiders! I've had enough of them to last me for my next ten lifetimes!"

Footnotes

1. In the real world, scorpions are found in habitats as diverse as scorching deserts, temperate woodlands, dark caves, tropical rain forests, and snow-covered mountains. It only makes sense that their larger cousins would be able to adapt to similarly diverse situations.

2. In fact, the saliva liquifies the fleshy parts of the scorpion's meal. Victims killed and eaten by a giant scorpion are unrecoverable by magic, unless a *wish* spell or similar means is used.

3. Scorpions do not actually lay eggs. The eggs hatch inside the mother, and the female gives birth to live young. After they are born, they climb on her back and ride there until they are old enough to fend for themselves. At the DM's option, 5% of scorpion encounters can be with a mother scorpion carrying 5-20 young on her back. Since the young do not eat or have effective attacks, it is possible that adventurers could sell those babies that survive to interested alchemists or wizards.

4. As befits a species with cannibalistic tendencies, scorpions are usually solitary creatures. However, during the colder months of the year, they do congregate in large groups of a hundred or more individuals. Encounters with these groups probably started the rumor that scorpions live and hunt in swarms.

5. Normal scorpions have enough venom for only one attack, and it takes a week to replenish the poison. A giant scorpion will use its stinger only against an opponent with an effective means of attack. I suggest a limit of two stinger attacks per week for large scorpions, four per week for huge scorpions, and five per week for giant scorpions.

6. Most of the 1,500 or so species of normal scorpions presently known to exist in the real world deliver stings no more harmful than a bee sting. However, about 25 species have venom that is potentially lethal to humans. (It's a wise adventurer who always checks her boots before she puts them on when adventuring in the desert.)

7. Because of the camouflaging and their ability to remain motionless for long periods of time, scorpions have a greater chance of surprising the party (-2 to party's roll to detect them). Giant scorpions cannot be surprised unless the players can think of a way to nullify the advantage given by the sensitive hairs, which detect all movement through the air, visible or not, within a 90' radius. Large and huge scorpions have 30' and 60' radii of detection, respectively. The first giant scorpion Brandi met simply ignored her in favor of its meal, leading her to think she was still unnoticed.

8. These hairs are sensitive enough to allow the scorpion to attack *invisible* opponents with no penalty. In addition, a large, huge, or giant scorpion can attack any flying creature which comes within range of its pincers, again with no penalty.

9. Suggested revised experience-point values for scorpions with the extra powers listed in this article are: large scorpions, 420 XP; huge scorpions, 975 XP; giant scorpions, 1,400 XP.

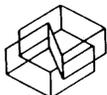
[For more information, see "Scorpion Tales," in DRAGON® issue #120.]

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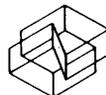
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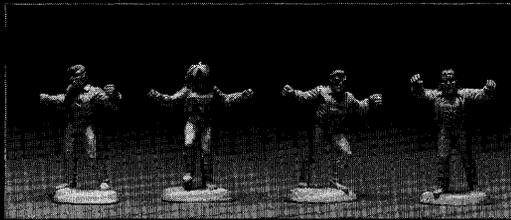
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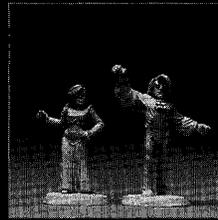
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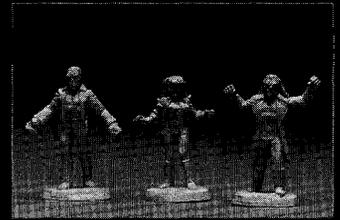
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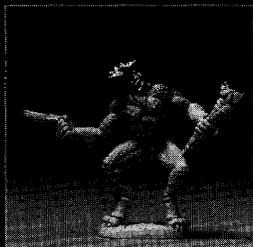
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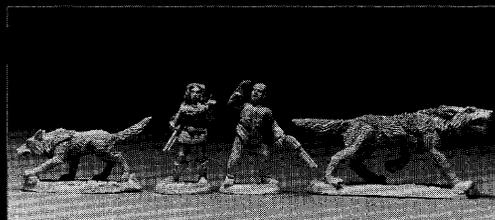
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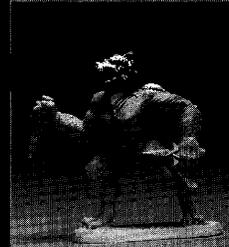
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Think ● Big— In Miniature!

Ral Partha and TSR, Inc.: the tag team of the century

by James M. Ward

When you go to your hobby store to buy figures for your role-playing games, you should know that you're really spoiled. An old guy like me can remember miniatures called flats, which were thin strips of metal with the images of horsemen or footmen stamped onto them. Today's miniatures are amazing pieces of sculpture, much more like fine art than simple toys.

If you haven't already gotten into the hobby of painting your own figures for your role-playing games, you owe it to yourself to give this experience a try. There's something almost magical about painting your own image of what your favorite barbarian or wizard looks like. There is also great satisfaction in painting figures better than your friends. In the old days, I used to think I was a pretty good figure painter. That was before I encountered Skip Williams and Dave Sutherland, two co-workers here at TSR. Those guys know tricks about painting figures I'll never be able to learn. Who would have thought that you could make your figures look better by touching them up with an ink pen? Skip and Dave each use a technical pen with a needle tip using a drafting ink (you can put colored ink into them, too). These pens cost about \$10 each, and they'll do amazing things to the quality of your finished figures.

I also remember the first time I hauled out a batch of painted characters to use in my AD&D® game. It's great to visualize what's happening to your player characters. Miniatures are a big help in deciding arguments over positioning, as when the players see that eight fighters can't possibly have room to surround a vampire in a narrow corridor. And there's nothing quite so nice for deciding who gets attacked in the front or the back of the party when there are figures for every one of the players nicely arranged out on a tabletop. The bottom line on this is that if you haven't gotten into the hobby of figure painting, you should.

TSR licensed Ral Partha Enterprises to create our D&D® and AD&D figures. It's a

partnership that has produced some of the most fantastic miniatures art I've ever seen. The people at Ral Partha take a fierce pride in what they do, and it shows in their work. "Proper proportions" isn't just a phrase with them, it's a way of life. Time and time again, they call TSR to task for some out-sized illustration or physically impossible dimension on one of our creatures. Luckily for me, I can occasionally fall back on the fact that we are dealing with a fantasy universe in which all things are possible. That argument usually buys me a little time, but unfortunately it hardly ever wins an argument.

In the pages that follow, you'll see a bit about the products Ral Partha makes for TSR. (Ral Partha makes figures for other game companies, too, and that's basically why we thought of it as the company we wanted most to work with.) Ral Partha handles figures for all of TSR's most popular settings, producing a wide assortment of our fantasy characters and monsters in both blister packs and boxed sets. Every three months, something new comes out in the AD&D line. TSR works closely with Ral Partha to present our fans with figures they'll find interesting and useful. By the time this article sees print, several boxes of plastic figures will be out as well. I've seen Ral Partha's plastic, and it's the finest on the market today.

In the BATTLESYSTEM™ series are seven boxed sets allowing you to have instant armies of 25-mm figures. Besides the dwarves, gnolls, and ogres are wonderful Oriental figures, mounted clan warriors, and the nicest set of skeletal cavalry you'd ever want to see. The DRAGONLANCE® groups of figures include all the heroes and villains of TSR's most popular novel series. The blister packs of AD&D figures are great fun and allow you to have all the character classes done up in miniature. It was in the RAVENLOFT® line that the concept for vampire halflings, dwarves, and elves came up. The village mob figures are wonderful, perfect for use with settings other than just the RAVENLOFT

one. When the DARK SUN® figures came out, I was very impressed. A few character races in the DARK SUN world are very unusual for the AD&D game, and Ral Partha has helped shape the nature of these wonderful creations. The half-giant has become my favorite current figure from the company. I like painting it, I like using it in a game, and I especially like using the figure with DMs who haven't encountered the giant's unusual properties.

A wide range of AD&D game monsters appears on a regular basis. Every three months Ral Partha releases another batch of monsters straight from the *Monstrous Manual*. I'm lucky enough to review them at TSR before they go into mass production, and their quality constantly amazes me.

We've gone into new areas, too. It took me a long time to convince Ral Partha that AD&D 15-mm miniatures would sell. The figures they have done are as good in 15 mm as the same type of figures in 25 mm. Even now I'm putting together some 15 mm armies and having great fun painting them up and fixing the stands. The range of figures in this line includes fantasy as well as Middle Ages-style units, great for the role-player as well as the war gamer.

When Ral Partha offered TSR the chance to have its own line of AD&D paints, it was an offer too good to pass up. Now you can have colors like Ghoul Flesh Lime, Dragon Scale Red, Mind Flayer Mauve, and Blue Water Blue.

All I can say in conclusion is that whatever Ral Partha produces in the next few years will probably be even better than what's been done in the last few years—as impossible as that sounds. Look for more incredible works of miniatures art with the Ral Partha label. □

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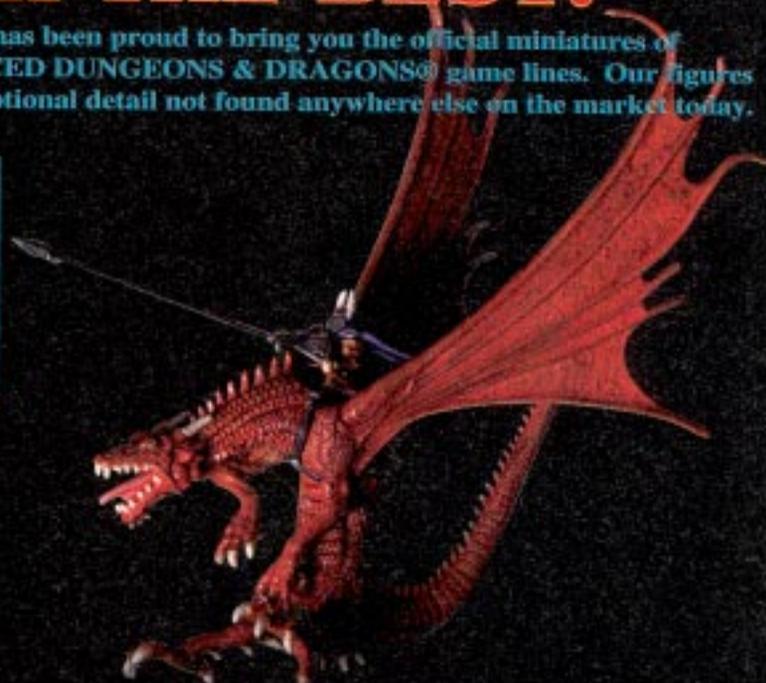
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And the winners were:

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Pendragon Knight & Lady Sets, by Lance and Laser
Sculptor: Tom Meier

Best Fantasy/Science-Fiction Figure Series (tie)

Call of Cthulhu series, by RAFM
Sculptor: Bob Murch

Shadowrun series, by Ral Partha Enterprises

Sculptors: Tom Meier, Dennis Mize, and David Summers

Best Vehicular Figure Series

BattleTech 'Mechs and Vehicles series, by Ral Partha Enterprises
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Battlescapes, by Geo Hex
Designer: Kieran Rohan

Best Miniatures Rules

Star Wars Miniatures Rules, by West End Games
Designer: Stephen Crane

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Vampire: The Masquerade game, by White Wolf Publishing
Designer: Mark Rein•Hagen

Best Role-Playing Adventure

Horror on the Orient Express (for the Call of Cthulhu game), by Chaosium, Inc.

Designers: Mark Morrison, with Marion Anderson, Phil Anderson, Bernard Caleo, Geoff Gillan, Nick Hagger, Peter Jeffery, Christian Lehmann, Thomas Ligotti, Penelope Love, Russell Waters, Richard Watts, and Lynn Willis

Best Role-Playing Supplement

GURPS Time Travel, by Steve Jackson Games
Designers: John M. Ford and Steve Jackson

Best Graphic Presentation of an RPG, Adventure, or Supplement

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EastFront, by Columbia Games
Designers: Craig Besinque and Tom Dalglish

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Cosmic Encounter, by Mayfair Games
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Revision designers: Jack Barker, David Goun, Sean Rhoades, Richard Sheaves, and Mark Simon

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HeroQuest, by Milton Bradley

Best Play-By-Mail Game

Illuminati, by Flying Buffalo
Designer: Draper Kauffman

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Middle-earth Play-By-Mail, Third Age, circa 1650, by Game Systems Inc.
Designers: William Feild and Peter Stassun

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Sid Meier's Civilization, by MicroProse
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Best Play-By-Mail Game (tie)

Middle-earth Play-By-Mail, Third Age, circa 1650, by Game Systems Inc.
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Illuminati, by Flying Buffalo

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Lords of Destiny, by Maelstrom,

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SAGE advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 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, the sage turns the spotlight on himself, then considers a few questions straight out of the mailbag.

I was disappointed to learn that you and the "Sage Advice" staff are no longer making personal replies, so please print my letter.

There is no "Sage Advice" staff—there's just me and anybody I can buttonhole for a few minutes to discuss the intricacies of game rules. Of course, the DRAGON Magazine editorial staff is a vital cog in the "Sage Advice" machine, but they don't swing into action until I'm done my month's work.

I had to stop making personal replies more than six years ago—the volume of mail was and is just too great.

I read the words "please print this letter" almost as often as I read "please write back." I cannot do the latter. Nor can I print every question I get—I never print entire letters. I ask myself several questions when deciding what to print:

1. Is this a question I've printed before? "Sage Advice" couldn't possibly keep pace with all the new inquiries it gets if we spent time and space reprinting old questions. Also, the column would be pretty boring to read if it was packed with re-treaded material all the time. Before you write, take a look through your back issues and see if your question already is in print; your local book store, library, or game store might be able to help here. I do sometimes revisit an old topic, but only if I feel there is need for a clarification.

2. Are a lot of readers asking the same or similar questions? If I get three or more readers asking about the same thing, I

usually answer the question. In a sense, you could say that it is the readers who decide what appears in this column.

3. Is this question specific and answerable? Some questions just don't have any answers. "How can I become a better DM?" is one that I see several times a year. Fortunately, this magazine prints many, many articles on DMing techniques every year.

Sometimes readers don't give me enough to go on. One question that is sitting in the pile right now asks about such-and-such a monster's actual hit points. The reader didn't even give me a single clue about where this creature appeared. Sure, I like a little challenge once in awhile, but you stand a much better chance of getting a question printed if you assist by telling me where to start looking for the answer, especially if your question involves a potential misprint or editorial omission. Include the title of the product and the page number where you found the problem. Check out the next question for an example of what I mean.

I'm having trouble using Table 22: Player Character Living Expenses in the DMG, page 34. What is included in these costs, just basic needs? Also is the cost for a single character or a whole party of characters?

The table gives the monthly cost for a single character's room and board—housing, food, and miscellaneous services (such as laundry, mending, and bathing). Obviously, characters living in squalid or poor conditions aren't going to receive many extra services, and characters living in middle-class or wealthy conditions are going to receive a lot of extra services. Costs for adventuring gear and supplies are not included. Likewise, costs for new clothes, stabling for mounts, training, medicine, and similar expenses are not covered.

Does a jongleur's (from *The Complete Bard's Handbook*) use of her dodge ability count as an action? That is, can she dodge and attack, or dodge and cast a spell in the same round?

Since the kit description describes the dodge ability as a sudden, agile leap to safety, I'm inclined to suggest that you treat a dodge as an action. If the jongleur loses initiative, she can either use her dodge ability or forego it, weather the attack, and take another action. If the jongleur wins initiative and takes an action, she cannot dodge until the next round. Alternatively, you might allow a jongleur who has won initiative and taken an action to dodge during the same round if she beats the opponent's die roll—each character rolls 1d6, if the jongleur rolls higher, she can attempt to dodge. If the roll is tied or the jongleur rolls lower than her opponent, she has to take her lumps like any other character.

If a wild-talent psionicist is using Synaptic Static and another wild-talent psionicist tries to use another power, say Elongation, how is the psychic contest resolved given that neither character is using an attack or defense mode?

You resolve this contest the same way you'd resolve any other psychic contest. Many readers seem to be confused by the fact that the psychic contest rules (see *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, pages 22-24) use attack and defense modes as an example. All psychic combat takes the form of a psychic contest, but you use the psychic contest mechanics whenever two or more psychic powers are in conflict—the presence or lack of attack or defense modes notwithstanding. As one example, if two wild-talent psionicists are trying to Telekinese an object, use the psychic contest rules. In your example, the character using Synaptic Static uses his Synaptic Static power score for the contest and the other psionicist uses her Elongation power score. If the Synaptic Static user wins the contest, the Elongation power fails. If the Synaptic Static user initiated the power first, he is the defender in the contest and he wins ties. If the Synaptic Static user initiates the power in order to disrupt the Elongation power, he is the attacker.

There seem to be some very similar proficiencies in the *Complete Spacefarer's Handbook* and the *War Captain's Companion*. In particular, *Spacefarer's* features Wildspace Navigation, Phlogiston Navigation, Slow Respiration, Signaling, and Zero-Gravity Combat. On the other hand, *War Captain's* offers Celestial Navigation, Slow Breathing, Semaphore, and Freefall. Generally, these proficiencies have similar purposes, but different game mechanics.

These two works actually were developed in parallel, one by the TSR, Inc. staff and the other by freelancers, so the overlap isn't surprising. While you are correct that the proficiencies in question are very similar, their game effects can be quite different.

The three Navigation proficiencies seem

to be similar on the surface, but work differently. The *Spacefarer's* skills allow a navigator to move more efficiently between points in space. (This implies that the navigator knows where he is, but this isn't necessarily the case. The only thing the navigator really knows is what to do in order to get where he's going in the shortest possible time, which could be a seat-of-the-pants undertaking.) The *War Captain's* skill allows a navigator to know exactly where his ship is in relation to his destination (and to the rest of the sphere if he also has the Astronomy proficiency). Celestial Navigation also allows the character to direct ramming attacks. All three proficiencies allow navigators to avoid hazards. If you have both books, you might consider requiring a character to know Celestial Navigation before learning Wildspace or Phlogiston Navigation (though dropping Celestial Navigation altogether would make things a lot simpler for PCs).

Slow Respiration is a mental skill (based on the character's unmodified Wisdom score) that is fairly easy to use; it also incapacitates the character, allowing no other actions. Slow Breathing is a difficult physical act (based on Constitution score -5), which has the same effect as Slow Respiration but allows the characters to at least move around. Further, a character using Slow Breathing can converse, eat, and even fight if she makes an additional

proficiency check. Slow Respiration is best for most characters because it doesn't carry a huge ability-score penalty. However, a character with a very high Constitution score might be better off with Slow Breathing. The logic behind both proficiencies seems sound to me, and your campaign won't suffer if you make both proficiencies available.

Semaphore and Signaling do virtually the same thing, so use your judgment and pick one for your game. Signaling is easier to use (Intelligence +2 instead of unmodified Intelligence for Semaphore), but Semaphore allows the user to send and receive messages more quickly if he spends extra slots on the skill. Whatever you pick, it would be best to drop the other proficiency from your game.

Freefall allows a character to temporarily ignore sudden shifts in gravity. This is quite different from Zero-Gravity Combat, which allows a character to fight normally in the total absence of gravity—and even move around a bit. Both these proficiencies should be useful to spacefarers. Note these skills don't overlap: Freefall does not negate the combat penalties for fighting in the absence of gravity (see *Concordance of Arcane Space*, page 14). Likewise, Zero-Gravity Combat does not prevent a character from being tossed about, perhaps catastrophically, when her ship's gravity plane shifts.

Pantheon of the Month

Last issue, I promised to start giving unofficial suggestions for using the optional spheres of priest spells from the *Tome of Magic* with the deities in *Legends & Lore*. I'll work through one pantheon a month until they're all done. Here's the list for the American Indian pantheon:

Great Spirit: Major: Time, Wards; Minor: Thought, Law.

Sun: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, Thought.

Moon: Major: Wards; Minor: Travelers, War.

Earth: Major: Wards; Minor: Time, Law or Chaos (priest picks one).

Morning Star: Major: Time; Minor: Travelers, Wards.

Wind: Major: Time; Minor: Chaos, War.

Fire: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, War.

Thunder: Major: Time; Minor: Law, Chaos.

Raven: Major: none; Minor: Time, Travelers.

Coyote: Major: none; Minor: Chaos, Travelers.

Snake: Major: none; Minor: Time, Wards.

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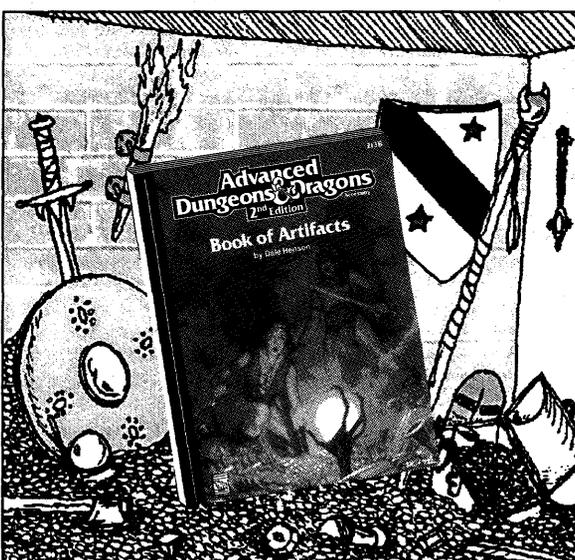


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Perils & Postage

PBM Gaming #1: How to run your favorite role-playing game by mail

by Mark R. Kehl

Have you ever been involved in a great campaign that came to an abrupt end because one or more of the participants moved away? Does your gaming group break up at the end of every school year? Has graduation and its aftermath left your gaming group spread across the country? Is there a lack of gaming in your area that suits your style and tastes?

These are a few of the reasons why running a campaign by mail might appeal to you and your players. However, play-by-mail (PBM) gaming is not just a last-ditch option when you can't play "live." It offers certain advantages that, when properly exploited, can compensate for the lack of face-to-face role-playing.

When playing by mail, both players and GMs have time in which to consider their options, develop tactics, and formulate plots and plans. Also, everything that happens is recorded on paper, where it can be read over and over in light of new developments. This allows for more complex story lines and mysteries than you might normally use; you don't have to deal with players forgetting key pieces of information, such as the name of the smuggler who vanished in the storm last fall or the riddle spoken by the old woman in front of the tavern.

Of course, these advantages lend themselves primarily to a very story-oriented sort of role-playing in which plots, subplots, and mysteries assume greater importance than combat. Combat will still be a part of most campaigns, but it becomes more of a means to an end rather than the end itself. The thrill in this sort of role-playing lies in unmasking the murderer, outwitting the archvillain, and unearthing the secrets of the lost empire.

If this appeals to you, read on. The following guidelines suggest ways to go about setting up and running your own campaign by mail. Keep in mind that these are general guidelines, designed to apply to most any role-playing game you would care to use. Your tastes, your knowledge of your players, and your chosen game system should suggest alternatives and innovations that allow you to customize the best campaign for your purposes.

What's there to play?

For this first step, you have two options, each with its own inherent advantages and drawbacks.

First, you can adapt an existing campaign for running by mail. This might be done when a group is forced to break up because its members (particularly you, the game master) move away. In this way, you are already familiar with the players' styles of play, they know what to expect from you as a GM, and everyone knows the rules. You're all in familiar territory. Everyone has a sense of the campaign's background and past events. Many key nonplayer characters already exist and are familiar to the players, requiring no re-introduction. These aspects will help you run the game and save time.

The disadvantage of running an existing campaign is that your new play-by-mail version will still be different from the old campaigns that everyone is used to. There's no way around that. Players can't simply have their characters walk into a bar and play things by ear; that would take dozens

of moves and months of real time to play out. As noted earlier, combat by mail loses much of its excitement, but this is balanced by more emphasis on plot and story. Finding this balance may prove problematic with an existing campaign.

The other option for your new campaign is to start from scratch. This allows you to tailor your game to make the best use of the advantages of playing by mail, as discussed later, but this too has its drawbacks. First, the players must all know the game system or be willing to pick up and learn the rules. Second, you must document *everything* that players need to know to create characters and get started in your new world. Of course, to many GMs the prospect of detailing and developing a new campaign is an exciting one. Guidelines to do just that follow.

From humble beginnings

If you are using an already active campaign, the amount of preparation you need to do is minimal. If you are creating an entirely new campaign, you've got a lot to do, as anyone who has ever created his own campaign knows. You need to put together the information the players must have to understand your world without benefit of you sitting in front of them. The easiest way to proceed is to detail a limited area in which your players will begin—the last civilized spaceport on the frontier, the superheroes' home town, the elven wizards village, or whatever is appropriate for your milieu. A map is a good idea, detailing the familiar home territory and providing sketchy information about more distant lands; tantalize the players with vague references to the mysterious City of the Undead, the Waterfall That Flows Upward, or the ever-popular Haunted Wasteland Where a Big Sorcerous Battle Took Place Long, Long Ago.

With the setting taken care of, you next need to detail the people: who rules what, which race lives where, what languages are spoken on what planets, that sort of thing. If you are deviating from or twisting standard elements of your chosen genre—always a fun exercise—make sure your players know about it up front so they can



take this into account when generating their characters. For instance, if you decide all the elves in your world are cannibalistic demon worshipers, clue in the players before they make up their band of fun-loving forest-dwellers.

Other information the players need might include details about local laws and law enforcement, the availability of certain weapons and supplies, climate, calendars, and specifics about character generation using your chosen rule system. What character classes, races, skills, or professions are allowed? Is plate armor made locally? How often do spacecraft land at the run-down starport? Should the PCs invest in raincoats, arctic gear, bathing suits, or space suits?

One more thing you'll want to include is some sort of loose group rationale or general party alignment; nothing will drive you insane faster than characters who spread out all over the map. Come up with a reason for them to start together and stay together. Letting the players know how you feel about this early on gives them the opportunity to tailor characters specifically for your envisioned group so that you don't have to try to shoehorn incompatible characters into the party during the course of play.

Who to invite?

When you've got the background information assembled, you're ready to get the players themselves involved. Your first consideration is how many players to include in your new campaign. One or two would work fine; I prefer three, which allows me to pay sufficient attention to each individually and still have some variety of PCs who can interact with one another. Four is a good maximum; more would severely limit each character's time in the spotlight and would probably prove too much work for a GM who has other demands on his time.

After you've chosen your players, send them the information you've assembled about your campaign, and let them know what you need from them. First, of course, you need each player to have a character generated using the specified rule system. Make up a list of guidelines to include any house rules, impose restrictions, or set point values.

Next, you will probably want a rough character history from each player. As playing by mail lends itself best to story-oriented campaigns, you will want as many hooks for plots and subplots as you can get. The backgrounds of characters are not only a source of good ideas, but by having the players come up with these backgrounds themselves you let them have a say in future story lines, ensuring that the players will have an interest in them. Let the players know beforehand that you may alter or add to their backgrounds slightly to help them fit in the campaign and get along together. Also, to make sure you get the sort of background

information you want, you might want to specify details or make up specific questions for the players to answer, such as where the characters are from, what sort of long- and short-term goals they possess, and what motivates them. A physical description is helpful for visualizing the character and for describing the character's actions when you write game moves.

When you receive responses from your players, go over the character backgrounds with an eye toward using events from their pasts as future story elements. Modify the backgrounds as necessary to develop such ideas, but try to add to what's there rather than altering it. For instance, if a player writes, "One day the young mage's master passed away, and he decided to leave the seclusion of his master's tower and seek his fortune." In that case, tell the player the master did not just drop dead in his oatmeal one morning. Instead, the PC looked out his tower window one stormy night and saw his master arguing with a one-eyed dwarf, who struck him down with a sword blacker than night itself. The character will check every dwarf he meets for a missing eye and a black sword, and the eventual confrontation and revelation of why the dwarf killed the mage's master will hold the sort of personal meaning for the PC that casual encounters lack.

Making the first move

Once you've got your players' characters and you've finished touching up their backgrounds, you're ready to set up the first move. Simply tell the characters where they are, how they got there, and what they see. Then give them information to work with, the more the better—rumors from the inn, postings from the mercenaries' bulletin board, news reports, legends from their childhood, whatever is applicable. Just make each adventure hook interesting so that the players will be intrigued and so that you will be able to create the subsequent adventure if the players decide to pursue it.

When you send this starting scenario to the players, give them your house rules. Let them know exactly what you expect from them and the mechanics of your play-by-mail system. Here's an example you can modify for your own use:

1. Combat will be of two basic types. Simple fights in which your course of action is obvious (fight or die, using your strongest attack) will be resolved by me. For more complete fights, I will describe the situation and then end the move, so that your next instructions will include how you want to deal with the combat situation. For instance, I might write: "After your companion Tangor makes a comment about a drunken barbarian's ponytail, the barbarian backhands Tangor, knocking him to the floor, and puts a booted foot on his chest. The bar erupts in chaos as the barbarian's compatriots begin

hitting whomever is closest. The red-headed elf who has been staring at you grins and pulls a black rose from her sleeve. What do you do?"

2. Based on your current situation, for each move you need to supply your character's immediate long- and short-term goals. For instance, suppose you're in the situation described above. Your long-term goals might be to become the most powerful wizard in the land and to find the one-eyed dwarf who killed your master. Your short-term goals might be something like: "Hit the drunk barbarian with my chair, then make my way to the nearest window. If the elf starts to cast any spells in my direction, I'll throw darts at her. When I reach the window, I'll jump through it, get on my horse, and find an inn in the next town. In the morning I want to try to sell the necklace I found in Orblatt's cave and replace the darts I lost. Also, I'll check around at the mercenaries' guild or at local inns for rumors about the one-eyed dwarf who killed my master."

3. Your moves should take into account as many contingencies as you can think of (such as the possibility of the elf casting a spell in the simplified example above) and should describe your actions in enough detail to avoid ambiguity. If you are locked up in someone's dungeon, you cannot simply say, "Escape." You need to do something like "try to pick lock with nail from my boot" or "search for secret doors" or otherwise outline some definite course of action.

4. Overall party actions will be determined by majority, with me, the GM, as final arbiter. I'll do my best to integrate your moves and come up with acceptable compromises when they conflict.

5. Keep the moves I send you for future reference. They may hold clues and other information that will come in handy to understanding overall plot lines.

The results are in....

With all of your players' instructions in hand, it's time to sort through them, determine the results of their actions, set up the next cliffhanger, and write it all up in one brief, thrilling move.

To start, go over each player's instructions and construct the story line for the move, integrating the actions of all of the players and resolving any conflicts. Look at what the players want to do and let them do it. One of the greatest advantages of playing by mail is the flexibility that time gives you. Here's how to do that and take care of conflicting instructions from different players.

If you're playing "live" and the PCs decide they all want to go off the map, away from the encounters you've labored so hard to prepare, you've got a problem. You have no time to prepare new material, so you're forced either to ad lib, make the old material work somehow, or force the players to realize the error of their ways, none of which is an ideal situation. How-



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ever, when playing by mail, the PCs have complete liberty to go anywhere and do anything they want; you don't need to have anything prepared. Whatever the players decide to do, you'll have ample time to come up with something to entertain them. Take advantage of this by supplying lots of adventure hooks and letting the PCs choose what they want to do rather than forcing them into a scenario you've already got prepared.

The only hitch here is keeping the PCs together. If they decide to go in four separate directions, you could end up with a lot of material to write as your campaign splinters into four different story lines. The way to deal with this is first to let the players know from the start that party actions will be decided by majority, with you, the GM, as final arbiter. In the case of a tie, nudge them in the direction you think will supply them the most fun.

For instance, if the fighter and the mage want to go off and face the dragon in his lair, but the two thieves want to stick around the city and do some second-story work, you decide the whole party would be more involved fighting the dragon than in robbing a few villas, so the party is off to see the dragon. What do you tell the thieves? Don't simply say they were outvoted or vetoed. Come up with something that discourages their course of action and makes the other option more attractive, properly motivating their characters and satisfying the players. For instance, when the two thieves are preparing for their larcenous excursion, they may hear that the bounty hunter who is after them has just hit town and it might be a good idea to

get away for a while. Or the local thieves' guild has its eye on them. Or Lord So-and-So was robbed last night, the watch has been tripled, and the penalty for theft has been changed to on-the-spot execution.

Once you've determined the party's general course of action, outline the sequence of events for the move. For instance, using the example above with the character in the bar fight, suppose you determine the characters escape from the bar and decide to ride to the next town. The PC finds a black rose—like the one the red-haired elf was holding—on his saddle, attached to a note saying, "At moonrise tomorrow on the bridge over the Raging River." Then you decide the players will make it to the next town, where they can take care of errands and information-gathering in the morning. The move will end, you decide, with the one-eyed dwarf ambushing them at their inn in the afternoon.

This sequence of events accomplishes a couple of important objectives that you should aim for every move. First, each move should leave the players with several significant decisions to make or plans to prepare, such as how to deal with the one-eyed dwarfs ambush, whether or not to meet the red-haired elf who presumably left the rose, and how to prepare for and approach such a meeting. Second, end with a cliffhanger whenever possible. This brings the action of the move to a climax and leaves the players with at least one major decision to make or plan to formulate. Also, the suspense of not knowing the outcome will, at the very least, help maintain player interest between moves. Just

don't be late with the results, or you're likely to get a few phone calls.

So, what happened?

Now that you have determined the general course of events, you are ready to write up the move to send to your players. The format you use should give the players all the information they will need while demanding no more effort than necessary from you.

Always number the moves so that the players will be able to organize them easily. If you're using some sort of calendar system, start with the current date. Give a one-sentence reminder of where the characters are and what they're facing. Other categories of information you might want to give in a simple shopping list format include rumors, experience points, and the results of simple errands. I usually start my moves with an errands section that briefly covers the accomplishment of mundane tasks such as selling loot, buying supplies, and training. Also, I like to end each move with a lengthy rumors section listing all of the miscellaneous tidbits the characters have picked up during the course of their other activities. This is a good way to provide new adventure hooks, clues about ongoing subplots, and red herrings, as well as strange but completely useless information. It's up to the players to sort it all out. Rumors are also a handy way to build up to or foreshadow major events, such as wars.

The body of the move itself narrates the action of this latest installment of the ongoing adventure. How you handle this depends on your enthusiasm for writing.



The result can range from brief sentence fragments relating the events to the sort of flowing prose one might find in a novel or short story.

For a party of characters in which each player needs to receive a move, you have a couple of options. First, you can write a third-person account of the action (including the moves of all participating characters) from your own omniscient point of view, then send identical copies to each of the players. This is easier than writing a separate move for each player but may tend to yield a long move. Also, such a move may seem impersonal and detached to individual players, or it might reveal information to everyone that only a single character should know.

The other option is best suited to those of us who write using a word processor. First, write out the sequence of actions during the turn from one character's point of view using second-person narration ("You draw your sword and hack your way free of the webs; across the room, you see the wizard casting a spell"). Then go back through and alter the text for each of the other players ("You finish your Slay Spider spell just as the barbarian cuts himself free of the webs"). Sometimes this will require a lot of work, but the result is a personal, immediate move for each of your players, in which information is revealed only to proper characters.

When writing the narrative itself, consider exploiting another of the advantages of playing by mail: atmosphere. A sentence or two describing the way the gloom shrouds the dungeon corridor or the way the mist coils around the twisted trunks of dead trees can add a lot to your moves. Also, employ concrete descriptions instead of game jargon. Instead of a +2 sword, PCs should find a sword whose blade glows like the moon on a clear winter night, with a silver hilt fashioned in the shape of a dragon's head with two small ruby eyes. In combat, don't write, "You do eight points to the troll. It's still alive." Instead say, "Your sword bites deep into the trolls rubbery shoulder. Though its left arm hangs useless, it fights on."

Hack-n-slash time

Combat resolution seems to be the least interesting aspect of playing by mail. If the party is attacked during the course of the move by, say, a few goblins, it's up to you to roll the dice and determine the outcome. For more involved battles in which it is important that players choose their means of attack and which opponents will be dealt with first, it's a matter of sorting through the players' instructions, figuring out who's doing what in which order each round, and reporting the results.

If players want to play more of a part in combat or tend to be generally "superstitious" about rolling their own dice, give them the option of making the rolls themselves and listing the results for you. Have them generate 10, 20, or however many

roll results you estimate will be needed (plus a few extra) for each sort required in the game you're using. Whenever their character needs to make a die roll, check off the next roll in the column.

[Because of the long start-up and playing times involved in PBM games, the GM might be well advised to avoid killing off characters even in the most dangerous combat or traps. Combat can render a character unconscious, send him to a hospital, force him to flee, or lead him to be imprisoned. Poison need not kill; it can put characters to sleep, take away hit points or ability-score points, make characters hallucinate, or have many other sorts of effects. This avoids frustrating a player who has waited many days to make his next move and has understandably become quite attached to his character and that PC's adventures. The strong story orientation of PBM games is best supported by having characters survive their trials and learn from them. Few players will continue in a PBM game that offers nothing but a new dead character every other letter.—Editor]

Handing out handouts

Maps and other visual aids can be of tremendous value when players don't have a live GM in front of them to answer questions and help them visualize their surroundings. Even a simple diagram of where characters are placed in relation to their enemies can eliminate misunderstandings and confused phone calls.

Other possible handouts include drawings of scenes or objects, messages found or intercepted, old news clippings from libraries, photos, wanted posters, diary entries, and excerpts from reference books or databases. Lists of rumors overheard in daily life and current news reports from town criers, TV, or subspace radio may lead to changes in plans or future adventures. Handouts may also be tailored to specific characters based on their jobs, contacts, personalities, etc.

Death and deadlines

A final consideration is establishing deadlines for players to send you their instructions. Some players will respond the day they get your latest move; others will put it off for weeks.

The decision of whether or not to use deadlines is up to you. One or two terminally delinquent players can drastically reduce the number of moves you finish each year, but this also gives you more time to plot and plan. If you want players to respond in a week or two, give them a precise, reasonable deadline at the end of each move you send out. Stipulate that anyone not meeting the deadline will not have a say in party actions for the next move. Don't kill off the delinquent player's character, but don't go to any special effort to include the character in the move's action. The feeling of being left out should be enough to get the player to respond to the next move on time.

A postal postscript

The steps and guidelines outlined above are general suggestions and should be tinkered with to suit you, your players, and your campaign. The objective is to set up a system that allows for an engrossing game with a pace fast enough to keep everyone interested without demanding unreasonable amounts of player or GM time or making the players feel they have no control over their characters' actions. The players should feel the opposite: Their actions should determine their characters' destinies.

A good campaign run by mail will supply plots and subplots to occupy the thoughts of both players and GM during the time between moves. It provides mysteries to wrestle with, motivations to untangle, and combat situations to deal with tactically. It should give everyone unprecedented anticipation when going to the mailbox, as they look forward to the results of their latest actions and finding out what sort of trouble they're in now. The same applies to the GM—your curiosity about which new directions the players will seek adventure in can keep you entertained week after week.

In these days when letter writing is a dead art and a long-distance phone call can cost more than a pizza, a play-by-mail game is not a bad way to stay in touch with close friends who are far away. Ω

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By Mail or by Modem?

PBM Gaming #2: The joys of the BBS

by Craig Schaefer

Even the most avid gamer often finds herself at a loss for something new and original beyond the regular playing group. Other gamers, living in out-of-the-way places, may have a hard time finding *any* other players. What to do in such situations? This article presents two suggestions for expanding your scope beyond ordinary campaigns: games run by mail or by computer.

All for a stamp

Postal campaigns, like postal chess games, are often the last resort for gamers starved for action. However, if one has many playing friends out of state or scattered across wide distances, this can be a great way to bring them together.

In a postal role-playing game, the game master maintains a list of the current players and copies of their character records, then sends the information concerning the current turn in letters to each player. The players read the turn information and write back with their actions. It works much like a professional PBM (play-by-mail) game. There are three main ways of running such a campaign, which are:

1. Direct to GM. At first, this method seems to be the easiest, but with close inspection reveals several flaws. In a direct campaign, the GM sends a copy of the turn results to each player, with any secret information only certain players would know, and they each respond to the GM individually.

The main problem here concerns repeating information. If you are running a fantasy campaign, for instance, difficulty may arise when all three party thieves examine a chest at once—two unlocking it and the third checking for traps! In cases like this, the GM may either redo the turn, costing time and inducing frustration on both the GM's and players' parts, or decide that only one character performs the action while the others do something else.

The latter solution is actually the worst of the two, as it makes the players feel

that they have no real control over their characters (and players *hate* being manipulated). Dire repercussions could result if, say, the rogue you selected to open the chest fails miserably and the whole party dies from a gas-cloud trap! After all, he wasn't the *only* candidate.

[A possible solution here is to have the players agree beforehand to a sort of action "pecking order" based on character statistics, mixed with liberal GM diplomacy. The character with the highest dexterity, movement rate, skill level, etc. goes first, with others following in descending order. Given the "three thieves" problem mentioned earlier, the GM might decide that the thief checking for traps goes first even though he has a lower dexterity than the other two, because the GM knows the chest has a deadly trap and that the other thieves are likely to listen to a reasonable

course of action (why open a chest before it's checked for traps?). If the trap-checker misses the trap, the GM might have the most experienced thief check before the chest is opened by the third thief.—Editor]

The main benefits of the direct-to-GM method are speed and (relatively) low postage costs. However, you must brave headaches and player resentment.

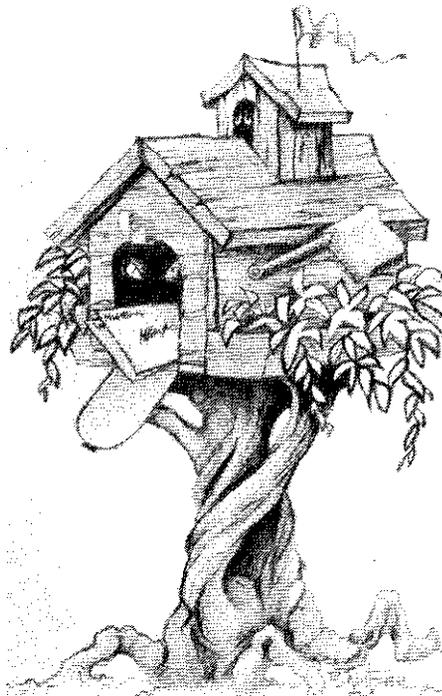
2. Caller. This works much in the way a number of regular RPGs are run, especially TSR's AD&D® and D&D® games. The GM sends out turn results to every player, but the players send their actions to one gamer designated as the caller. The caller sorts the responses, informing any players either by mail or phone if their actions overlap. Then he sends all the responses at once to the GM.

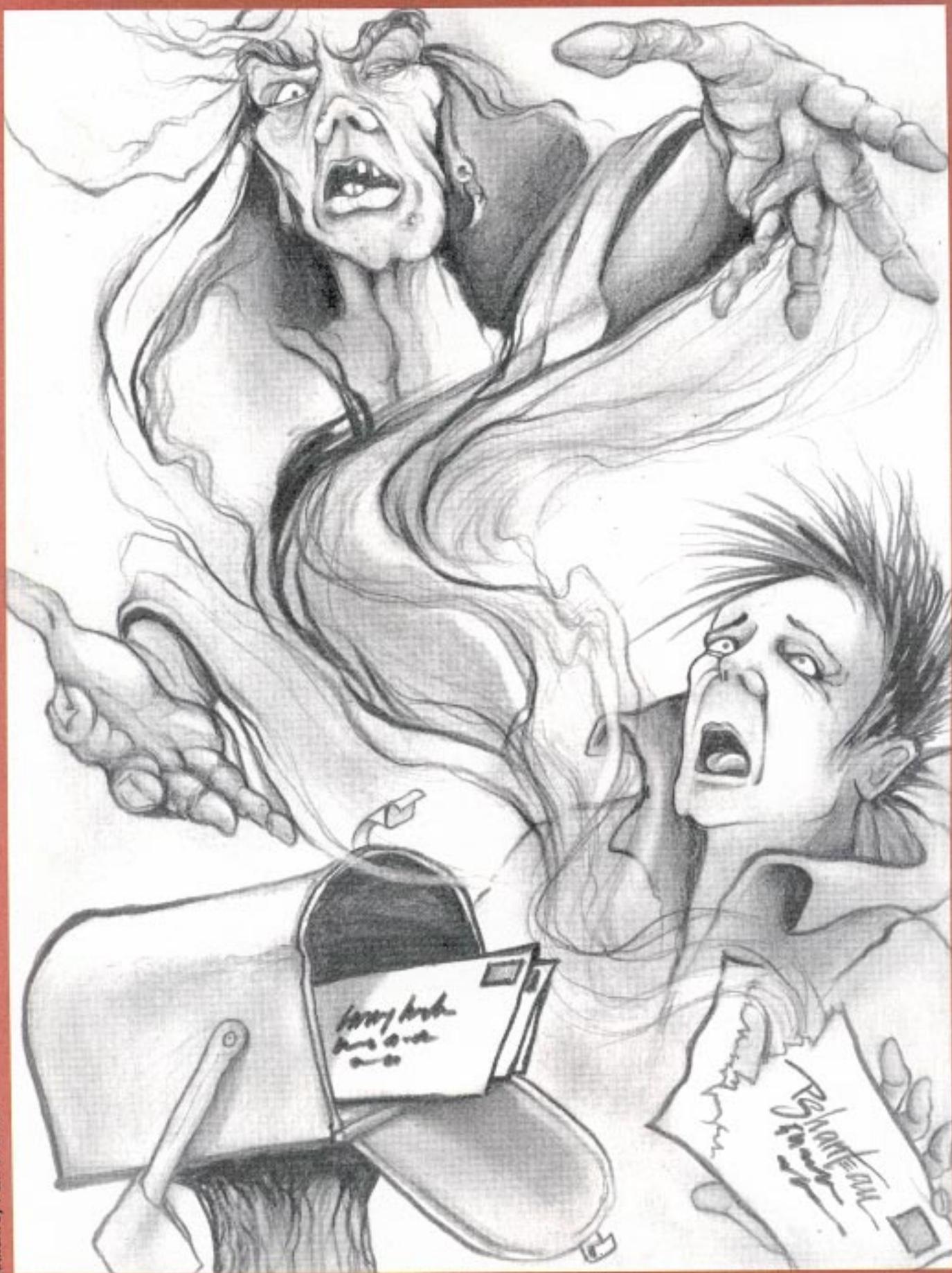
While this method may work somewhat better than the direct one, it places a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of the designated caller, not to mention added postal and telephone expenses. It may be a good idea to rotate the position of caller every month or so (depending on how fast your turnaround rate is) so nobody gets stuck with the job for long.

Also, if there is trouble with overlapping actions, the game can be held up for quite some time as the caller attempts to rectify the situation. In the meantime, the other players *and* the GM are wondering where the letters are. Blood feuds have started from less aggravation than this. As an advantage, though, it saves the GM a great deal of coordinating work when all the letters come at once.

3. Round-Robin. This is probably the best method, but one often neglected by postal gamers. It seems complex at first, but is really a quite tidy way to run a campaign. The GM first arranges a turn order, deciding which player's character acts first, second, and so on, down to the last. This may be based on dexterity, speed, or other factors, depending on the game system you are using.

Then the GM sends the turn-results page





and movement order list to the first player. The player decides on her action, writes it down, and sends her action sheet, the turn-results page, and the turn order to the second player. The second player encloses all materials in addition to his action sheet, and so on. The items eventually circulate all the way to the last player, who then sends the entire package to the GM. If the players are reliable and don't manage to spill coffee on the papers or forget to mail them out, a turn may be completed in two or three weeks.

Out of these three techniques, the round-robin method lends itself to the tidiest execution and the fewest headaches. Then again, other postal gaming methods may be better for certain games. For example, in West End Games' PARANOIA* system, everything is done without the other gamers' knowledge, so direct mail is the best method. If several players try to do the same thing at once, we all know how the GM of a PARANOIA campaign loves to make things explode. . . .

The electronic warrior

Another way to play without a regular group is by a computer bulletin-board system (BBS). For those unfamiliar with BBSs, a brief summary is in order.

A BBS consists of a program within a computer connected to a telephone line by a modem. Modems are used for telecom-

munications and allow people to link their personal computers with other computers for various purposes such as file transfers. Other people with modems may call a BBS and do many things, depending on the system.

The majority of BBSs consist of several areas where users may leave messages to each other on a variety of topics. Many have as many as 30 or more different sections set aside for this purpose. This basically takes the form of "open letters," where people may read and write their own comments on the earlier messages. Thus, continuing conversations are carried on that may last for months on a single topic, with any number of users jumping into the discussion.

Some boards have areas designated as "general usage" or specifically for role-playing. In this case, a GM may post a message looking for gamers, then begin a campaign on the system itself. This results in a slightly chaotic game, but it is close to the round-robin in that players, reading the postings of the previous players, will not repeat actions. However, trying to run actions in a particular character order is next to impossible.

I would hardly recommend going out and buying a computer and modem just for the purpose of gaming, but if you already have them *and* access to a local BBS, you might wish to try an online cam-

paign. Remember to ask the system operator's permission before starting a game in a nondesignated area. While it is not as much of a problem on huge national networks like CompuServe or GENIE, messages can take up a lot of memory on smaller computers—and RPGs take a lot of messages!

Notable advantages of BBS gaming include the potential for making new friends (which is next to impossible with a postal campaign, where you must know all the people involved before starting the game) and a quick response time. This writer has successfully run a campaign using Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game on a local BBS for over a year now, and has recently begun a new campaign using West End's TORC* game. In both cases, I have managed to enter at least one turn a day—slow, but much faster than any system by mail.

Remember that role-playing games are primarily social activities, best enjoyed with a live group of players sitting face to face. However, when you don't have a regular group nearby or want to try something new, postal and BBS gaming can't be beat. Ω

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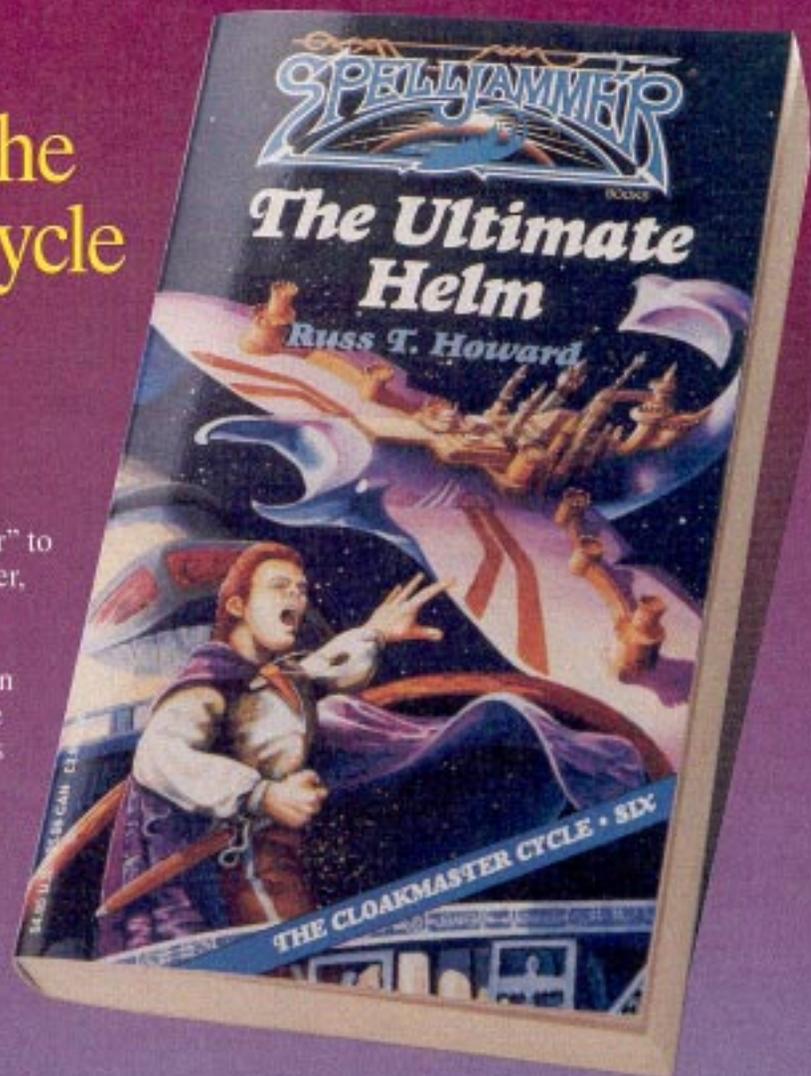
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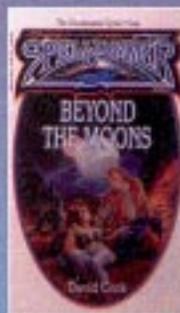
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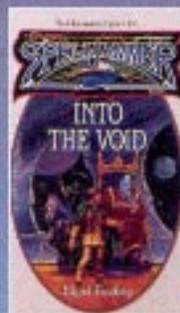
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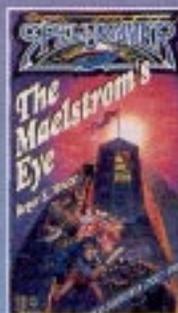
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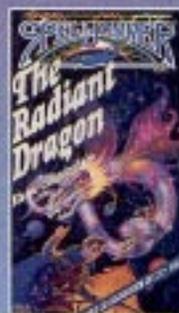
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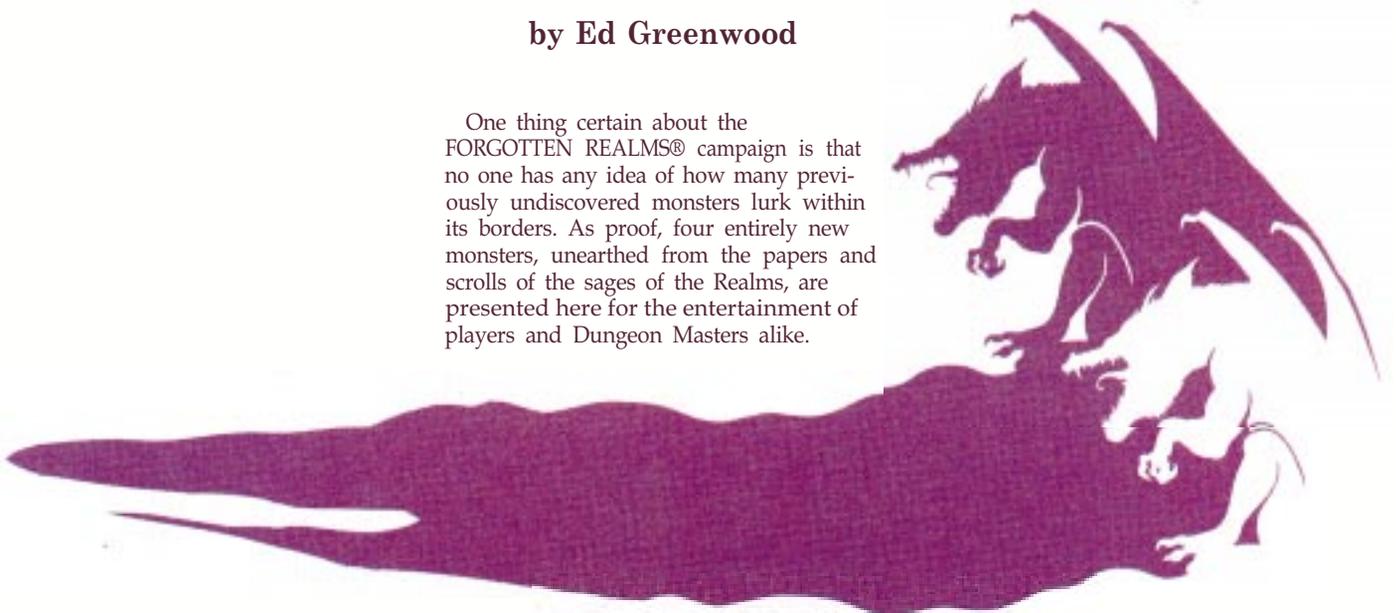
The Dragon's Bestiary

Four new monsters for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting

Artwork by Tom Baxa

by Ed Greenwood

One thing certain about the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign is that no one has any idea of how many previously undiscovered monsters lurk within its borders. As proof, four entirely new monsters, unearthed from the papers and scrolls of the sages of the Realms, are presented here for the entertainment of players and Dungeon Masters alike.



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Hot to temperate/any
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary or small bands
ACTIVE TIME:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional to Genius (15-18)
TREASURE:	Any (especially Q, V)
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING:	1-4
ARMOR CLASS:	6 (head and sting: 3, tentacles: 1)
MOVEMENT:	10
HIT DICE:	7+7
THACO:	
NO. OF ATTACKS:	Up to five possible (bite, sting, spell, and up to two held items)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	Bite (1-3 +venom), sting (2-8 +venom), and by item
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spell use, poison, possible magical item use
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Regenerates 1 hp/round
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	H (22'-25' long)
MORALE:	Elite (16)
XP VALUE:	3,000 +



Banelar are evil, nagalike creatures found on the land and in the water throughout the warmer regions of the Forgotten Realms. Named for the many alliances between individuals of this race and priests of Bane, banelar are native to the Realms on the Prime Material plane. They are quite independent in nature, and not all serve or obey other servants of Bane. Banelar have long, dark, snakelike bodies and large, humanlike heads. They are dark purple-green in color, each with green-white glistening eyes and a brownish tail near the end. Tiny tentacles grow in a ring about a banelar's mouth. These are too weak to wield weapons but can wear, manipulate, or carry minor items such as rings, keys, wands, and bits of food. Banelar can breathe air and water alike without harm or hesitation.

Combat: A banelar casts spells as a 6th-level cleric and 6th-level mage with no ability score bonuses. Thus, it has the following spell capacity: Wizard: 4,2,2, and Priest: 3,3,2. A banelar can utter a maximum of one spell per round, in addition to making physical and weapon attacks. Banelar spells are verbal only (the casting is modified so that no material components are required, involving an increase in casting time of three in all cases). Such spells must be found or learned from dragons, other banelar, or similar creatures employing verbal-only magic.

A banelar can wield any magical items it can carry (up to rods in size and weight), regardless of class limitations; alignment restrictions on weapons still apply. A banelar can wear amulets and magical rings on its tentacles, with the usual functional maximum of two at any one time. Periapts, however, will not fit on banelar tentacles and confer no magical effects.

A banelar can bite for 1-3 hp damage plus poison effects (save or suffer unconsciousness and 2-12 hp additional damage, with skin turning blue, for 2-5 turns). A banelar also has a tail sting (2-8 hp piercing damage and the same poison effects as the bite; save separately for each).

Habitat/Society: Banelar tend to be selfish and solitary, but they often cooperate with lesser creatures (such as humans, orcs, and hobgoblins) and greater ones (beholders, liches, evil dragons, and even vampires) for common gain or to fight a specific foe. Banelar speak Common and Orcish in horrid hissing voices. They are paranoid, always planning against attacks and

seeking to strengthen their personal weaknesses and defenses. To do so, banelar collect and hoard treasure, particularly magical items, to use and to trade for services or to provide safety from powerful enemies. Banelar are treacherous, adhering to the letter (not the intent) of any bargains they make. They see nothing wrong in commanding or forcing their own servant creatures into breaking bargains they have made.

Ecology: Banelar have been known to steal and tend entire herds of livestock for their own larders, and can dine with perfect safety on snakes and other creatures that generate poisons and acids (to which banelar seem immune). Banelar are also highly resistant to petrification (+3 on all saves). As hermaphrodites, they each give live birth to a single young every winter. A banelar parent hunts with its hungry offspring and teaches it spells until the youth is able to fend for itself, whereupon it leaves. Typically, a banelar mates whenever it encounters another banelar and avoids fighting others of its kind. Beyond this, unless weakened or frightened, it avoids consorting with its fellows. A banelar parent tends to raise its young in undersea or mountain caves, far from its usual haunts; this is so that when the parent sneaks away and leaves its young, it can return to its favorite areas with little fear of being found.

Flameskull

DRAGON® Issue #197

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary or small groups
ACTIVE TIME:	Any
DIET:	None
INTELLIGENCE:	As in life (usually 8-16)
TREASURE:	Any
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil

NO. APPEARING:	1 (or, very rarely, 1-6)
ARMOR CLASS:	3
MOVEMENT:	Fl 20 (A)
HIT DICE:	4+4
THACO:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 + special
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2d4 x 2 (gouts of flame)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spell use
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Regenerates 1 hp/round, various spell immunities
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	88%
SIZE:	S (about 1' diameter)
MORALE:	Elite (16)
XP VALUE:	2,000

Flameskulls are rare undead creatures found throughout the Forgotten Realms. These magically powered flying skulls are fashioned from human heads soon after death, by a magical process first developed in long-lost Netheril and still practiced by a few evil priesthoods (such as that of Bane) and magical societies (such as those based in Zhentil Keep and Thay).

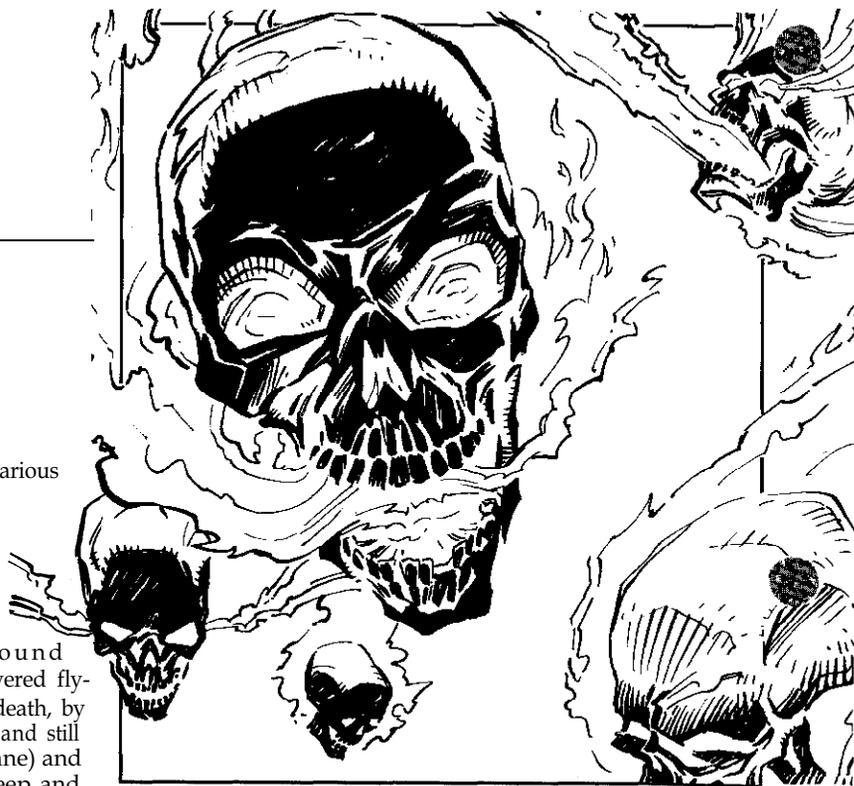
Combat: Flameskulls can speak Common and possibly 1-4 other languages that they knew in life. They can use their voices to lure intruders into traps or deceive them about the presence of other dangers. Flameskulls can spew fire from their mouths twice in a round, in straight beams up to 10' long.

If enchanted to do so at the time of their making, each can also cast one spell per round by verbal means only. Most flameskulls cast *magic missile* spells or *flame strikes*; none can use mind-control spells. Most flameskulls can cast up to three different spells, and almost all flameskulls cast their attack spells every second round. On the rounds between, they utter a single-segment, verbal-only magic now lost to most spellcasters in the Realms: *spell reflection*, which returns any and all cast spells reaching the flameskull in that round back on the caster(s). If the spells do damage, they do normal damage to the casters; if not, they are merely negated.

Flameskulls cannot be affected by mind-control spells like *charm person*; by *sleep*, *hold*, and other spells to which undead are immune; by cold-, fire-, or heat-related magical attacks; or by electrical (lightning) attacks. Their high magic resistance often protects them against spells they do not reflect back at their casters. Flameskulls are turned as liches and may be struck by any sort of weapon. They regenerate and reassemble even after being shattered, unless a *dispel magic*, *exorcise*, or *remove curse* spell is cast on their remains, or the majority of their bone fragments are doused with holy water.

Flameskulls fly about trailing little jets of flame. They move in silence, unless uttering spells or screaming for effect.

Habitat/Society: Flameskulls do not reproduce, nor have they any purpose in life beyond the guardianship they were created for. Though retaining their intelligence, they often go insane from sheer boredom and may, if the DM wishes, exhibit erratic behavior. They always want to be entertained, and if freed from their guardianship by the destruction or pilferage of whatever



they were set to guard, they do not hurl themselves to attack to achieve destruction. Instead, they try to follow or accompany the being(s) who freed them from guardianship. Typically they float along just out of reach, making smart comments and wanting to see everything interesting that is going on (including secret meetings, seductions, magical research, and other private matters). Flameskulls are utterly lonely and act accordingly.

Ecology: Flameskulls fill no niche in the ecology of the Forgotten Realms. They are studied by alchemists, priests, and wizards whenever possible in an effort to duplicate their powers or the means of their making (so far without reported success) or to find special properties their flame might possess.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any land
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Flock
ACTIVE TIME:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1-4
ARMOR CLASS:	3
MOVEMENT:	6, Fl 13
HIT DICE:	6
THACO:	15
NO. OF ATTACKS:	5
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-5/2-5/2-5/1-4/1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Ammonia breath, blood drain
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	H (16'-20' long, 40' wingspan)
MORALE:	Very steady (14)
XP VALUE:	975

Foulwings are grotesquely misshapen flying predators thought to have originated on another plane. Mildly empathic and essentially lazy hunters, these clumsy fliers are often tamed for use as steeds by evil and unscrupulous humans. Foulwings have black, leathery wings; tailless, toad-shaped bodies; and vaguely horselike heads. The shapes of their heads, and the location and size of the many horn-shaped wriggling skin growths that cover their black bodies, vary from individual to individual. Every foulwing has three needle-toothed jaws set around its single-nostril snout. Glowing, many-faceted red eyes give a foulwing both infravision (90' range) and ultravision. Foulwings communicate with each other in harsh creakings that communicate identities and basic emotions, urges, and warnings.

Combat: Foulwings prefer to fight in the air or pounce on their prey, allowing them use of their wing claws and the weight of their wings and bodies, to knock down and pin prey to the ground. Savage and wantonly destructive, foulwings enjoy killing. They twist their heads when engaged with opponents so as to bite with all their jaws, and their ammonia-like breath causes opponents, during the round of contact and the following round, to suffer a -1 penalty on attack rolls due to the stinging irritation it causes to visual and olfactory senses. If a foulwing disables or pins prey (a Strength of 16 + is required to escape pinning unaided; allow one Strength check per round), it attempts to leisurely drain the victim's blood by sucking with one of its hollow, tubelike tongues, biting open wounds to do so. The blood drain is equal to 2-5 hp per round; pulling free causes the victim another 2 hp damage.

Habitat/Society: Foulwings may be found as solitary hunters or in "flocks" (sometimes as families), gathered while courting or to attack strong prey. Every flock (of up to four foulwings) is dominated by the largest specimen and works together to scatter, disable, and herd prey.

Ecology: Foulwings are rapacious scavengers that will eat carrion or plant leaves if no other food is available. They have been known to keep "larders" of captive creatures for later food. Foulwings bear live young, typically 1-3 at a time, and always nest in rocky, mountainous wilderness areas. Young are born with 1 HD and only bite attacks (for 1-2 damage per jaw), but rapidly grow to full size, whereupon the parents abandon them and each other. Foulwing flesh is heavy, oily, and foul in taste



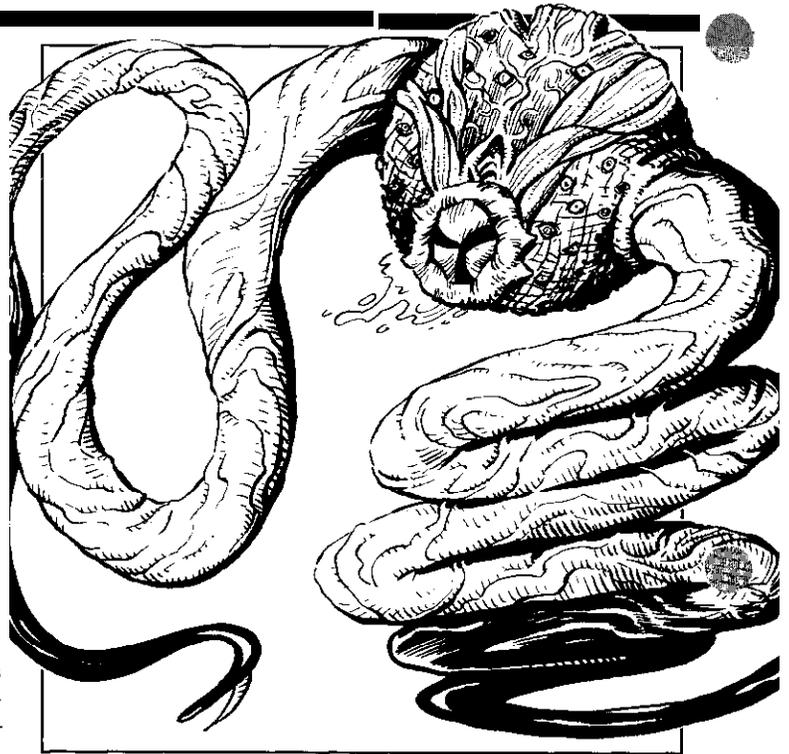
(hence the creature's name). It quickly rots upon the creature's death and has no known usefulness as armor or in magical practices. Foulwing blood and saliva, however, have both been found to be mildly caustic cleansers that bring metal to a bright, long-lasting sheen.

Foulvern: In very rare instances, foulwings have mated with wyverns. The offspring are always misshapen wyverns with 1-2 HD extra and three jaws each (as a foulwing has). Foulverns have a taste for blood and a savage enjoyment in killing, but otherwise favor their wyvern heritage (and statistics, with a typical XP Value of 1400).

Whipsting

DRAGON® Issue #197

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	All/Rocky, subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary or small packs
ACTIVE TIME:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore, scavenger
INTELLIGENCE:	Varies (1-12)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
<hr/>	
NO. APPEARING:	1-6 (d6)
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	8, Fl 9 gliding (D)
HIT DICE:	1+4
THACO:	20 (16 when springing)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2 (bite)/1 x 2 (stings)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Venom
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Jump
SIZE:	S to L (tentacles 5' to 20' long)
MORALE:	Steady (12)
XP VALUE:	120



The whipsting is a vicious predator found on rocky ledge caverns, and among ruins all across the Forgotten Realms. It is named for its lashing attack, in which it tries to drive an envenomed sting into an opponent. The strike of an attacking whipsting makes a loud, whiplike crack audible up to 70' away. Whipstings have wrinkled, spherical bodies 6"-12" in diameter. From opposing sides of a whipsting's ball-like form protrude two dexterous, tapering tentacles. These are usually about 5' long, but some whipstings fought by adventurers have had tentacles up to 20' long. Both tentacles end in sticky tips that aid the whipsting in grasping and climbing, each tip having a fixed, bony sting protruding at an angle just beside the leathery tentacle tip. Amid the "wrinkles" (skin flaps) of the muddy-gray body of a whipsting are many eyes. A whipsting has both normal vision and infravision effective to 120'.

On the underside of a whipsting is a sucking mouth dominated by three shark-like teeth set in a triangle. The teeth can move independently of one another and are capable of gnawing through armor plate. When they close together, they meet to completely seal the whipsting's mouth. A whipsting eats any meat it can, living or dead, gorging itself tirelessly. Its elastic body can expand to contain meals of up to 10 times its own size.

Combat: A whipsting usually waits for prey with one tentacle curled underneath itself to form a natural spring. If facing a large foe, a whipsting often avoids attacking or seeks to flee altogether by using this curled tentacle to leap about in a constant bobbing or bouncing pattern, like a pogo stick. Otherwise, its initial attack consists of suddenly straightening this tentacle to propel itself from its ledge or fissure in a wild spring that ends in a lashing whip of the whipsting's body, which drives its envenomed sting deep into the opponent (+4 to hit). The whipsting then tries to constrict, smother, or strangle prey by remaining attached to it, slapping with its tentacles to drive home its two stings. A whipsting's sting strikes for 1 hp damage. A strike also injects its venom into or onto its prey (the poison is effective both internally and by skin contact).

The prey must save versus poison at -2 to avoid the venom effects. If the save fails, the prey shudders uncontrollably on the round following the sting-strike. Nausea and weakness ruin all attacks and spellcasting attempted by the victim on that round, and cause the automatic dropping of all wielded or carried objects. Tasks requiring high manual dexterity, such as picking a lock or writing a message, are impossible. The victim

also suffers a one-round armor-class penalty of 1. On subsequent rounds, the victim can move normally but is still weak; attacks are at a -3 penalty to attack and damage rolls initially, -2 on the round following, -1 on the next round, and normal thereafter. Each successful whipsting strike results in another round of shuddering (as described above) unless saved against. Every successful whipsting attack must be saved against even if the target creature has previously escaped venom effects by a successful saving throw.

Habitat/Society: Little is known about these predators. They are believed to be hermaphroditic and to vary widely in intelligence. Whipstings lay eggs (large and rubbery like turtle eggs, often green-white or dun in color) in caves or dark crevices. These eggs are edible but have no market value. Whipstings are more often found in groups than alone, and they peacefully coexist with each other. They are thought to live many years.

Ecology: Some whipstings have been domesticated as pets or guards; others are used as unwilling guardians. In Amn and Tethyr, whipstings are often imprisoned in small coffers atop treasure as a deterrent to thievery. This custom is rarer elsewhere but not unknown, and it is a special favorite of caravan merchants. Intelligent monsters often use whipstings to guard their lairs. Perytons and griffons are known to eat whipstings, biting off the stings with their first attacks to avoid the venom. Whipstings are themselves immune to the effects of all whipsting venom. Whipsting venom is an ingredient in the making of *rings of weakness* and nausea-inducing medicines.

Stingwings: Approximately 10% of all encountered whipstings have gauzy, fragile wings that allow them to glide down from heights without damage or jump farther than wingless whipstings, up to 60' horizontally. Such wings can be regenerated in 1-3 days if damaged. The wings cannot be targeted in combat, but a captured "stingwing" could have its wings cut off (wings have AC 10 and 1 hp), and they will automatically be destroyed by any sort of area-effect flame spell.

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DAVE JOHNSON '93



The Known World

Gazetteer
Earth-shaking news about the
MYSTARA™ campaign setting

by Bruce A. Heard

This feature offers answers to letters on the D&D® Game, its worlds and products, occasional articles, or "first glance" reviews of D&D game products. The reader is 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.

You mentioned a while back that TSR was considering re-releasing old Gazetteers "in a series of big, fat, softbound

books (in lumps of three Gazetteers each)." Would these be updated with changes from *Wrath of the Immortals*?

We did consider the idea—before a major change occurred in the direction of the MYSTARA™ setting as a TSR product line. The Known World is one of the oldest and most detailed game worlds among TSR's campaign settings. Yet, despite its age, it has remained a unique, colorful, and lively world that begged for greater recognition from the gaming community. It has been decided that the MYSTARA setting would

be granted much greater attention and support as a major TSR line. In that regard it became crucial to put the setting within reach of the single greatest gaming community in the world—that of the AD&D® game fans. Thus, it is with pleasure that we announce the graduation of the Known World to the universe of the AD&D game as its newest campaign setting!

What does this mean? In the summer of 1994, the Known World will become a brand-new campaign setting for the AD&D game. World-famous designer Jeff Grubb has been hard at work on the colossal task of converting the massive amount of Known World data into the new WORLD OF MYSTARA campaign set (for the year AC 1012). If everything goes right, we also should have a new-look Monstrous Compendium with color art, a new adventure module for dungeon-lovers, and a Gazetteer-style accessory on the classic Castle Amberville that reveals the latest on the amazing fate of Etienne d'Amberville. Also available will be an AD&D Almanac for AC 1012 with a greater focus on events, and a brand new series of MYSTARA novels (can you say "The dragons are coming"?) Last but not least, a special game accessory will recreate, in AD&D terms, the Savage Coast twelve years after the familiar Princess Ark series. This unique accessory will have a very special item that will forever change the atmosphere of your adventures! And all that before Christmas 1994!

For AD&D game fans, this is an opportunity to enjoy the wondrous MYSTARA setting to its fullest, without making any rules conversions. For the die-hard D&D game supporters, nothing really changes. Your favorite game world is very much the same, except probably twice as many products as before will become available and many more people will finally know what (or where) in the universe you are talking about.

Indeed, this is an unexpected and drastic turn of events, at least for the Known World. But again, in the wake of *Wrath of the Immortals*, we've all gotten used to earth-shaking news! So, about the re-release of updated Gazetteers? Well, they may be done someday, but not in the immediate future.

In December, I picked up a copy of the *Poor Wizard's Almanac* and I think it's a superb supplement for the D&D game. I hope TSR publishes a new one every year. While I loved the Almanac overall, I was a bit disappointed that it didn't address in greater depth the changes that the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set wreaked on the Known World. In particular, I hoped there would be a section detailing changes in the titles and positions of important NPCs introduced in the various Gazetteers. Some changes are hinted at in the Almanac, such as the status of "baron" given to

Retameron Antonic in the "Hyraksos Buried" entry, pp. 205—Retameron was formerly a knight.

Our plans are to release Almanacs once a year around November or December. About the NPC changes, it would have been difficult to include such a list, considering the number of changes that took place (the Almanacs already are 240 pages long with very small type. If we had included a list of title changes for NPCs, we would have had to include a similar list for many other items that were modified. The result could have been what looks like a very long list of errata. Such a list could have been hard to use and we thought that simply giving the new data in the appropriate chapters was sufficient and more elegant. In the upcoming Almanac, however, we added a yearly "obituary column" for those NPCs who've met their end during the year.

Will there be Almanacs for other AD&D game worlds?

No, not as far as we know now.

Have Port Marlin, Rock Harbor, and Anchorage become independent city-states after the sinking of Alphatia? Is Minaea a city-state, a kingdom, or a republic of pirates?

Without the Alphantian overlords to keep the peace, some of these places might decide to become heavily-militarized, despotic states to fend off barbarian pressure or banditry. Some might fall prey to local ways and become pirate havens, while others would become open to barbarian rule, paying wondrous tributes of magic or wealth to barbarian kings in exchange for protection and freedom. Either way, without Alphantian supremacy, they would all become independent states struggling for survival. As for Minaea, it could be a loose confederation of piratical tribes whose main target is the coast of Eastern Bellissaria and merchant traffic in the Strait of Minaea. These pirates would not be averse to minor incursions into Bellissaria for the purpose of sacking poorly defended cities.

GAZ2 Emirates of Ylaruam does not tell the names and classes of the ruling emirs. Who's in charge? GAZ4 *The Kingdom of Ierendi* mentions Orisis, the hawk-headed Nithian Immortal of death and resurrection. Who is he, and what happened to him?

The names and classes of the emirs will be given in the upcoming Almanac. Orisis is another Immortal who was accidentally left out of the Wrath of the Immortals boxed set. After the curse of the Nithian lands, Orisis would have been barred by the other immortals from having any kind of relation with the old Nithian culture. Orisis would be more involved with the Hollow World Nithians.

Who are the present rulers of the Principalities of Bramyra and Sablestone, in the post- *Wrath of the Immortals* Glantri?

Prince Urmahid of Krinagar (ex-Count of Skullhorn Pass) now rules the Principality of Bramyra. Prince Harald of Haaskinz (ex-Archduke of Westheath) now rules the Principality of Sablestone.

Could you publish Weapon Mastery tables for the Bullroarer Knife and the Chakram described on page five of module *X5 The Temple of Death*, along with the classes that can use them?

Chakram					
	Mastery	Ranges	Damage	Defense	Special
P=M	Basic	10/20/30	d6	—	—
	Skilled	15/25/35	d6+2	H: +1AC/1	—
	Expert	20/30/45	d6+4	H: +2AC/2	—
	Master	25/35/50	P:d8 + 6 S:d4 + 6	H: +3AC/2	—
	Gd Master	30/50/60	P:d10 + 8 S:d6 + 7	H: +3AC/3	—

P = H Primary target includes creatures attacking with hand-held or hand-thrown weapons.
P: Primary target.
S: Secondary target (opponents with missile weapons or natural weaponry).
H: AC bonus to the chakram user against attacks from or opponents using hand-held or thrown weapons.
AC/# Number of times the AC bonus can be used each round.

Note: *Don't forget to apply the Hit Roll bonuses from the table on page 76 of the Rules Cyclopedia. The chakram is a 6" ring-shaped, hand-thrown steel disk that clerics (Hulean or other war-clerics), fighters, thieves, and mystics can use.*

Bullroarer Knife				
	Mastery	Damage	Defense	Special
P=M	Basic	d6		Spread damage (rounded down)
	Skilled	d6+2	H:+1AC/1	Spread damage (rounded up)
	Expert	d6+4	H: + 2AC/2	Spread damage (rounded up + 1)
	Master	2d4 + 4	H: + 3AC/2	Spread damage (rounded up + 2)
	Gd Master	2d4+8	H: + 3AC/3	Spread damage (rounded up + 3)

P = X There are no primary or secondary targets for damage (all creatures within a 10' radius are affected the same way).
H: AC bonus to the bullroarer knife's user against attacks from or opponents using hand-held or thrown weapons.
AC/#: Number of times the AC bonus can be used each round.

Note: *The bullroarer knife is a 10'-long chain ending in a flat knife, whirled over the head to make a loud roaring noise. This is an "odd-ball" weapon capable of hitting several opponents at once, within a 10' radius.*

In a melee with multiple opponents, the user makes one single attack roll and spreads damage among the opponents whose AC the user could hit (minimum damage should be 1 point), even if they stood behind him! The user, however suffers a -1 penalty to hit for each opponent beyond the first within the chains radius. The weapon cannot be used if any obstacle stands within the chains radius (dungeon walls, trees, etc.)

For example, three opponents surround the user. One is AC0, the other two AC8. If the user's attack roll is good enough to hit AC5, the damage should be spread among the two opponents with AC8 only.

At basic level of mastery, a score of 3 for a d6 damage would result in both opponents taking 1 point of damage. At a skilled level, the user would inflict 3 points of damage to each of the two opponents (3 + 2/2 = 2%, rounded up = 3). At expert level, the damage per opponent becomes 5 per opponent (3 + 4/2 = 3½ rounded up + 1 = 5), etc.

The extra "plus" modifier for damage after rounding up is only to be used when damage is spread among multiple opponents. Bonuses due to strength and magic should be added up before spreading damage to multiple opponents. Mystics and fighters can use the bullroarer knife. Ω

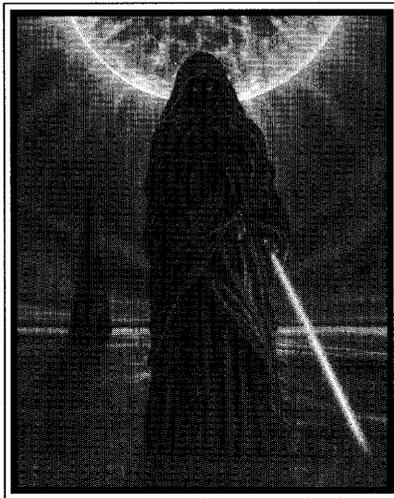
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CONVENTION CALENDAR

Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) 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 cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 246-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

- ✦ indicates an Australian convention.
- ✧ indicates a Canadian convention.
- ⊙ indicates a European convention.
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NOWSCON '93, Sept. 11-12 OH

This convention will be held at the ONG Armory in Brook Park, Ohio. Activities include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, plus an auction. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$10/day preregistered; \$17/weekend or \$11/day at the door. Write to: NOWSCON, c/o Dennis Alvarez, 21574 Ivan Ave., Euclid OH; or call: (216) 731-4360 evenings.

SUMMIT CITY CON '93, Sept. 11-12 IN

This convention will be held at the Indiana National Guard Armory in Ft. Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, and a painting contest. Write to: Phoenix Rising Game Shop, 6252 St. Joseph Rd., Ft. Wayne IN 46835; or call: (219) 485-6807.

MAELSTROM I, Sept. 17-19 NE

This convention will be held at the UNL East Campus and Super 8 hotel in Lincoln, Nebr. Guests include Richard A. Knaak, Mickey Zuckerman Reichert, and Erin McKee. Activities include gaming, anime, panels, and a writers' contest. Registration: \$20. Write to: MAELSTROM I, P.O. Box 82844, Lincoln NE 68501-2844; or call: (402) 477-8430.

ANDCON '93, Sept. 24-26 OH

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Independence, Ohio. Guests include Jean Rabe, Peter Bromley, Rick Loomis, Colin McComb, Tim Beach, and "Slade" Henson. Activities include 23 RPGA® Network events, miniatures games, the national PBM convention, and over 200 other events. Registration: \$17.95/weekend. Daily and visitor passes are available. Write to: ANDCON '93 HQ P.O. Box 3100, Kent OH 44240; or call: (800) 529-EXPO.

CONTACT XI, Sept. 24-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Evansville, Ind. Guests include Missouri Smith and Dr. Bill Breuer. Activities include gaming, discussions, a dealers' room, an art show and auction, a hospitality suite, and a video room. Registration: \$20. Write to: CONTACT XI, P.O. Box 3894, Evansville IN 47737; or call: (812) 473-3109.

DEMICON 4, Sept. 24-26 MD

This gaming convention will be held at the Sheraton Conference hotel in Tiowson, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, a game auction, a painted-miniatures contest, and dealers. Registration: \$25. Send an SASE to: Harford Adventure Society, c/o Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Rd., Bel Air MD 21014; or call: (410) 638-2400.

EPSILON ALPHA '93, Sept. 24-26 IL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Collinsville, Ill. Guests include Todd Bryant and John Haymes. Activities include dealers, banquets, an art show, movies, a costume contest, and a masquerade. Registration: \$35/weekend or \$20/day. Write to: MASFA, Inc., P.O. Box 23167, Belleville IL 62223; or call: (913) 677-6537.

TACTICON '93, Sept. 24-26 CO

This convention will be held at the Sheraton hotel of Lakewood, Colo. Events include over 150 events in all types of gaming. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered. Write to: Denver Gamers' Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044; or call: (303) 665-7062.

EARTH '93, Sept. 25-26 ⊙

This convention will be held at the Freizeithem Stocken in Hannover, Germany. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a costume contest, demos, and writing contests. Write to: Arne Rassek, Berliner Str. 23, D-W 3005 Hemmingen 1, GERMANY.

EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY '93, Sept. 25-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Century Center in South Bend, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: Mark Schumaker, 1621 Frances Av., Elkhart IN 46514; or call: (219) 294-7019.

GAMECON '93, Sept. 25-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn South in Indianapolis, Ind. Guests include Steve Lortz. Activities include a painted-miniatures contest, seminars, and dealers. Registration: \$12 preregistered; \$15 at the door. GMs are welcome. Send an SASE to: GAMECON, P.O. Box 39035, Indianapolis IN 46239-0035; or call: (317) 862-3982.

GAME DAY '93, Sept. 25 IL

This convention will be held at Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniatures and art contests. Registration: \$4. Write to: Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor, Student Center SIU, Carbondale IL 62901-4425; or call Joel at: (618) 529-4630.

VENCON '93, Sept. 25-26 ◇

This convention will be held at Simon Bolivar University's Student House in Caracas, Venezuela. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies and dealers. Registration: Bs. 200/day. Write to: Tito Labastidas, Fundacion Caracas, Av. Universidad, Esq. Monroy, Caracas, VENEZUELA.

COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS 19 NY

Oct. 1-3
This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Schenectady, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, demos, an auction, contests, and a benefit breakfast. Registration: \$20 before Sept. 30; \$25 at the door. GMs are welcome. Write to: Schenectady Wargamers' Assoc., C.O.F.N., P.O. Box 9429, Schenectady NY 12309; or call: (518) 664-9451.

NOVACON IX, Oct. 1-3 TX

This convention will be held on the campus of Texas A&M University in College Station, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games.

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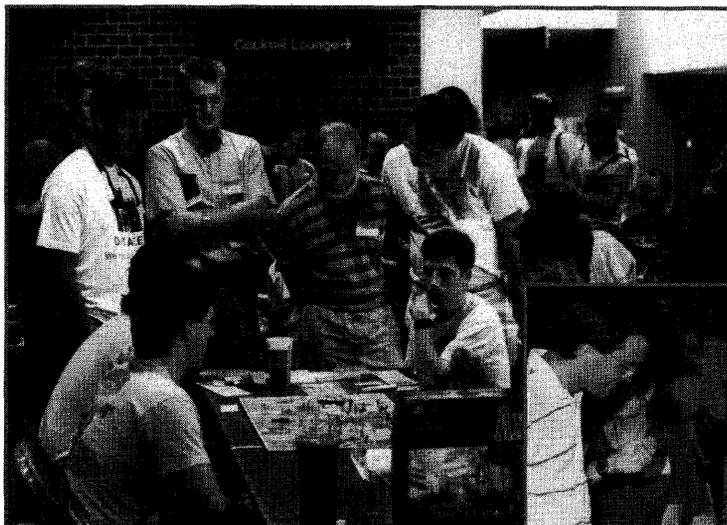


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tures games. Other activities include dealers and anime. Registration: \$10. Write to: NOVACON IX, MSC NOVA, Box J-1, College Station TX 77884; or call: (409) 845-1515.

WOLF-CON III, Oct. 1-3 MS

This convention will be held at Colvard Student Union of Mississippi State University's campus in Starkville, Miss. Guests include Mike Stackpole, Liz Danforth, and Mark O'Green. Activities include gaming, dealers, an art room and auction, a costume contest, and a dance. Registration: \$20. Write to: Clayton Bain, Rt. 3, Box 178, Starkville MS 39759; or call: (601) 323-9407.

GAMEMASTER '93, Oct. 2 ID

This convention will be held at the Student Union of Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. The guest of honor is Gary Thomas. Activities include gaming, a miniatures-painting competition, and an auction. Registration: \$2/game preregistered. Write to: Gamemasters' Guild, P.O. Box 8823, Boise ID 83707; or talk (208) 343-4288.

NOVAG VIII, Oct. 2-3 VA

This convention will be held at the Elks' Lodge in Fairfax, Va. Events include role-playing, war, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$10. Write to: NOVAG, P.O. Box 729, Sterling VA 20167.

TOL-CON XI, Oct. 2-3 OH

This convention will be held at the University of Toledo's Scott Park campus in Toledo, Ohio. Events include over 200 role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, demos, painting contests, dealers, and open gaming. Send an SASE to: TOL-CON, c/o Mind Games, 2115 N. Reynolds Rd., Toledo OH 43615.

COSCON '93, Oct. 8-10 PA

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Beaver Falls, Pa. Guest of honor is Jean Rabe. Activities include gaming, dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, and game demos. Registration: \$15 before Sept. 30; \$20 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003; or call: (412) 283-1159.

QUAD CON '93, Oct. 8-10 IA

This convention will be held at the Palmer Alumni Auditorium in Davenport, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, and a silent auction. Registration: \$9/weekend or \$4/day preregistered; \$12/weekend or \$6/day at the door. Game fees are \$2-3 per game. Send a long SASE with extra postage to: Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Av., Moline IL 61265; or call: (309) 762-5577. No collect calls, please.

RALLY 'ROUND THE FLAG '93 Oct. 8-10 OH

This convention will be held at the Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. Events include miniatures, war, board, and role-playing games. Other activities include game and miniatures dealers. Write to: HMGSNT, P.O. Box 14272, Columbus OH 43214; or call: (614) 267-1957.

ARTYCON V, Oct. 9-11 OK

This convention will be held at the Caisson Recreation Center at Fort Sill, Okla. Events include role-playing, board, and all types of miniatures games. Registration: \$5/day at the door. Write to: The Game Shack, 2114 Ft. Sill Blvd., Lawton OK 73507; or call: (405) 353-5006.

NUKE-CON III, Oct. 8-10 NE

This convention will be held at St. Bernard's school in Omaha, Nebr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$8/weekend or \$5/day. Write to: NUKE-CON, P.O. Box 1561, Omaha NE 68995; or talk (402) 733-5937.

INCON '93, Oct. 15-17 WA

This convention will be held at Cavanaugh's on Fourth in Spokane, Wash. Guests include Spider and Jeanne Robinson, Betty Bigelow, and Nick Pollotta. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, dealers, movies, panels, and demos. Registration: \$20 before Oct. 7; \$25 at the door. Daily rates will be available at the door. Write to: INCON '93, P.O. Box 1026, Spokane WA 99201-1026; or call: (509) 922-9932.

NECRONOMICON '93, Oct. 15-17 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn-Airport in Tampa, Fla. Guests include Lois McMaster Bujold and Peter David. Activities include panels, an art show, gaming, a masquerade, videos, a charity auction, and dealers. Registration: \$20. Write to: NECRONOMICON, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.

RUDICON 9, Oct. 15-17 NY

This convention will be held at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include art and costume contests, anime, guests, and dealers. Registration: \$6 for students; \$8 for non-students. Send an SASE to: RUDICON 9, c/o Student Directorate, 1 Lomb Memorial Dr., Rochester NY 14623.

TOTALLY TUBULAR CON '93 Oct. 15-17 CA

This convention will be held at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: TOTALLY TUBULAR CON, P.O. Box 18791, Anaheim Hills CA 92817-8791.

P.E.W. KHAN-U II, Oct. 16-17 PA

This convention will be held at the Embers in Carlisle, Pa. Events include only political, economic, and historical board and war games. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070; or call: (717) 774-6676.

TACTICON '93, Oct. 16-17 CT

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

RUCON III, Oct. 23 PA

This convention will be held at Lock Haven's University's Parsons Union Building in Lock Haven, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include contests, discussions, and dealers. Registration: \$7 before Oct. 7; \$10 at the door. Send an SASE to: Role-playing Underground, Parsons Union Bldg., LHU, Lock Haven PA 17745.

U-CON '93, Oct. 29-31 MI

This convention will be held at the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor, Mich. Our guest of honor is Keith Herber. Activities include gaming, seminars, a special Halloween horror tournament and costume contest. Registration: \$9 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Write to: U-CON, P.O. Box 4491, Ann Arbor MI 48106-4491.

UMF-CON XIII, Oct. 29-31 ME

This convention will be held at the University of Maine in Farmington, Maine. Events include role-playing and miniatures games. Registration: \$8/weekend preregistered or \$12/weekend at the door. Single-day rates are available. Write to: Table Gaming Club, 5 South St., UMF, Farmington ME 04938.

WARP IV, Oct. 29-31 OK

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Skyline East hotel in Tulsa, Okla. Guests include Tom and Mary Wallbank, Ron Dee, and Dell Harris. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, dealers, an art and games auction, and panels. Registration: \$12 before Oct. 1; \$15 at the door. Write to: W.A.R.P. IV Room 215-A OMU, 900 Asp Ave., Norman OK 73019; or call Carol at: (918) 582-3930, or Mary at: (405) 325-9583.

WARZONE WEST '93, Oct. 29-31 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Ashley Plaza in Tampa, Fla. Events include gaming, dealers, a flea market, and an auction. Registration: \$13 before Oct. 1; \$17/weekend or \$7/day at the door. Write to: WARZONE WEST, c/o Wolf Entertainment, P.O. Box 1256, Deland FL 32721-1256; or call: (904) 822-9653.

WIZARDS' GATHERING IV, Nov. 5-7 MA

This convention will be held at the Days Inn in Fall River, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include contests, raffles, and open gaming. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$9/day before Oct. 23; \$18/weekend or \$10/day at the door. Write to: SMAGS, P.O. Box 6295, Fall River MA 02724; or call: (508) 673-7589.

LAGACON 16, Nov. 6 PA

This convention will be held at the Eagles' Club in Lebanon, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. GMs are welcome. Registration: \$5 preregistered; \$7.50 at the door. Write to: Lebanon Area Gamers Assoc., 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon PA 17042; or call: (717) 274-8706.

SAINTS CON '93, Nov. 6-7 MN

This convention will be held at the Atwood Center Ballroom on the campus of St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a games swap and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$2. Write to: SAINTS CON '93, c/o Joe Becker, 1404 12th St. S.E., St. Cloud MN 56304.

CONSTELLATION XII, Nov. 12-14 AL

This convention will be held at the Huntsville Hilton in Huntsville, Ala. Guests include Jim Baen, Julius Schwartz, and David O. Miller. Activities include dealers and an art auction. Registration: \$20 before Oct. 10; \$25 thereafter. Write to: CONSTELLATION XII, P.O. Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815-4857.

HEXACON '93, Nov. 12-14 NC

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Airport in Greensboro, N.C. Events include role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and clay-o-rama. Registration: \$15 before Nov. 1. Write to: SF3, c/o HEXACON, Box 4, EUC, UNC-G, Greensboro NC 27412; or call: (919) 334-3159.

SAN DIEGO GAME CON X, Nov. 12-14 CA

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson-Harborview in San Diego, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15 before Oct. 31. Write to: SDGC, 4409 Mission Ave., #J208, Oceanside CA 92057; or call: (619) 599-9619.

SCI-CON 15, Nov. 12-14 VA

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Va. Guests include Timothy Zahn and Darrell K. Sweet. Events include panels, videos, a costume contest, an art show, and gaming. Registration: \$20 before Oct. 1; \$25 at the door. Send an SASE to: SCI-CON 15, P.O. Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670.

LOST IN KENTUCKY CON '93**Nov. 13-14 KY**

This convention will be held at the Murray State University Curris Center in Murray, Ky. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies, a game auction, plus art and miniatures contests. Registration: \$8/weekend or \$4/day preregistered; \$10/weekend or \$5/day at the door. Write to: Murray St. Univ. Gaming Assoc., 322 N. 7th St., Murray KY 42071-2027; or talk (502) 753-2126.

PENTACON IX, Nov. 13-14 IN

This convention will be held at the Grand Wayne Center in Ft. Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, contests, a flea market, and door prizes. Registration: \$10 preregistered. Write to: Steve & Linda Smith, 836 Himes, Huntington IN 46750; or call: (219) 356-4209.

CONTRARY '93, Nov. 19-21 MA

This convention will be held at the Ramada hotel in West Springfield, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include guests, demos, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$17 before Nov. 10; \$20 at the door. Write to: CONTRARY '93, 626 N. Main St., East Longmeadow MA 01028; or call: (413) 731-7237.

RECON IV, Nov. 19-21 CO

This convention will be held at the Radisson Inn North in Colorado Springs, Colo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a painting contest, and a games raffle. Registration: \$13/weekend preregistered; \$15/weekend at the door, or \$7/day. Write to: Mark Surber, 6614 Provincial Dr., Fountain CO 80817; or call: (719) 392-3920.

SHAUNCON VII, Nov. 19-21 MO

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's in Kansas City, Mo. Guests include Tom Dowd. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a painted-miniatures contest, and seminars. Dealers are welcome. Write to: Role-players Guild of Kansas City, c/o SHAUNCON, P.O. Box 7457, Kansas City MO 64116; or call: (816) 455-5020.

SOONERCON 9, Nov. 19-21 OK

This convention will be held at both the Central Plaza and Trade Winds hotels in Oklahoma City, Okla. Guests include Steven Brust and Tim Hildebrandt. Events include role-playing,

board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, videos, a masquerade, and a dance. Write to: SOONERCON, P.O. Box 1701, Bethany OK 73008-0701.

DRAGON'S DREAM GAME FAIR**Nov. 20 MI**

This convention will be held at the Elks Club in St. Joseph, Mich. Guests include Michelle Shirey Crean. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$8 preregistered; \$10 at the door, plus \$2/game. Send an SASE to: James Wilber, 69393 Oak St., Oak Park, Benton Harbor MI 49022; or call: (616) 944-1785.

ELLIS CON V, Nov. 20 CT

This convention will be held in the cafeteria of H.H. Ellis Tech School in Danielson, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies and prizes. Registration: \$5. Call John at: (203) 774-8511, ext. 115.

GOBBLECON 2, Nov. 20 PA

This convention will be held at the Easton Inn in Easton, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a raffle, a painted-miniatures contest, and door prizes. Registration: \$8 before Nov. 12; \$10 at the door; plus game tickets. Send an SASE to: Michael Griffith, 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091; or call: (215) 863-5178.

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

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It's quite possible that your manuscripts and I have already met. If the editors receive a gaming article, but the author has not sent a self-addressed, stamped envelope with the manuscript to allow for a reply, the editors give the manuscript to me, and . . . well, let's not dwell on that.

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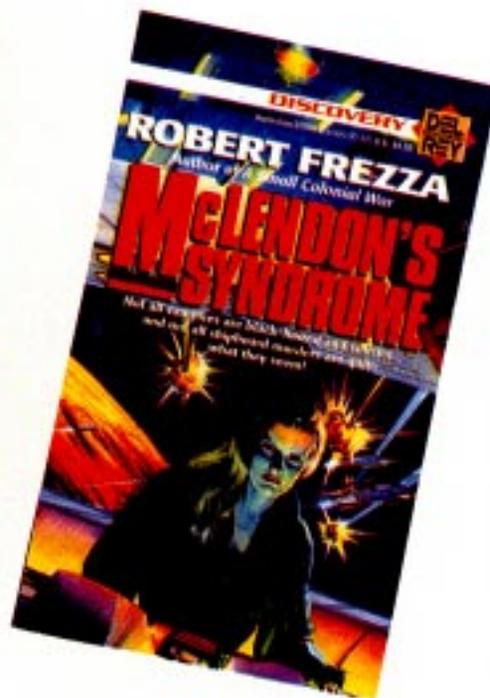
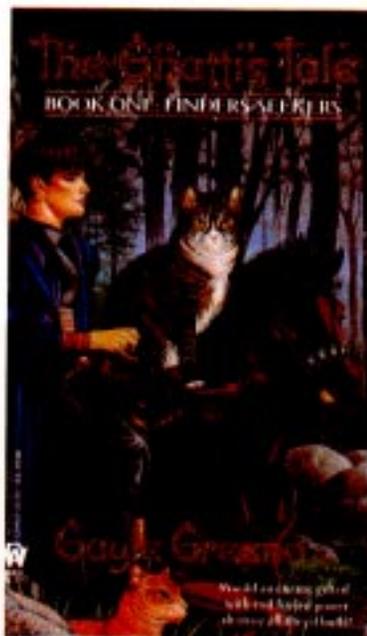
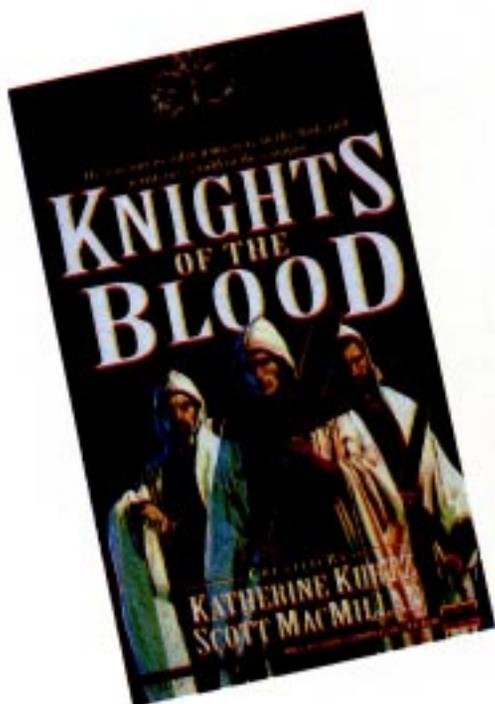
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THE ELEMENT OF FIRE

Martha Wells

Tor 0-312-85374-2 \$23.95

There's plenty of swordplay and costume drama in Martha Wells' first novel, but typecasting the book as pure swash-buckling adventure doesn't do it justice. Wells weaves a narrative that combines

stylish gallantry with pragmatic common sense to produce an action yarn of rare intelligence.

The milieu is the small country of Ile-Rien, where plotting against the throne seems to be one of the nobility's chief leisure activities. The stakes multiply, however, when two magicians enter the

game: Urbain Grandier, who has fled a neighboring state and now seeks revenge against enemies there, and Kade Carrion, illegitimate sister of Ile-Rien's king and heir on her mother's side to the unpredictable powers of the Fayre. Caught between a young, ineffectual king and his shrewd but aging mother, guard captain Thomas Boni-

face may be the only man who can keep matters from falling apart completely—if he can keep himself alive long enough.

Wells has a keen sense of period and atmosphere, giving Ile-Rien an air of bustling elegance that's effective without being self-conscious. She matches this with an equally sharp hand for intrigue, expertly portraying a political climate in which appearance matters little and loyalty is a vanishingly rare commodity. This is a world where neither expert bladecraft nor sheer magic can assure a victory, where utter ruthlessness and absolute honor cross swords with one another, and where romance can be as inconvenient as it is inevitable.

In the midst of the chaos, Thomas and Kade emerge as eminently likeable protagonists and excellent foils for each other. Thomas, though inclined to cynicism, is an excellent tactician and swordsman, while Kade's unpredictable nature is a match for magical talents derived from a combination of Fayre blood and training in mortal sorcery. They're an appealing pair, and Wells does an excellent job of making them heroic and human at the same time.

The result is a novel that's a lively swashbuckler perfectly integrated with a thoughtful, down-to-earth character study—not just a fantasy homage to Errol Flynn movies, but to high Shakespearean drama as well. *The Element of Fire* is a remarkable book from a remarkable new writer.

KNIGHTS OF THE BLOOD

Katherine Kurtz & Scott MacMillan
Roc 0-451-45256-9 \$4.99

There's no doubt that Katherine Kurtz can produce readable occult suspense; her solo novel *Lammias Night* and her more recent collaborative *Adept* series are ample proof. This new joint effort, unfortunately, seems to be an exception. *Knights of the Blood* is a book whose ingenious premise is badly undercut by writing and plotting that simply do not stand up under scrutiny.

The implicit conflict between the blood-thirsty nature of vampirism and the human capacity for goodness is a frequent theme in vampire fiction. Kurtz and husband Scott MacMillan propose one of the most direct examples of that confrontation yet—that a small order of Church-sworn knights became vampires during the Crusades and has been attempting to reconcile its vows and its state ever since. Unfortunately for the Order of the Sword, a chance encounter in World War II Germany gives a Nazi officer vampire status as well, and Wilhelm Kluge is under no such oaths as bind the order's members.

Strangely, though, the book's focus is not primarily on the order and its troubles. Instead, we follow the adventures of modern American policeman John Drummond, whose efforts to unravel a series of unsolved murders in 1990s Los Angeles lead him first to an elderly Catholic priest and

then to Vienna, where further developments culminate in a battle at the isolated castle in which the order has been hiding for some 700 years.

In itself that might not be a problem, given that this is clearly the first book in a planned series. But Drummond's adventures and the order's continued survival are the products of far too many coincidences and contradictions to be even remotely credible.

Drummond is always in just the right place at the right time to meet the one person who can provide an essential clue, give him a discount on travel or lodgings, or put him in mortal danger. The Order of the Sword makes a point of having remained hidden in its castle sanctuary ever since discovering its "curse," yet archvillain Wilhelm Kluge only decides to wipe them out when Drummond shows up, even though he either knows or could easily have learned the castle's location. And, though Drummond's final act in the book is clearly necessary as a setup for future volumes in the series, it's an extraordinarily rash and rushed decision on his part, given his earlier cautious and skeptical attitudes toward the supernatural.

It doesn't help that the prose itself—primarily MacMillan's work, according to the title-page credits—is no better than ordinary, conveying little sense of history in the opening sections and an undistinguished tourist-guide atmosphere elsewhere. A minor plot point concerning the Holy Grail gets especially weak handling, with a repeated bit of description appearing lazy rather than symbolic. For fans of Kurtz's other work, in which compelling ritual magic is a key element, this will be a major disappointment.

If future installments of the series show better attention to matters of detail and internal logic, *Knights of the Blood* may conceivably redeem itself from this inauspicious opening. Gamers justifiably intrigued by the concept should hope for that sort of improvement, but until it happens, it's difficult to recommend the book as anything more than a paper-weight.

McLENDON'S SYNDROME

Robert Frezza
Del Rey 0-345-37516-5 \$4.50

Whoever wrote the back-cover copy for *McLendon's Syndrome* deserves a bonus; it's crisp, accurate, and funny enough to get a laugh even from people who don't read science fiction. And it's a clever introduction to a novel that's not only a sharp straight-ahead space opera, but also a hilarious homage to a host of SF traditions and classic motion pictures.

The plot is pure thriller material: mysterious murders aboard a small spaceship, a desperate battle with vastly superior aliens, and an impending invasion by an even more dangerous enemy. Only the joint efforts of spacer Ken MacKay and his newfound colleague Catarina Lindquist

may be able to jolt the population of Schuyler's World into action and prevent the planet from being conquered.

But, while author Robert Frezza plays the adventure for all the suspense it's worth, his characters are another matter. Ken and Catarina cheerfully quote lines from Casablanca at each other (except when Catarina is making puns of epic atrociousness), and the choreography is worthy of the Marx Brothers at their zaniest. Add a clever nod to the most famous taverns in SF and fantasy, and a race of inscrutable alien rodents who resemble a cross between Ewoks and Hokas, and you have a yarn where the good-natured comedy never lets up long enough for the laughter to die away.

That's no small success, and it makes comparisons tricky. Though the puns and wordplay are as liberally applied as you'll find in, say, a Robert Asprin or Piers Anthony tale, Frezza's handling of them is less forced; rather than using them as a world-building device, he's made them a character tag, and the difference is significant. Though there's a lot of very funny character interaction, Frezza never lets his players forget that they're in a genuinely dangerous situation, with the result that the novel has a lively, compelling quality missing from a good deal of science-fiction comedy.

No, *McLendon's Syndrome* isn't high art by a long shot, but it's a unique, appealing adventure yarn that displays uncanny control of tone. For fans of outer-space RPGs, this a novel not to be missed. For everyone else, it's a roller-coaster of a story that's at least as entertaining as the movies and books that inspired it.

THE GHATTI'S TALE

(Book One: Finders-Seekers)

Gayle Greeno
DAW 0-88677-550-7 \$5.50

I used to play in a variant AD&D® game campaign that borrowed elements of its milieu from at least two different published fictional universes. It worked mostly because the DM took care not to mix the two worlds willy-nilly, thought out the consequences of their interaction, and added a number of her own touches in order to flesh out the setting. *The Ghatti's Tale* reminds me of that campaign, but author Gayle Greeno isn't as good at reconciling the contradictions inherent in building a story from off-the-shelf parts.

"Off the shelf" should be taken literally. The three major elements of the story—premise, setting, and scope—are all clearly derived from successful series by existing authors. While Greeno puts enough spin on each aspect of the novel to give it her own flavor, the combination of the three resembles a literary Frankenstein's monster.

The book's principal gimmick is the bond between the human Seekers and an alien race known as the ghatti—triple-sized sentient versions of Terran house cats with powers of mindspeech and an unerr-

ing ability to help their chosen bondmates detect truth. Readers of Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar novels will recognize the parallels at once, though Greeno's characters have no purely magical powers and her ghatti appear to be of purely natural rather than supernatural origin.

Though the spine labels it fantasy, the novel gives a science-fictional background to its setting: a human colony world cut off from Earth when unexplained forces destroy a buried network of geological monitors and cause the loss of most other technological artifacts. As the tale opens, Methuen has been on its own for just under two centuries—not so long as the world of C.S. Friedman's *Black Sun Rising*, but again the similarities are easily identified: an elusive native race, natural laws that resist Earthly shaping, and a society forced to adapt or perish.

The books nominal protagonists are the human Seeker Doyce and her ghatti, Khar'pern, but Greeno does not limit her story to chronicling the pair's adventures. Equal attention goes to the leaders of Doyce's order, to a subplot involving another guild's most closely guarded secret, and to a series of events that culminates in the revelation of a previously unknown power-bloc. The shifts of scene and viewpoint, large cast, and slowly emerging political intrigues recall the broad canvas painted in Melanie Rawn's Dragon Prince cycle. This echo is fainter than the others; Greeno's plot roams across a much smaller geographic area and her alliances are more political than familial.

Individually, each aspect of the book is well-enough conceived. It's when the ideas start to interact that the novel begins to fall apart. For instance, the ghatti are perfectly reasonable fantasy creatures, but Greeno strongly implies that the species has come into existence only with the arrival of humans (and their cats) on Methuen. Even granting the assumption that house cats and ghatti-ancestors could have crossbred, 187 years isn't nearly enough time for that sort of evolution to occur.

The culture is also oddly low-tech given its origins as a scientific expedition. No one has bothered to reinvent firearms or tried to build an electrical plant, yet swordcraft seems to be high art, stone buildings are positively elegant, and written records are curiously sparse.

Tight character work might have compensated for the sloppy worldbuilding, but again Greeno's choices work against her. The meandering plot doesn't give individual characters a chance to imprint on the reader, and too much of the character development is portrayed in the context of a world that doesn't make a great deal of sense on close examination. Doyce and Khar'pern are pawns, not protagonists, and no one else gets enough screen time to matter.

The lesson *The Ghatti's Tale* teaches is not that we shouldn't borrow ideas. It's that fitting ideas together is as important a

part of storytelling as the ideas themselves, and it's a lesson Gayle Greeno needs to learn if future books in the series are to improve over this one.

ON BASILISK STATION

David Weber

Baen 0-671-72163-1 \$4.99

THE HONOR OF THE QUEEN

David Weber

Baen 0-671-72172-0 \$4.99

David Weber's publishers have launched this series on the fast track, releasing Honor Harrington's first two full-length novels only two months apart. It's justified enthusiasm, though, for a pair of crisp adventure yarns notable for their well-choreographed space battles and strategic confrontations.

Weber is working in the tradition and style of classic British naval fiction, following in the footsteps of C.S. Forester and Patrick O'Brian. Instead of the high seas, though, Weber's landscape is outer space, more specifically the region of space surrounding the Star Kingdom of Manticore. Manticore has the good fortune to be situated at the junction of several critical interstellar trade routes. While it's a fairly affluent political entity, it's also the target of considerable envy in certain quarters. Its most notable adversary is the so-called Republic of Haven, which is looking for excuses to annex Manticore without having to resort to outright war.

Enter Honor Harrington, a young officer in the Manticoran Navy who has a full share of the trait she's named for. As *On Basilisk Station* opens, she's just received her first independent command—at the same time that the ship she's been given is being stripped of most of its useful weaponry as the result of a political decision made at higher levels. The refit is even more disastrous than it initially appears, because Honor's first mission sends her, with no backup whatsoever, to an isolated star system where smuggling runs rampant and Havenite agents are secretly attempting to orchestrate a coup.

Weber sets all this up in a brisk yet friendly style that aptly characterizes its characters' military-trained instincts, yet doesn't prize formality over common sense. Honor immediately captures readers' interest, and her matter-of-fact determination makes her an appealing protagonist, even with the odds stacked ominously against her.

At the same time, Weber doesn't sanitize the hazards and consequences once Honor and H.M.S. *Fearless* are forced into battle. People die, and some of them are characters we've met and liked. Yet the tone isn't grim, either, and the combat sequences are described with a sophisticated precision that's absolutely convincing without lapsing into lecture-mode. Fans of ship-to-ship battle games should find the narrative irresistible, while even those who aren't so minded will discover that Weber's prose

is remarkably accessible.

There's even a streak of mischievous humor, though that's more in evidence in *The Honor of the Queen*, in which Honor and her ship are dispatched to support a diplomatic mission to a small but strategically important world directly between Manticoran and Havenite space. The catch is that Grayson's citizenry comes from extremely conservative religious stock, and women on Grayson have very few legal rights. Honor's status as commander of the military task force is thus an affront to civilized Graysonian tradition, and only a plot by Grayson's nearest (and even more extremist) neighbors is enough to jolt the Graysonians into an appreciation of just what Honor can do.

There is, in short, a lot to like about the Honor Harrington books. As long as Weber can keep from promoting her past field commands entirely, her adventures are material that fans of spacefaring strategy will watch for with pleasure.

Recurring roles

The Department of Continuing Series is crowded this month, and is topped off by Marion Zimmer Bradley's tenth *Sword and Sorceress* anthology (DAW, \$4.99). This one has more and shorter tales than usual, but the quality remains high, and there's an unusual note: Diana Paxson's story is billed as the last in her ongoing series about the female warrior Shanna. There's also a high complement of first sales, including an especially effective dark tale from Francesca Myman.

Next comes *The Templar Treasure* (Ace, \$4.99), the third book in the collaborative series of occult suspense novels from Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris. Though several ongoing plot threads are left mostly hanging, and there's something of a by-the-numbers quality to the artifact hunt which takes up most of the plot, the authors' command of Scottish history is commendable and the reappearance of a major figure from Kurtz's *Lannias Night* is most welcome.

Another stronger-than-average entry in a normally undistinguished series is *The Whistling Wraith* (Bantam, \$4.99), Will Murray's latest Doc Savage novel under the Kenneth Robeson byline. An intricately convoluted plot and a wily and exotic villain who can literally walk through walls lift this adventure above Murray's first few efforts.

Next come two solid prequels: Ann Logston's *Greendaughter* (Ace, \$4.50), and Ellen Guon's *Bedlam Boyz* (Baen, \$4.99). Logston takes readers of her Shadow novels back to the time before the Compact between humans and elves with a story about the founding of Allamere, the slow and reluctant building of trust between the races, and the barbarian invasion that lays the foundations for that relationship. The protagonist has been a minor figure in the earlier books, which allows Logston to drive home the unique

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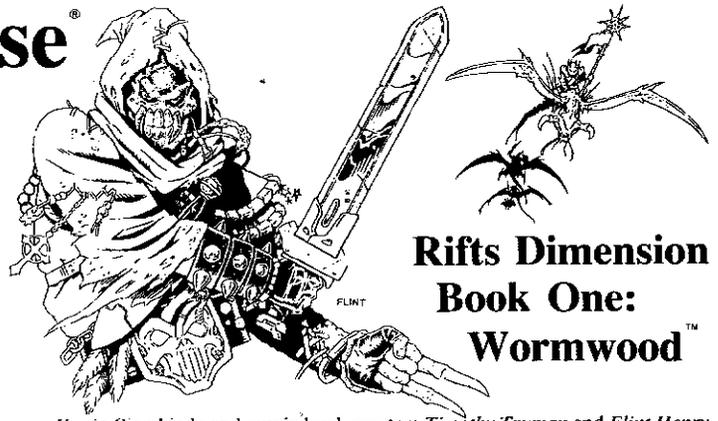
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perspective afforded by centuries-long elven lifespans. It's a more bittersweet book than Logston's earlier work, and a welcome sign that the author's already considerable talents are improving with practice.

Guon's book, her first solo novel, is also an origin story, describing the background of two secondary characters from her two urban-faerie collaborations with Mercedes Lackey. Bedlam Boyz follows Kayla on and off the streets of greater Los Angeles as she tries to cope with her newfound powers of healing, the rival gangs for whom those powers represent an irresistible asset, the assorted magical beings who find her equally tempting, and atypical psychologist Elizabeth Winters' determination to teach her how to control her abilities. Guon steers a middle ground between "West Side Story" romanticism and the messy, grim realities of L.A. street life, and produces a solid coming-of-age tale in the process.

Elizabeth Moon's newest novel finds her turning from medieval fantasy to military SF, if a rather genteel grade of the latter. *Hunting Party* (Baen \$4.99) takes retired naval officer Heris Sarrano from the front lines to the bridge of a wealthy noblewoman's private spaceliner, then to a vacation-world where she joins her employer in a resurrected form of the English fox hunt. However, someone on the

planet is hunting human game, and an old enemy of Serrano's is out to destroy her once and for all. It's a good yarn of its kind, though altogether lighter fare than David Weber's Honor Harrington novels.

Split Heirs (Tor, \$18.95) is an entirely different brand of story. The joint effort of Lawrence Watt-Evans and Esther Friesner, this is a wild, weird, and altogether silly adventure featuring, as the jacket says, "flashing swords, high magic, and hopeless dynastic confusion." There's an ample supply of the inspired, over-the-top comedy that's a Friesner hallmark, and Watt-Evans fans will recognize his ability to create amusing yet logical plot complications from thin air. The results are seamless and screamingly funny, especially the machinations of the pseudo-outlaw known as the Black Weasel.

Watt-Evans also has a new solo novel out, but *The Spell of the Black Dagger* (Del Rey, \$4.99) is an arcane mystery rather than a comic tale. Set in the author's Ethshar universe, it focuses on a young thief who makes a brief and unexpectedly notable side trip into wizardry, creating a dagger with powers unusual enough to confound a dozen different sorts of magicians and put her on the very throne of Ethshar of the Sands. Watt-Evans is always intriguing when he's playing with theories of magic, and this book is no exception.

Elsewhere on the collaborative front, *If I*

Pay Thee Not in Gold (Baen, \$20.00) presents an unusual pairing. The premise and polish come from Piers Anthony, with Mercedes Lackey providing the meat of the story. The characters show Lackey's skill at creating credible relationships, in this case including one of the most exotic romantic triangles you've ever seen in a fantasy novel, but the effect is somewhat undercut by a heavy-handedness in the narration that's characteristic of Anthony's style. Behind the occasionally thick prose, though, is a solid story featuring plenty of distinctive magic and a quest through lands that occasionally become very strange indeed.

Another perspective on Anthony, and one that merits special mention, can be found in *Letters to Jenny* (Tor, \$18.95). Fans will recall that Jenny Elf, a character in several recent Xanth novels, was inspired by a severely injured young girl whose mother wrote Anthony in hopes that such a gesture might help her daughter's recovery. This book collects that letter and a year's worth of Anthony's weekly correspondence with Jenny (who has indeed made remarkable gains) into a volume that combines the poignancy of Jenny's case with Anthony's own often acerbic view of the world. It's a one-of-a-kind volume that bridges the worlds of fantasy and reality, and one that will linger in readers' memories for a long time. Ω

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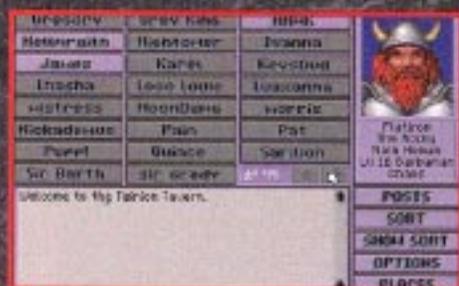
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Nathaniel Hawthorne

Hi! I'm Sandy Petersen. I've been a computer game designer for the last five years. For eight years before that, I was employed designing role-playing games and supplements, and still retain a keen interest in role-playing games (i.e., I still play them). [Editors' Note: Sandy designed, among other things, one of our all-time favorite games, Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game.] It's clear to me that computer games will never replace role-playing games for us aficionados. A role-playing session is really a night of social interaction with your friends. Most of us have soda and chips out on the table, and spend nearly as much time telling jokes and making side comments as playing. In comparison, a computer is a heartless, cold thing, scarcely a replacement for the *joi de vivre* of a good role-playing evening.

However, computer games have their place. We can't always get a band of friends together at a moment's notice to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, but the computer is always available to be your friend. Its one great advantage is its convenience.

Computer games (and Nintendo and Sega cartridges) are significantly more expensive than paper games. Most conventional games cost less than \$30. Computer games run up to \$80 or more. Because of the significant nature of this investment, I believe that the most important task a reviewer can accomplish is to give his readers the information they need to decide whether or not to invest in a particular game.

Reviews

Wolfenstein 3-D

ID Software Inc.
distributed by Apogee Software
Creative Director: Tom Hall
Programming: John Carmack and John Romero
Art: Adrian Carmack and Kevin Cloud

"I have been too lenient."

Adolf Hitler

This is an unusual type of game: It is unlikely to be for sale in any store near you, yet it is readily available. *Wolfenstein* is shareware. The initial installment of *Wolfenstein* can be obtained from bulletin boards or from professional shareware distributors either for free or for a nominal fee. You can also order it directly from Apogee. *Wolfenstein* boasts six different



EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1993 by Sandy Petersen



Wolfenstein 3-D (ID Software)

adventures, each with nine levels. You can get only the first adventure for free. To get further adventures, you must pay Apogee. You can order direct from Apogee by phoning (800) 426-3123, or writing it at P.O. Box 476389, Garland TX 75047.

The game runs only on IBM-compatibles, and requires VGA graphics. It supports a wide variety of sound boards, and the

game benefits greatly from enhanced sound. In my opinion, you'll want at least a 386-16 MHz machine to run *Wolfenstein*.

Many years ago, there was a simple little game called *Castle Wolfenstein*, designed by a fine game designer named Silas Warner. This game put you inside a Nazi-controlled castle from whence you had to shoot your way out. *Wolfenstein's* concept is the same as the earlier game, but it has evolved almost beyond recognition.

Wolfenstein gives you a prisoner's-eye-view of the castle, with spectacular vistas of brick, stone, or wooden walls, overhead lights, dangling cages holding skeletons, beds, oil drums, stoves, even toilets. The lantern-jawed Nazis look great, too, sneering viciously as they fire at you. The walls are festooned with Nazi regalia, banners,

Computer games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	Superb

and posters. Bones and pools of blood litter the floors.

You, the prisoner, must race down the halls, opening doors, gunning down Nazis, and finding treasures. Each of the six games has nine levels. In each game, your task on the first eight levels of the castle is to find the elevator leading to the next level up. On the ninth level, you must confront and kill the head bad guy, after which you get a congratulatory screen and a plug to purchase the next installment.

Puzzles are present, but *Wolfenstein* is primarily an action game—shoot the guards, steal the treasure, go to the next level. The game has four difficulty levels. The easiest (titled “Can I play, Daddy?”) is very simple indeed, and I recommend a new player to jump right into the game at this level. When you decide that your hero is now too tough for these wimp Nazis, restart the game at the second difficulty level. You’ll be in for a shock. The Nazis improve substantially with each level. The toughest level (“Bring ‘em on!”) is so hard that I have not yet finished all nine levels of any game using it. Sigh.

The game is very user-friendly. Saving and reloading the game is extremely easy, which is good, because it is quite easy to die in this game. If you do die, you simply restart the current level. You’ll only have eight bullets and a pistol (sometimes this result is bad enough that you’ll reload a saved game anyway). You can change your controls right in the middle of a game, or stop to read the rules. *Wolfenstein* is state-of-the-art with regard to the way it treats the player. If every game was as player-benign, we would all be happier people.

There is nothing else quite like *Wolfenstein*. While a few other games boast both complex 3-D and scaled sprites (such as *Ultima Underground*), *Wolfenstein*'s greatest asset is its speed—you can careen down the fortress halls at an astonishing rate for 3-D, racing past highly detailed posters of der Führer while Nazi guards shout at you.

Wolfenstein is a fun, fairly mindless romp through a huge maze. It is bloodily violent (it's been banned in Germany!), and is not a good game for preteens. The game rates itself PC-13, for “Profound Carnage.” When you shoot a Nazi, he jerks back, then collapses while blood spurts. As your own character takes damage, his face starts getting bloodier and more bruised, until he looks like he's gone 10 rounds with George Frazier. In some games, at the moment you finally defeat the highest-ranking villain, something called “DeathCam” kicks in, and repeats the gruesome scene for your enjoyment.

As you progress through the castle, you collect ammunition and can improve your weaponry. You start out with a pistol, but you can get a submachinegun or even a minigun. If you run out of ammunition, you are relegated to a mere knife. Though the minigun wreaks devastation among the Nazis, I found myself switching to the sub-



Wolfenstein 3-D (ID Software)

machinegun or even the pistol when low on ammunition, because the minigun ate up the bullets so darn fast. The damage you do to the Nazis depends not only on what weapon you use, but it also appears to depend on how accurately you place your shot and what direction the guard is facing when you fire. On the rare occasions you pick off a guard from a great distance, you feel quite proud of yourself. You can lay ambushes for the Nazis, and set traps of your own. When the Nazis bunch up to come through a doorway, you can often kill a lot of them in a very short time. However, sometimes one of them doesn't show himself, but lurks by the side of the door, so when you stride through, he'll blast you from short range. I've been killed a number of times by this tactic.

The guards aren't complete idiots. Many times I've seen them run from my fire, trying to work their way around me and come up from behind. On the other hand, I've occasionally opened a door to see a guard standing at attention, his back to me. I love it when this happens. It may not be good or clean, but it sure is fun.

The damage done by the Nazis' weapons depends upon range. The SS gunners, who carry submachineguns of their own, can kill you in a matter of seconds, even at a goodly distance, and these guys must be taken out as soon as they appear. There are no traps or other devices that can harm you—it's all armed guards or guard dogs. However, often the guards themselves act as a sort of trap, hiding in little nooks and crannies and popping out at you when your back is turned.

There are secret chambers and rooms on every level that I've checked for them. To open a secret door, you must walk up to a wall and press on it. Unlike most similar role-playing games, *Wolfenstein* provides you with no visual cue (such as a loose brick) telling you that a secret chamber hides there. Sometimes a particularly ostentatious bit of Nazi regalia hides a

secret door, but not always. Of course, you can frequently figure that a room must hide a secret entrance. If a room appears to hold little if any treasure, but is heavily guarded, start checking. Also check if a corridor is a dead end.

In the later adventures, especially the last three, the action gets a little repetitive. I still enjoyed them, but not nearly as much as when I started. For one thing, some of the levels were just plain hard, with no compensating amusement factor.

If you like a fun game with lots of action, I unreservedly recommend *Wolfenstein 3-D*. I do mention one important caveat—if you are offended by the sight of Nazi regalia (even if your own goal is to kill the Nazis), or if wholesale slaughter disturbs you, this game is *not* for you.

Game tips

1. If you open a door, but see no guards behind it, try stepping through the door and then immediately backing through it. Any guards that saw you will come to the door and you can lie in wait for them and plug them as they come through.

2. If you're very low on ammo, wait until you see a guard with his back turned, or one you can get very close to. Then draw your knife and attack as fast as you can. He won't be able to shoot you if you keep attacking him, and you'll be able to kill him without using any ammo. This is a little tricky, so save the game before you try it. Also, don't try this on one of the zombies in game two. At least, I've never succeeded.

3. If your damage points are at 5% or less, you can regain a single point by walking over one of those near-ubiquitous pools of blood. If you have a sound card, you'll hear a slurping noise as you do this. Ech!

4. The dogs only take one bullet each before dying, so don't waste your shots on them as they dodge back and forth on their way to attack you. Wait until they're very close, then just as they leap up to bite



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you, shoot once per dog. You should be able to kill them without expending too much ammo.

Commander Keen

ID Software Inc.

distributed by Apogee Software

Creative Director: Tom Hall

Programming: John Carmack, John Romero, and Jason Blochowiak

Art: Adrian Carmack

Commander Keen, like *Wolfenstein 3-D*, is shareware. Also like *Wolfenstein*, you can get the first bit of it for free, but then you must pay for subsequent installations.

This game is for IBM-compatibles only. It supports most sound boards, and can be used by CGA, EGA, or VGA machines.

Not to mince words, *Commander Keen* is an action game with hilarious graphics. You play the part of Keen himself, a yellow-helmeted tyke in tennis shoes. You pack a zap-gun and a pogo stick. *Commander Keen* comes in several different versions. The first series of three adventures, titled "Invasion of the Vorticons" is the most primitive, but certainly amusing enough. Only the first adventure in "Invasion" is available for free. The second Keen game, "Goodbye, Galaxy," contains two segments, the first of which is free. Keen's third exploit, "Aliens Ate My Babysitter" is available only from Apogee. It only has a single episode, but is quite extensive.

When Nintendo first made its appearance, arcade games for home computers took a blow from which they have never really recovered. Today, IBM-arcade games are actually fairly rare. While I approve of this general trend, since I like strategy and role-playing games plenty, I can't deny that every so often, I enjoy a really good arcade adventure.

In all the *Keen* games, you wander across an alien landscape until you reach a city, sinister pit, or other obstacle, when you drop into a sideways-scrolling Mario-Brothers-like adventure. Each city site has its own unique background graphics and hidden dangers, and secret traps and treasures to discover. In this, the game owes a lot to Nintendo's Mario Brothers games, which pioneered this style of game.

Commander Keen is one of the best games of its type that I've played. It's not mindlessly hard, like so many similar games, and brains are necessary for victory. The graphic art is hilarious. The goofy-looking monsters include insane mushrooms with tongues hanging out of the side of their mouths, huge buck-toothed fish, and bug-eyed-monsters with comically gnashing teeth. I frequently blast perfectly innocuous aliens with my stun-gun just to see the goofy look on the sprite as it sits there immobilized and unconscious, cartoon stars circling around its head.

In a number of ways, *Commander Keen* stands above its rivals. You can save your game at any point (in the earlier version, however, you can save only if you're out-

side a level.) When you are standing some where, you can look up or down to see what you're about to jump into. If you barely miss a ledge, you don't plummet into the depths—instead, Keen grabs hold of the edge, hanging on by his fingertips, until you can pull him up and over.

I think you'll like *Commander Keen*. If you'd like to try a top-notch arcade game that doesn't require the finger dexterity of a riverboat gambler, but does require a bit of deductive reasoning and experimentation, this is certainly the game for you.

Game tips

1. If you stand on a ledge and fire at one of the big two-eyed monsters, you can hit and kill it without its being able to hurt you at all (from "Invasion of the Vorticons").
2. Let the giant ice cannon hit you. It doesn't kill you (unless you fall into the water), and the graphic is pretty amusing ("Invasion").
3. The dopefish has trouble eating you if you lie on a shelf. Just after he tries to unsuccessfully gulp you down, make a break for it. He will continue to go through the whole "gulp" animation, and you can escape with relative ease (from "Goodbye, Galaxy").

Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure

**

Apogee Software Productions

Programming and Level Design: Todd J.

Replegle

Graphic Art: Stephen A. Hornback

Producer: Scott Miller

In keeping with this month's theme, *Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure* is shareware also. As with most shareware, only the first of three related games is available for free. The rest you have to pay for.

Cosmo is for IBM compatibles and supports EGA. I do not know if it also supports CGA. You play the part of a suction-footed alien lizard who must wander across a highly animated sideways-scrolling landscape, eating fruit and stars, and bouncing on the heads of squiggly alien monsters. It is a low-pressure game, but some dexterity is required.

Cosmo has fine graphics, with eye-plants that follow your every move, monsters that not only parade back and forth but take breaks to slaver and threaten you, the viewer. Some of the art and the monsters are a little reminiscent of the animated cartoon *Yellow Submarine*.

Unfortunately, *Cosmo* is a failure. The graphics are so rich and intricate that they actually interfere with your ability to play the game. The main character is rather slow-moving, which is always a handicap in an arcade game, and the level design encourages a lot of backtracking over ground you've already covered. In addition, the levels are very repetitious, not in terms of art, which remains fairly outstanding. You simply progress from level to level, scrolling along, bouncing on the tops of monsters, eating fruit, and collect-



Commander Keen (ID Software)

ing the rather ineffective bombs that you can use to collect bonuses and occasionally kill monsters.

Cosmo is okay, but it's no masterpiece. I found myself tiring of this game long before reaching the end. If you like arcade games a lot, you'll probably like *Cosmo*. Fortunately, as shareware, you can get the first installment free, so there's no risk in checking it out.

Game tip

Whenever you are on top of a tree, stop and look up, or jump up. Often, objects "hidden" above the screen's top will then fall down to you. Also, if you collect enough stars, on most levels you'll get a special bonus screen good for lots of points.

Waxworks

Accolade

Designers: Mike Woodroffe, Alan Bridgeman, and Simon Woodroffe

Producers: Mark Wallace and Todd Thorson

Graphics: Paul Drummond, Kevin Preston, Maria Drummond, and Jeff Wall

Waxworks is a role-playing game for the IBM. You'll need VGA graphics, a mouse, and at least a 386-16 MHz machine to enjoy this baby. It is firmly set in the horror genre. Accolade has produced two previous horror role-playing games with vaguely similar interfaces: *Elvira*, and *Elvira II*. If you purchase and like *Waxworks*, you'll probably want to seek out its predecessors. Fans of the earlier games will probably enjoy *Waxworks*, too.

In *Waxworks*, you must seek out and destroy the forces of evil in four different quests. The game is actually four games in one, as you must complete each of the quests, and once inside a quest, you can't easily jump out to another. The quests include an Egyptian pyramid, a haunted mineshaft, Victorian England, and a zombie-infested graveyard.

The Egyptian pyramid is the most similar



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to a conventional "dungeon crawl" of all the adventures. It teems with traps, foes, and bare stone walls. Golden treasures abound, but you get no points for accumulating loot in this game—your job is to survive, not acquire junk. Walk cautiously in this one, and know what you are getting into.

The haunted mineshaft is infested with fungus-riddled zombie-like beings, hideous plants, and other gross, infectious monsters. There are fewer treasures than in the Egyptian level, but it, too, has much of the look of a conventional dungeon expedition. A monster awaits you early on, so be prepared to fight. As in the Egyptian level, you should be cautious.

In Victorian England, you are stuck in the narrow London slums plagued by Jack the Ripper. You are mistaken for the Ripper, and if you are nabbed by the cops, a quick trip to the hangman is in store for you. Stay on your toes. If you stick around too long, you're sure to be captured, so this adventure opens with a high-speed chase, during which you're likely to get lost. You'll have to save and reload frequently as you try to map the maze of the London streets.

The graveyard is the most confusing environment. The pyramid and mineshaft at least look familiar. In London, while there is no ceiling, there are confining alley walls. But in the graveyard, the obstacles blocking you are rows of tombstones. This feels strange (why can't you just squeeze between two adjacent monuments?) and it is very hard to see where you are going. It may look open up ahead, but before you go three steps, you run smack dab into a gravestone and before you can figure out which direction to go next, you're assaulted by a zombie. I rate the graveyard as the most difficult quest of the four by far.

The game is similar in style to *Dungeonmaster* and *Eye of the Beholder*, using bit-mapped graphics and a player's eye-view of the maze. You must solve puzzles, battle deadly monsters, and figure out how to progress through the various mazes. Each area teems with deadly traps, and you'll frequently have to reload from a saved game because you didn't see the wire in the sunlight, or some similarly trivial reason.

Skim the manual before playing the game, and start out in the Egyptian level—it was slightly easier than the other quests (at least for me). Be very cautious, and each time you defeat a monster, save the game! Also, if you kill a monster but the result was a Pyrrhic victory in which your own injuries were unacceptably great, reboot and try the fight over. The game's one big drawback is its deadliness. You are killed so often and so easily that it becomes exceedingly frustrating after a while.

Another failing is the dire fact that when you obtain too many objects, the first objects acquired seem to vanish into nowhere, without warning or explanation. Keep a close eye on how much stuff you're carrying, and drop the excess periodically.



Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure (Apogee Software)

Dropped items don't evaporate, unlike some games, so you can always go back and get a discarded medallion if it later proves essential.

Waxworks believes in the principle that "travel broadens." Each time you step onto a new square, you gain experience, and enough such points raise your character's level, which increases your hit points. Though you can occasionally heal some of your wounds, in general the only way to restore lost hit points is by increasing your level. Walk down every corridor you see, because you need all the hit points you can get. Killing monsters and solving traps doesn't seem to give you much experience.

The puzzles are amusing, but often extremely difficult. They range from solving mathematical problems to playing a flute to shatter a pane of glass. Often, Uncle Boris can help. You have a magic crystal that you can use to contact your Uncle Boris, at the cost of losing magic power.

Combat in *Waxworks* is both gruesome and nerve-wracking. Your weapon appears on-screen, and you aim the mouse at the part of the enemy's body you wish to whack. By clicking the mouse, you cause your dagger, fist, etc., to strike the opponent, and then you randomly cause damage or not. In the meantime, the monster is striking back at you. When he hits you, blood briefly splatters across the screen. When you hit him, a nasty wound opens on his body. It is possible to knock a zombie's head clean off (this doesn't stop the zombie's attacks, but it sure feels good). Since combat is real-time, you'll be exercising your index finger quite a bit, pointing and clicking frantically, and doubtless groaning when you take a wound.

When you are killed (which happens all too often), your corpse appears on the screen with a wide variety of hideous ends, ranging from sword cuts to animal bites to fungus growths. The game may be objectionable to some people because of its extremely graphic violence. If you're

squeamish at all, give this game a miss. On the other hand, if you're the kind of person that likes flesh-crunching zombie movies, you'll probably enjoy the graphics. Accolade does recognize the dire nature of *Waxworks'* art, as there is a Parental Warning sticker on the box. Good idea, and kudos to Accolade for providing this warning.

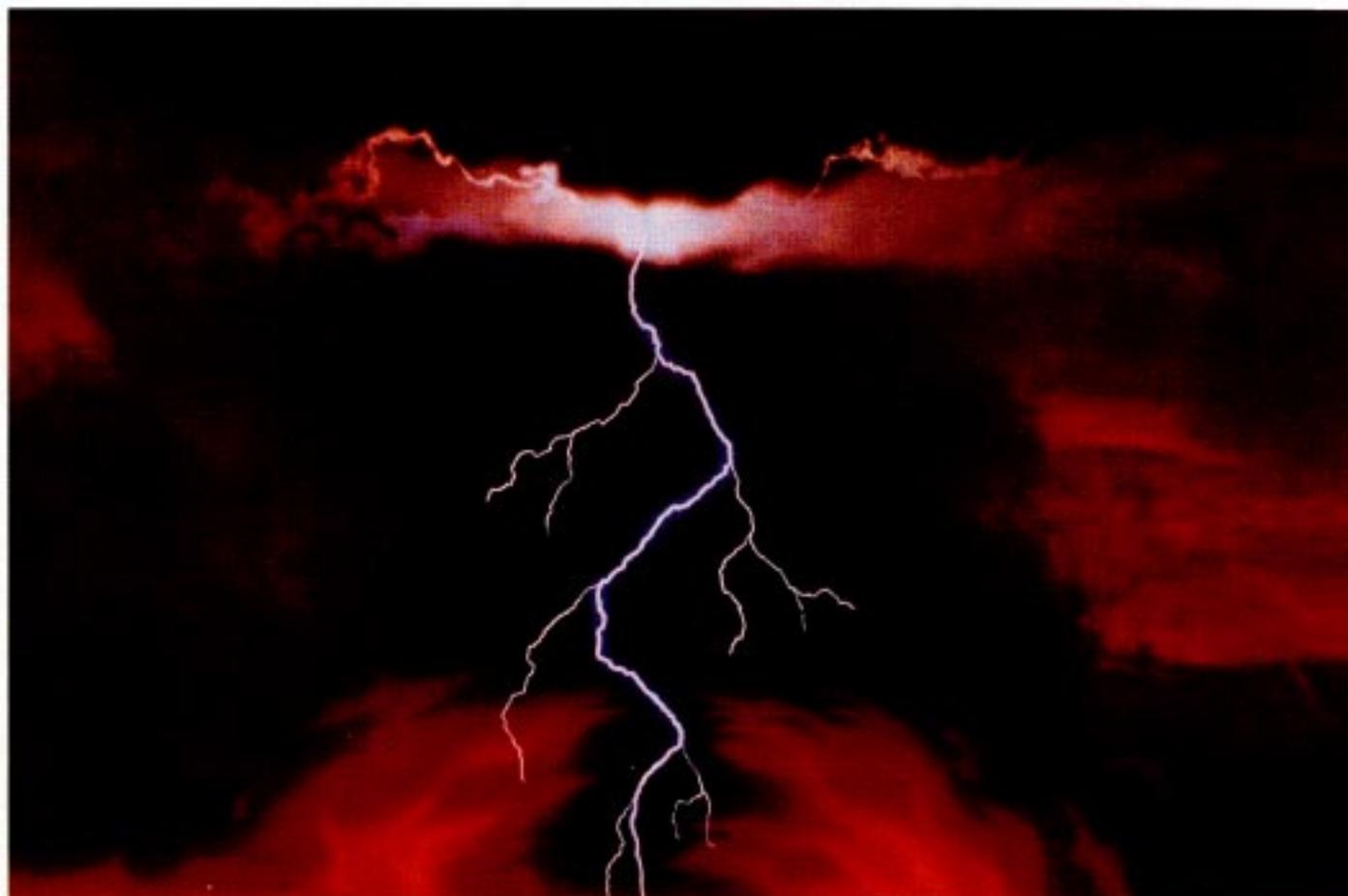
I welcome *Waxworks* not only because of its own merits, but because there aren't too many good horror games out there. Until very recently, computer games have not been up to recreating this genre. Sound and graphic capability simply didn't have the complexity needed. But now computers have advanced quite a bit, and horror games are beginning to appear. Naturally, I applaud this trend. The F-15 Strike Eagle or *Ultima* of the horror genre has yet to appear, but it's only a matter of time.

Game tips

1. When you have a question for Uncle Boris, save the game first, then contact him, then reload the saved game. In this way, you won't have to waste your magic power to find out essential information. This won't work in every case, however. For instance, the game won't let you use paper to heal yourself unless Boris has told you how to do it first.

2. Unlike many dungeon-crawl games, the time-honored technique of hugging the right-hand (or left-hand) wall as you pass through a maze won't always help you here.

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Fantasy at its finest—on your computer, from SSI

JOIN THE ELECTRONIC WARRIORS!

by James M. Ward

TSR has had a great relationship with Strategic Simulations, Inc. since 1988. For those of you who don't know, SSI makes computer games, particularly AD&D® and D&D® computer adventures for TSR. Each of SSI's AD&D games is commonly at the top of the sales charts upon its release.

Although a computer game will never take the place of a good Dungeon Master, the games SSI make do have elements that even a good DM can't reproduce easily. Full-color images backed by sound effects can equal and sometimes even surpass a good thousand-word description from a DM. I still remember playtesting one of the SSI DRAGONLANCE® games. I'd battled through the usual undead and evil warriors to come to the top of a castle spire. Suddenly, on the screen flashed the image of a huge black dragon, with the appropriate roar. I was actually filled with fear for my character. My heart raced, my palms broke into a sweat, and it was several moments before I realized I wasn't under an actual threat. That's the kind of role-playing that seldom happens in a regular gaming session, but it's great when it does.

On the past few pages is a batch of SSI game presentations. You'll see a wide range of product, all of the same high quality that you'd expect from any TSR paper product. The first of SSI's efforts in our area started with the "gold box" games. These emphasized combat and tactics; though they weren't long on role-playing, they were great fun and an interesting challenge.

Then came the Eye series, a visual and auditory delight from beginning to end. In playtesting *Eye of the Beholder I*, I can remember the chill that went up my spine when I heard the sound of a giant spider's claws in the stone corridor ahead of me. Each one of the Eye-series games got better and prettier until the release last spring of *Eye of the Beholder III: Assault on Myth Drannor*, a truly amazing effort. Everything in this game is fun, from putting together four tough high-level characters to adventuring in forests and dungeons to meet the enemies of law and order. The game was so expansive I was hard pressed to finish it even with the clue book in my hand. The "Eye III" experience is worth buying an IBM just to play it. Another nice feature to the Eye series is its greater use of role-playing elements. Your decisions count, and destroying the monster isn't always the best choice.

But, in the computer game business, it doesn't do to stand still. SSI proves again and again that it knows AD&D and the computer-game business. *Stronghold*,

Fantasy Empires, and the new DARK SUN™ game, *Shattered Lands*, are taking the computer-game industry by storm.

In *Stronghold*, you control elves, dwarves, thieves, clerics, and all the other D&D character classes in a struggle to raise your own fantasy fortress to power in a world filled with awesome monsters. The direction your characters take is completely up to you. You can concentrate on training and raise your characters up to high levels of experience, you can concentrate on building and create huge walled cities filled with busy characters, or you can concentrate on growth and let your massive populations sweep over the countryside. The game is a visual treat as your buildings go up and your Stronghold city develops. But while you are growing, your enemies are growing, too. Vampires, wights, evil clerics, evil thieves, red dragons, and more are populating the world in ever-larger numbers. Although hiding and growing strong is a sound tactic, the monsters grow stronger if left alone, too.

While playtesting the last version of the game, I discovered to my horror that a new and interesting game feature had been added. In the old versions of the game, you saw the monsters grow around their own strongholds, but it was easy to simply attack their main keep while the monsters around it did nothing. Imagine my surprise when I destroyed the main keep of some monsters with most of my army—then the surrounding monsters left and destroyed my fortress in retribution! In shock to this day, I am vainly trying to win at the toughest levels, all the while calling SSI for tips and battle advice (sigh).

Fantasy Empires is equally impressive in a very different way. This is the first computer game with an electronic DM who helps you in your quest to rule the world. The designers actually copied all the maps of the D&D Known World into this game. You play one of the political factions described in the old D&D Gazetteers. Your armies march through land after land, bringing your banner and control to all the different races of the world. You'll face amazing foes and must often personally lead your troops to victory.

Through it all, you'll be amazed by the art and sound of the *Fantasy Empires* game. It's a delight on two levels because the game is really two very good games in one package. On one hand, there are the grand tactics and strategy involved in moving vast armies across the world. This game would have been great all by itself, but there's also a subsystem that allows you to fight battles on an individual level. Your heroes and their troops match up

against the computer-controlled heroes and their troops in grand melees. You can let the computer decide these battles, but often a great deal hangs in the balance. You really want to be in charge of these struggles for best results.

Then there is the blockbuster game of the year: SSI presents the DARK SUN game, *The Shattered Lands*. Not content to do more of what was done before, the R&D department of SSI put together an entirely new look and feel to the DARK SUN game. The color and pageantry of the DARK SUN world comes alive in the art, sound, and play of this game. SSI has spared no expense to create new ways to play the AD&D game on the computer. Spell icons and psionic icons are richly detailed, and allow the gamer to instantly know just what spell effect or mental discipline to use in any given situation. Those of you who have enjoyed the DARK SUN setting will have great fun taking your half-giants and thri-kreen through the deserts looking for a bit of steel or water. The music, sound effects, and visuals of this game far surpass all other efforts to date from SSI. This game is sure to be a classic for all computer gamers.

What else can you expect from SSI? There will be a SEGA and SNES game out for the Christmas season. RAVENLOFT™ and AL-QADIM™ story lines have been approved and are in production. Lots more FORGOTTEN REALMS® games are coming out at regular intervals. We can expect more DARK SUN games using the new AD&D playing style SSI has invented for that setting; if it's really as popular as it appears to be, the new system will be used in all of TSR's popular trademarked games.

And, before long, you will see a new arcade game hit the fun places around the nation. It's set in the D&D world and is the largest memory- and art-intensive game ever designed for use in arcade machines. Using state-of-the-art sound, the play of the game is fantastic. When I reviewed the story line and look of the game, I itched to play it.

Finally, there is a neat game coming up with a working title of *AD&D Hack*. It's just what the name implies. Imagine creating AD&D game characters of any style you desire and exploring randomly generated dungeons filled with danger, adventure, and glory. If you've ever wanted to beat down the doors, slay the monsters, and revel in piles of treasure, the *Hack* game is for you.

Get ready—we've got the games for you!

Ω

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 the complete address of a contributor if the writer requests it.

I am writing to thank you for publicizing the survey in your July 1992 issue. We nearly doubled the number of inquiries to the survey of women gamers. If there are any women out there who still haven't responded, the survey address is: White Rose Publishing, P.O. Box 933, Amherst MA 01004-0933.

Second, I noticed Roger Moore's editorial a few months back [issue #185] in which he chastised "Z" for complaining about the mention of gay, lesbian, and bisexual gamers. I must say I was surprised by Mr. Moore's strong stance against discrimination given the "TSR Code of Ethics," which forbids the mention of any "sexual perversion" (implicitly in context referring to bisexuality and homosexuality). Has Mr. Moore read the code of ethics lately and, if so, what is the "official" stance of DRAGON Magazine and TSR on the inclusion of such issues/characters? [Yes, I have read the code of ethics, but the editorial is the place where I speak my mind as I please. My opinions do not necessarily reflect TSR policy. Policy discussions relating to DRAGON Magazine will have to wait for a future editorial. — The editor]

Finally, I just wanted to respond to some of the comments made in the October 1992 issue on women and gaming.

In my last letter [in issue #183], I discussed reasons why women/girls don't discover RPGs. The responses from your readers added little to that analysis. This time, I'd like to turn to a different question: What can be done about it?

1. **Gaming companies:** The first place to start is with the companies. If products are written and marketed in a manner that appeals to women without losing sales to men, then the audience would be improved. Advertising in magazines read by women in addition to the ads in comics is one idea. Improved marketing in mass-appeal chains like Waldenbooks and B. Dalton is another.

Game companies should change the focus of games from combat to role-playing. Many of the survey respondents perceived a difference in style between male and female gamers. GENERALIZATION WARNING: Male gamers tend toward shallow, combat-oriented characters who look for power and money. Women gamers tend toward supportive characters with detailed backgrounds who prefer to interact with NPCs and explore mysteries, intrigue, and politics.

This might involve producing fewer combat-oriented art and articles, and more adventures that depend on cunning and diplomacy for successful resolution.

License authors and titles that have a strong female audience (e.g., C. J. Cherryh, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Barbara Hambly, Mercedes Lackey, Elizabeth Moon, Anne Rice, John Varley, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbo) have all created interesting worlds for RPGs, but none have been officially adapted for gaming.

Use more female artists, editors, playtesters, and writers. It is easier to appeal to a group one is intimately familiar with.

Art: Enough ink has been spilled on this one, no further comment.

2. **Players:** Use courtesy. Be nice, be friendly. I have rarely had any problems in game stores and comic shops, but it doesn't hurt to make an extra effort to be friendly and helpful to anyone who looks new to the hobby. Guys, the women looking for a game are likely to be as serious about it as you are. Don't look at us only as potential dates — it shows.

Lobby: If you like or don't like a product because of its art, rules, style, etc., tell your neighborhood huckster; ask him or her to tell the distributor and write the game company. Silence is consent, after all.

Recruit: I have heard from a number of male gamers who would really like to see more women in their groups. The vast majority of survey respondents were introduced to gaming by their spouses, fiancées, boyfriends, male friends, fathers, and sons. Guys, find out if the women in your life would be interested in gaming, and show them what it's all about. Ladies, tell your friends and relatives what you do for a hobby, and offer to get them involved.

Research: Most fantasy RPGs are based on the historical Middle Ages. Women were doing many interesting things back then, but only the history nuts realize that Jeanne d'Arc wasn't alone. For example, Eleanor of Aquitaine went on a Crusade with her husband, Louis. She had armor, as did a number of her ladies. Jeanne de Montfort battled Charles of Blois for Brittany and donned armor to defeat him in a siege. A female archer nearly killed Saladin in the siege of Jerusalem, and another killed Simon de Montfort during the Albigensian Crusade. Women ran abbeys and convents. They were writers (Christian de Pisan), doctors (as in Paris), guild members (many of the London and Paris cloth and brewers guilds were entirely female), and rulers (e.g., Eleanor of Aquitaine and Jeanne de Montfort). Beyond that, of course, this is fantasy, and if we can imagine elves and dwarves, why not equality?

Think: GMs, think about how gender affects your world. Are there major female NPCs, heroes, and villains? Do they stray from tired stereotypes? Is the only matriarchy in the world an evil race (drow)? What does all of that magic mean to society?

Write: If you think you can do a better job

than the products you see on the market, give it a try. Submit query letters to companies, offer to playtest products, get involved.

3. **Miscellaneous:** Women gamers vs. female gamers: I prefer female/male because it avoids the age question of women vs. girls and men vs. boys. Unfortunately, the term "gamer" implies "white male."

The Universal "He": take a look at White Wolf's VAMPIRE* game, which uses "she" in a number of examples, and White Rose's own *Tapestry*, which uses "he or she" or just no gender identifier (the fighter, the magician) throughout. At minimum, alternation would be nice.

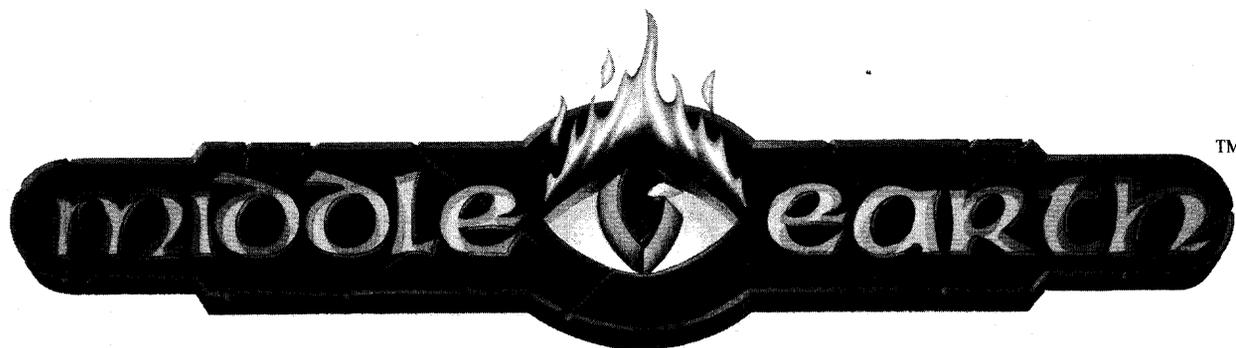
Finally, I also edit an APA, *Pallas Podium* (same address as the survey) that regularly discusses women and RPGs. If you want to explore the topic in depth, write for the APA.

Clarissa Fowler
Amherst MA

I am writing in response to the discussion in issue #187 regarding background for adventuring parties. I have noticed that it is often difficult to figure out how a group of characters could have formed when the party consists of several different races or characters from widely separated geographic areas. This is a problem that the DM should attempt to solve before getting seriously committed to a campaign, as the party background is a major influence on everything from what the characters will know to what they will do in their spare time. The background of a party, and of individual characters, is very important to the atmosphere of role playing and helps to "make the characters real."

In the several years that I have been running campaigns, both for AD&D and ICE's MIDDLE-EARTH ROLE PLAYING* games, I have developed coherent backgrounds for my adventuring parties. How have I accomplished this feat? I asked the players! It's their characters that are adventuring, after all. The DM should not have to force a background on the party or character ("Taladar the dwarven fighter worked in the mines for eight years, then joined the navy. He hates cats but has a passion for amethysts, thanks to working at a jewelry shop. And did I mention the prophecy?"). In my playing experience, I have seen too many times the DM who looks over the elven fighter, dwarven thief, gnome illusionist, and human paladin his players have just put together and says, "Well, you met in a bar and decided to go adventuring. . ."

The solution to the problem is to ask the players about the background of their characters. Ask the players about their characters, individually, before they can discuss it with the others. Preferably this should be done when the characters are being created, before the players even know what other characters will be in the party. It is amazing the depth of background that even the most reticent player will come up with if he sees that the DM is interested. Record this information, and prod if necessary to come up with as complete a description as possible of the character's past, hobbies, and other activities. Then do this with the other players in their turn. Compare the information thus gained and use it to find common points of interest that can unite the party. Do two characters both love harp music? Have them meet under the same teacher. Do two characters from the opposite ends of the world both have sailing experience? They could have served on the same ship. In this way, the DM can try to piece together the reason why these people are adventuring together and why they stay together.

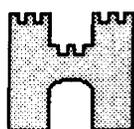


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There are obvious difficulties that arise using this method. The most common one is that the players may come up with backgrounds that seem totally incompatible. However, character histories that take place before the party formally gets together can be used to solve these problems. For example, in one of my AD&D campaigns, a fighter was from a land several weeks' away from where the campaign was taking place. The other characters, which included a halfling thief and a human cleric from a very reclusive religious order, were from the campaign area. At first I had no clue how to fit these backgrounds together. Then I realized that the fighter from the far land had mentioned being a smuggler. He would have traveled to many different lands, including the campaign area. The halfling thief's player had told me that he was on the run from the law. He had ended up in a town in the wilderness full of escaped criminals and other undesirables. What an ideal place to meet the smuggler character! The priest, it turned out, was from a wealthy landowning family. When that family was robbed (by the other two characters, now working as a team), the priest was sent after them with some family guards. After an ambush, the priest was captured by the others and was eventually won over to their cause as outlaws.

DMs often overlook the fact that any adventurers who fight among themselves will not stay together very long if there are other options—and there are always other options in an AD&D campaign! If the elf and dwarf are always bickering, even in combat, how can they expect to rely on each other as members of a party have to? The DM should try to explain to the players that the party stays together because it works well as a team. If characters cannot get along, they should not be in the same party. I am not suggesting that every member of the party should be slavishly devoted to or in love with the others, but at least there should not be constant arguing. There are always plenty of other adventuring parties out there if a character cannot get along with the rest. Why should a character who dislikes gnomes be adventuring with them if there are many other gnomeless adventuring groups around?

These are some of the problems and solutions that I have come up with in my gaming career. I don't know if they will work for everyone; maybe I've just had especially cooperative players. I hope they can help.

Please print my full address.

Kendall Miles
104 Northampton Court
Greenwood SC 29649

This is a reply to Laurence Davison's request for advice in issue #187, regarding odd party compositions. This sort of thing doesn't seem to bother some DMs, who cheerfully make up all sorts of wild tales for their PCs' histories; other DMs (myself included) feel better with more "probable" parties.

The first thing you should do is let the players know your guidelines for party composition *before* they generate their characters. For the AD&D game, for example, I usually require that PC parties be at least 50% human, with no more than one "bizarre" character per party (such as an Oriental martial artist in a medieval campaign, or a member of one of the underground races in a "surface" campaign). It's a *very* good idea to ask the players what sort of character they'd like to roll up, which allows you to plead your case with them. Once the character-generation process has begun, the envisioned

character becomes much more real in the player's mind, and your chances of changing that character's race, class, or background decrease dramatically.

Another way to avoid problems is to create the party as a whole. Invite your players over (*all* of them) to roll up their characters, instead of letting them bring over their home-rolled characters for your approval. If players know what the other players are creating, they know what works with those characters and what won't (most players wouldn't want to play a half-orc if they knew everyone else was creating elves and dwarves). This arrangement also lets you even out ability scores by giving the unlucky players a "raise" (nothing is as frustrating to a player as having a PC with average scores in a party where everyone else had fantastic luck with the dice). If your game is skill-based (such as the STAR TREK* or TRAVELLER* RPGs), this will also be handy for preventing too much skill duplication and ensuring all the necessary skills are represented. You might even find that your players will be the ones to argue whether the party composition makes sense or not.

Finally: negotiate. Most players, even the fanatical ones, have two or three favorite character types (beginners, of course, are usually happy with anything they receive). Within those options, you can usually find something reasonable or work out a compromise; an elf fanatic might not play dwarves, but he would probably accept a half-elf or even a human with distant elven ancestry. Even the most single-minded halfling lover I ever had as a player enjoyed playing grumpy dwarven fighters on occasion.

I realize that in some games this sort of thing is more of a problem than in others; the MERP* game was quite aptly mentioned. When I first played that game, the DM explained to me that some of the races (Variags, Easterlings, Black Numenoreans, and the like) were meant for NPC creation only, and thus were off-limits for the players. Orcs, half-orcs, and trolls, of course, were *way* off limits! Although I wouldn't be as restrictive as he was, I understand his reasons. In fact, none of us really minded his restrictions, since there were still 15+ races to choose from.

To conclude, I think the solution to your problem is largely determined by the sort of relationship you have with your players. Both as a player and as a DM, I generally prefer gaming circles in which the players defer to the game master when such "philosophical" issues come up. Other circles hold that the players are free to do anything that the game rules do not specifically forbid. If your gaming group is of the latter type, you'll have a lot of convincing to do. Knowing your players, and the sorts of arguments that work with each of them, helps you keep everyone happy (which, after all, is the DM's job).

Erik Munne
Aluminio, Brazil

I just finished reading "Be Nice to Your Referee," by Stewart Robertson, in the December issue of DRAGON Magazine. He hit my views on the nose. I am making this article a "must read" for all the players in my campaigns.

I have had a very bad problem with players being late and mooching munchies over the seven years of my GREYHAWK® campaign and two years of my CHAMPIONS* campaign. Recently, it went too far when my girlfriend decided that she was too tired to play on Sunday evening, having had only four hours of sleep because of work. She left me at the local

game shop and drove 20 miles home and went to bed. The time for everyone to play came around, but no one was there. Ten minutes went by, then 20; finally, 35 minutes later, with no one there or calling to tell me they would be late, I called my girlfriend and told her that she would have to come and get me; no one had showed. Ten minutes later the "mature" group of 24- to 29-year-old gamers showed up. Ten minutes after that, when my girlfriend arrived, it was not a pretty sight.

Soon afterwards, the following rules were instituted in my campaigns:

1. The DM will notify all players by Wednesday if a scenario is ready. The players will answer "Yes, I can play" or "No, I cannot play." "Maybe" will be taken as no. Day, time, and location will be set then.

2. If a player said he would attend but events occur that make him unable to do so, he must notify the DM by 6 P.M. the evening before playing.

3. The player has up to 30 minutes after the time set to show up. If he will be late, he must call the DM and say when he intends to be there. If no notification is given or the player does not show, it counts as an absence.

4. After three absences, a player is no longer asked or allowed to play in the DMs campaign—no ifs, buts, or temper tantrums.

So far, two players have been removed from my campaigns in this manner. It was hard because I'm friends with both of them, but I figured that I had put up with them taking advantage of my good nature long enough—seven years' worth.

The munchie moocher has quit showing up since we started playing at the game store, because we started buying soda from the store owner and not sharing our food. It may sound like we are being mean, but the moocher keeps bragging that I had put up with them taking advantage of my good nature long enough—seven years' worth.

I hope other campaigns do not have to do something similar to this, but it does work.

Les Bowman
St. Clair MO

The Complete Book of Dwarves has certainly opened a can of worms, hasn't it? Before its appearance, the inequalities of the multiclassed over single-classed were minor and easily fixed with one of the many kits available. Now, contrary to the other Complete Handbooks, kits are allowed for dwarven fighter/clerics and their like. This has proven to be a problem in my campaign, as in Andy Shockney's (DRAGON issue #187), but to a lesser degree.

In one of my campaigns there are two dwarves: a fighter using a Battlerager kit, and a fighter/cleric playing a Vindicator. As in Mr. Shockney's case, the players quickly noticed the unevenness of the characters. What can the former do that the latter cannot do better? To solve the problem, I went back to the basics. In the spirit of the AD&D 1st Edition rules, multiclassed PCs and NPCs should advance slower than single-classed, yet the new experience-point tables do not reflect this. I suggest giving the multiclassed PCs 60%-80% of their total experience earned (I routinely use 66%), effectively getting rid of the usual one-level separation. This has proven to make everyone happy, multiclassed kits notwithstanding. Unless you wish to strictly ban *The Complete Book of Dwarves*, this should be the easiest and best solution.

Steven Cox
Blacksburg VA

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I read the "Forum" letters about psionics in issues #178 and #184, and I must say that I disagree with their conclusion that the psionist is too powerful. I have played two psionist characters. One was a 6th-level psionist, the other a dwarf fighter/psionist of levels 5/5.

In all the sessions I played the pure psionist character, I felt that I was quite helpless. My character had powers of psychometabolism and psychokinesis, and most power scores were between 11 and 14. Our first encounter was with a blood elemental (it wasn't in Ravenloft), and there was little I could do to help. The most powerful power I had was Disintegrate, with a score of 13, and it gives a saving throw vs. death—not enough to kill an elemental even if a part of it is disintegrated. But what I was really afraid of was throwing 20 and having my character be disintegrated himself. Even if the chance of being disintegrated is just 1 in 60, it still means that someday when he uses this power he'll be gone, and no one would be able to resurrect him. Characters of no other class need worry about destroying themselves.

When I played the dwarf it was better. He was a good fighter and had telepathy as his primary discipline. This allowed him to use both cunning and force. I hadn't played him long, but he had used his powers in a helpful manner, even though my DM had insisted that whenever Contact was made, the character affected felt it.

One of the reasons a psionist was not that powerful in the campaigns I played in was that the house rule for magic-users enabled them to cast any spell within their spell book any time they wanted, as long as it was within the number of spells they were allowed for the day in that level. We also didn't use material components. Since spells had no chance of failure, this

made magic-users more powerful than psionists. Because at high levels magic-users have a lot of spells, more than psionists have powers, they could more easily find a suitable spell for the situation. Psionists simply don't have a spell such as *magic missile*, which strikes a target unerringly, or a fireball, which can cause massive damage to many opponents.

I see devotions as equal to spells of 1st or 2nd level, and sciences to spells of 4th or 5th level. This means that at very low levels, the psionist has powers that outstrip any spell-caster. At high levels, however, a magic-user has such power that there's a great chance that the psionist will be slain before he manages to use any of his powers.

As I see it, it's simply wrong to use the same adventuring style with psionists. On one hand, they can be quite useless in random encounters. On the other hand, when a psionist with telepathic powers goes against any single powerful opponent and has some time on his hands, he could win without even endangering himself. That's why psionists are powerful as NPCs, since these have much time to plot. As PCs, psionists are often thrown into situations in which they do not have time to make their powers work.

I do not believe that the psionist should be made less powerful. If anything, he should be made less powerful at low levels, and more powerful at high levels. But it's much better to let other classes have protection from his power. The DARK SUN® campaign spells *detect psionics* and *psionic dampener* are good examples of magic spells developed to such an end.

Just for fun, here are some possible ways to protect some classes, races and alignments:

—Evil psionists suffer a -2 penalty to power scores when using powers against a paladin. A

paladin receives a saving throw vs. paralyzation if forced to do something against his beliefs. If successful, the power in work will stop functioning, and so will the Contact, if there was one.

—The powerful minds of the elves (and, to a lesser extent, the half-elves) resist telepathy in the same way they resist *charm*-related spells. An elf who does not deliberately open his mind has 90% resistance to all mind-affecting psionic powers. The same is true for all other creatures for which the *Monstrous Compendium* states any resistance to charms.

—When a psionist contacts the mind of a chaotic-aligned character, or tries to affect him with a telepathic power, he must make a Wisdom check or be overwhelmed by the chaotic nature of this mind. If overwhelmed, the Contact is broken and he is stunned for the next round. (Other possible penalties include the inability to recover PSPs or to use the power, for some time.)

By the way, Brad Allison's claim that a 2nd-level psionist disintegrated a wolfwere is unfounded. A 2nd-level character has but one science, and Disintegrate is a science that has the prerequisite of the Telekinesis science. On the matter of defeating the shadow dragon, I would have suggested to the DM to make the dragon flee, only to come back and attack the party later when it least expected it (being a genius, the shadow dragon would certainly understand what had happened). It just goes to show that it's not the powers that win the day, but the will of the DM.

Eyal Teler
Jerusalem, Israel
Ω

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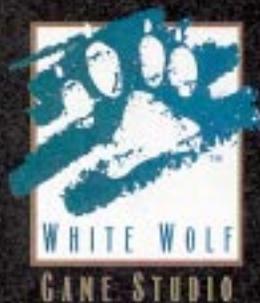
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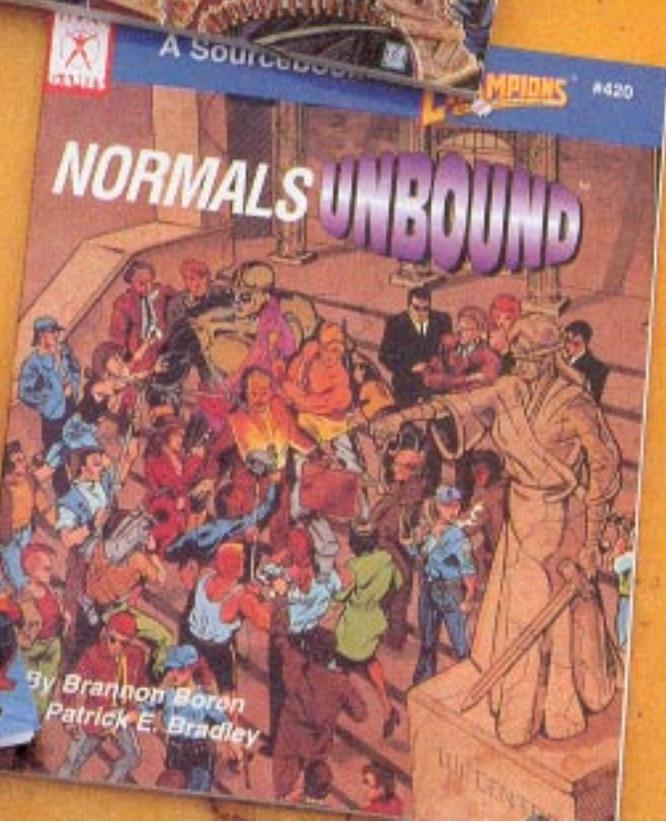
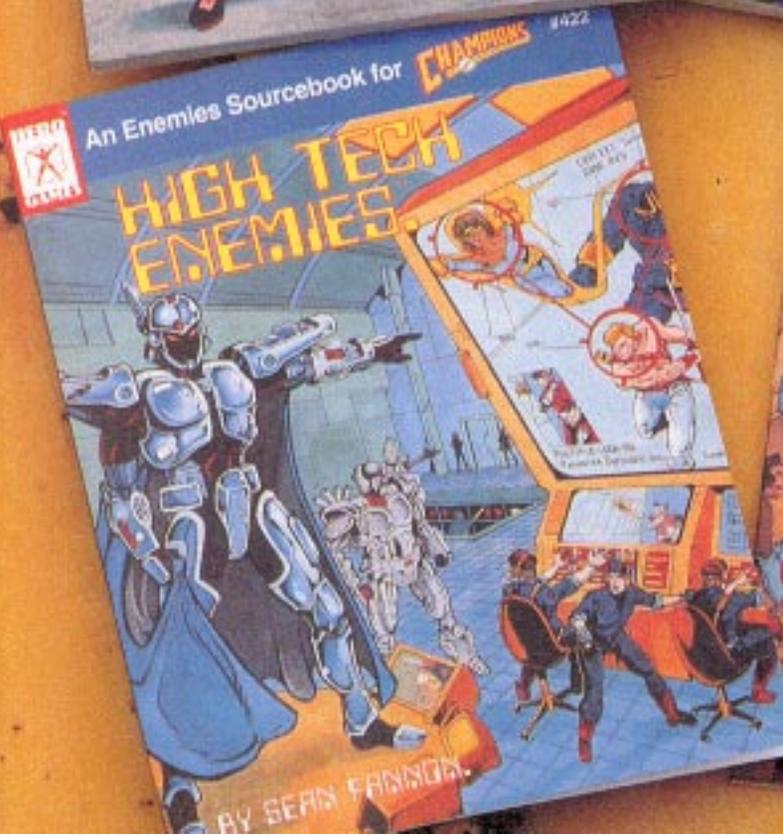
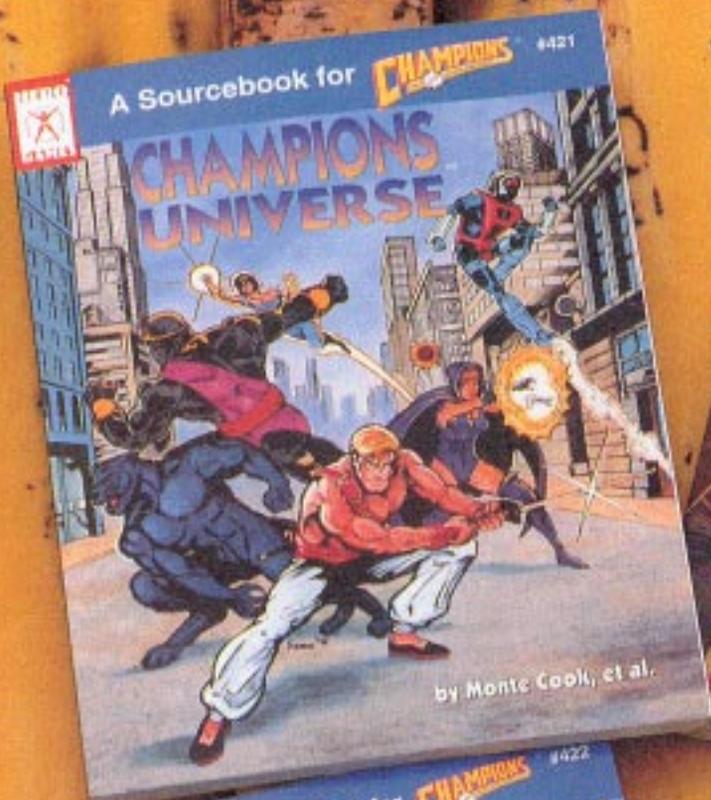
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WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE™

Role-playing

Reviews



A third life for my favorite role-playing game

©1993 by Allen Varney

You barrel into town doing 80, slam on the brakes at the game store, and lunge out of the car before the tires stop squealing. Hitting the door straight-arm, you stride to the counter and shout, "Bring me this month's releases for my favorite role-playing system, and snap it up!" The storekeeper groans under the weight of sourcebooks, scenarios, and accessories. You toss over your charge card, sign the slip, then peel out toward your game session.

It works this way for most gamers, but friend, reflect for a moment on the fans of the orphans, those games with little or no support. Imagine those gamers' plight! Think of their hopes and disappointments! Consider the accidents that can befall a role-playing game, such as low sales, publishers' cash-flow crises, or editorial misdirection. All these mean no support or, just as bad, lousy support. You see that an RPG line can be, like the woman in Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess*, a sometime thing.

Feel a chill? Take heart from those times, all the happier for their rarity, when struggling games find a new life, dormant support lines blossom, and orphaned fans breathe sighs of relief.

Why, yes, since you ask, I do have an example. The second dark age of the CHAMPIONS* game lasted barely half as long as its first. The hobby's leading superhero RPG, and to my mind its best universal system, has recently recovered from a three-year dry spell.

The CHAMPIONS difference: I play the CHAMPIONS game more than any other RPG because of its flexibility. Not just a game of comic-book slugfests, the CHAMPIONS RPG incorporates the genre-spanning HERO SYSTEM* game. It gives you the tools to create any character in any campaign background whatever, free of artificial restrictions on class or power level—to design any spell, power, or device you can imagine—in short, to do anything. The HERO SYSTEM game embodies anarchy in its best sense.

The game makes a conceptual breakthrough that should have become widespread but never did. Using a complicated but ingenious system, it separates game mechanism from *special effect*—in other words, it defines all powers, spells, gadgets, and other effects entirely in terms of abstract mechanical rules: Drain, Armor, damage of this type, movement of that kind, and so on. In other games your character uses Ice Attack or Lightning Bolt or a Magnum revolver, and it works in just the one way the rules explain that "special effect." Ice Attack casts iceballs but can't make it snow, Lightning Bolt needs a

chunk of magnetite, and the Magnum has eight shots. The HERO SYSTEM game calls them all Energy Blasts, or Ranged Killing Attacks if you prefer, with different advantages and limitations of your choice. Do you want your lightning bolt to hit a wider area, pass through solid objects, or use a different material component? In other games, even so-called "universal" systems, tough! But in the HERO SYSTEM game, your lightning bolt works the way you define it. The same flexibility marks the RPG's approach to campaign design, level of "realism," and other matters.

Note how this idea circumvents entire categories of rules questions that plague other games. "Can my *Tenser's floating disk*, which floats only a few feet off the ground, float across a chasm?" It can in the HERO SYSTEM game if you defined it as (for example) Telekinesis, but not if it works as extra Strength usable only to carry things. "If I turn these spears into grains of salt and pour them on my enemy's dinner, and then he eats it, does the salt changes back to spears in his stomach and kill him?" In the HERO SYSTEM game, you would buy the spears as an Independent Killing Attack, one use, with the Trigger "Contact with digestive fluid." See how it works?

Unfortunately, this flexibility creates an entirely new plague of rules questions that each beleaguered game master (GM) must settle case by case. Also, the HERO SYSTEM game's high complexity, arduous character-creation process, and grievously slow combat system sharply restrict its potential audience to picky hardcore gamers. This helps explain its minor position in the market. As for the quality of its support over the years—that has other explanations.

The recent drought: In 1990, line editor Rob Bell left the CHAMPIONS game's current publisher, Iron Crown Enterprises. At ICE, Bell had carried the game, first published in 1981, to new heights. In 1989 he masterminded the superior CHAMPIONS game fourth edition (known among fans as the BBB—Big Blue Book), the *HERO SYSTEM Rulesbook* extracted from it, and a strong support line by talented writers.

Bell's efforts pleased the HERO SYSTEM game's core audience, the old fans and true who had waited through the first drought, six years of halting support by the original publisher, Hero Games. (The checkered Hero history appears in "Role-playing Reviews" in DRAGON® issue #172, October 1989.) When Bell left ICE to work for a Congressional office and later to enter law school, some in the fan commu-

nity expressed fear that the game's second golden age had ended.

This proved true. Bell's departure coincided with severe cash problems at Iron Crown, and his replacement—well, one metaphor can't encompass the poor fellow's plight. He was thrown in the deep end, had to fill a big pair of shoes, and tried to make bricks without straw. The following three years produced no more than a dozen CHAMPIONS supplements, and these ranged from adequate to inferior. Some objections to these products involve technical minutiae; does it mean anything to you that *European Enemies* espoused the meaningless Elemental Control rationale? But any gamer can understand the larger complaint that these supplements generally showed little imagination, lack of concern for campaign use, and weak spelling and grammar.

Now, in a line that seldom looked especially good, we see improved production values and better artwork. Product flow has increased. Bruce Harlick, one of the game's earliest adherents, now edits the Hero line. Signs indicate that after two dead intervals, the Hero line has entered its third life. Few games get a third chance, let alone a second, so I celebrate the revival in this review.

I only wish we had had a different herald of the re-resurrection.

Dark Champions: Heroes of Vengeance

205-page softcover book
Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises \$20
Author: Steven S. Long
Cover: Frank Cirocco, Storn Cook
Illustrations: Dan Smith, Greg Smith

Catering to the comic-book readership's current taste for ruthless vigilantes, new author Steven Long (a contributor to *Fantasy Hero Companion II*) has designed what I must reluctantly call the best supplement the CHAMPIONS game has seen in years. *Dark Champions* describes, not to say exalts, the "heroes" who hit the crime-torn streets and beat up or, more often, murder the Mafia dons, yakuza *oyabuns*, drug smugglers, gang members, and other evil baddies who have brought about the terrible state in our inner cities. (It can't have anything to do with our attitudes or our government, right? Evil baddies did it. Jail them or shoot them, and you make it all better.)

"Heroes of Vengeance" in the subtitle means vigilantes, either super-powered or just well-armed, who want not only to actively do good but to assault crooks.

Comics fans recognize this mentality in the Punisher and the "grittier" versions of Batman, among many others. These characters' obsessive street-level crusades differ from the extravagant alien invasions and monster fights of traditional four-color comics, but both kinds of melodrama rely on the same principle: "Violence solves problems." *Dark Champions* presents, in interesting and effective game terms, dozens of contemporary problems: terrorists, psycho killers, gangs, organized crime. Then it proposes solutions: pages and pages of detailed, well-designed weapon statistics. Brrrr.

Note, by the way, that the CHAMPIONS game system permits murderous behavior, unlike its principal competitors, TSR's MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game and Mayfair's DC HEROES* game. With their Karma or Hero Point penalties against characters who kill, these licensed systems enforce traditional super-hero morality, sometimes at odds with the comics they simulate. The CHAMPIONS rules, for better or worse, enforce no moral view.

Dark Champions should appeal to those who find moral behavior futile, feel ethics have meaning only when tested to destruction, or believe responsible conduct includes passing sentence on others. It should also go over big with players who just wanna hit drug labs and kill everything that moves. Steven Long writes with care for both audiences, emphasizing playability as he develops intriguing kill-or-be-killed skyscraper scenarios a la *Die Hard*, careful analyses of the heroic Code Against Killing, a fine overview of law in a super-heroic world, and a high-power vigilante called the Harbinger of Justice. He excels in informative descriptions of the Mafia, Chinese tongs, the yakuza, Jamaican "posses," and other real-life crime organizations. The clinically gruesome serial-killer scenario has the same ring of authenticity. Long's attention to campaign use raises this product far above many recent CHAMPIONS game supplements. Some individual sections of this book represent the best of their type the Hero line has yet seen. A GM can use most of *Dark Champions* ready-made in a campaign, so the player characters can start killing people right away.

Why this bugs me: The super-hero concept began with the idea of the vigilante taking justice into his own hands. For much of comics history, most writers ignored this tension between the heroic and the unlawful. Then some talented creators explored it in fascinating stories. But, as happens constantly in comics, a streak of brilliant work led to endless notalent imitations. The stories exploring vigilantism have given way to brutal power trips starring costumed psychopaths. When one of these sinister avengers storms a crimelord's hideout and kills two dozen people in 20 pages, how does he differ from any mass murderer?

Of course, the scumbags he kills deserve

to die; the writer has stacked the deck to justify the hero's actions. Vigilantism has become more than an unexamined rationale for super-hero stories of excitement, imagination, and the fantasy of great power in service to a high ideal. Some comics treat bloody vigilante justice as a *meaningful response* to society's problems, an approach worth exploring. Why? Blood sells. Commercial success validates the vigilante approach. The Punisher keeps winning his pathological vendetta because, as long as he wins, the publisher can sell three or four *Punisher* titles every month.

With *Dark Champions*, this creepy syndrome comes to super-hero gaming. Heaven help us, it arrives looking really sharp.

I don't fear that players will enjoy *Dark Champions* so much that they'll take to the streets and start pounding criminals. I find such concerns asinine. I don't think any game product directly affects behavior at all, unless you're writing it and deadline pressure drives you nuts. Pop culture items like games reflect attitudes shaped at a deeper level. When the gifted fantasy writer Martha Soukup took part in a 1991 protest march against the Gulf War, her sign read: WAR IS A SYMPTOM. Like war, violent comics and role-playing games represent symptoms, not causes, of a violent society.

This book panders to our violent society in two ways. First, it proposes that players can have big fun role-playing vigilante killers. "A scenario with a vigilante [player character] who is trying to kill his worst enemy while being chased by the police and several four-color player characters leads to edge-of-your-seat, nail-biting CHAMPIONS games which are better than any comic book" (page 17). I call this the same kind of fun that people had at Roman gladiatorial bouts, medieval bear-baitings, guillotine executions, and modern snuff films: the "fun" of seeing someone get killed. You can't wipe out this facet of human nature, but you don't have to cater to it.

Second, *Dark Champions* relies on the unspoken assumption that our society has already fallen apart, so we'd better start shooting people. Long never explicitly endorses murder, and the text does perform a certain amount of ritual hand-wringing that cautions characters against irresponsibility, but in the context of a 200-page supplement all about shooting at crooks, these displays do not convince. *Dark Champions* gives GMs and players tools to enshrine fictitious heroes of escapist four-color comics as the saviors of our genuine inner-city crisis. The book's high quality can't disguise or redeem its cruel and useless "solution." Lots of popular comics, books, movies, TV shows, and now RPGs have reduced social problems to thoughtless and violent entertainment, but popularity and quantity alone cannot make them honorable.

Evaluation: I don't assign star ratings in game reviews. *Dark Champions: Heroes*

of *Vengeance* illustrates one reason I find star ratings meaningless. They confuse a product's execution with the worth of its subject.

Does *Dark Champions* succeed in capturing gritty street-level vigilante adventures in game terms? Yes, brilliantly, not only for the CHAMPIONS game but for many modern-day RPGs. Should players refuse to play this kind of campaign? I can't make that call. Do I think *Dark Champions* helps the super-hero gaming field? No, I absolutely do not. For those who disagree, this book gives excellent campaign value.

High Tech Enemies

93-page softcover book
Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises \$13
Author: Sean Fannon
Cover: Storn Cook
Illustrations: Greg Smith

Champions Universe

186-page softcover book
Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises \$18
Authors: Monte Cook and 95 others
Cover: Storn Cook
Illustrations: Storn Cook, Scott Heine

Normals Unbound

94-page softcover book
Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises \$13
Authors: Brannon Boren, Patrick E. Bradley
Cover and illustrations: Storn Cook

Let us continue the theme of campaign use, or its lack. These three books illustrate the contrast in the CHAMPIONS support line between its recent downtime and (I hope) the future standard.

Yet more bad guys: I don't remember how many books of supervillains Hero Games has published—seems like dozens—but apparently we don't have enough *Enemies* books yet. In *High Tech Enemies*, we get villains based on super-science technology. This rationale stretches to the breaking point to include the occasional mentalist, alien, space pirate, and, umm, dwarf. The 39 bad guys and assorted agents mostly wear armor and mostly like to steal or destroy technological gadgets. "My," you say, "how can this seemingly arbitrary and sterile premise give rise to a gallery of unique new foes, unlike any seen before?" We don't find out. The villains in *High Tech Enemies* serve no new campaign function, and they conjure few novel ideas.

Incidentally, the character designs here point up a longtime pitfall of the CHAMPIONS game's flexibility. When you, as GM, can easily adjust damage and defense standards in your campaign, you never know whether a given Hero supplement matches those standards. In the absence of firm editorial control, every writer appears to design differently. For example, the villains in *Champions of the North*, the recent supplement about Canada, seem

unusually wimpy. As for the other extreme, try reading this aloud to someone who knows the CHAMPIONS game: "This *High Tech Enemies* book has a cybernetic ninja assassin called Weasel. He has Speed 8, Stealth at 18, OCV 12, five combat skill levels, Find Weakness at 13, 4d6 + 1 armor-piercing HKA, and the Psychological Limitation 'Enjoys killing.' "

You got quite a reaction, didn't you? This jargon translates into: "Weasel will kill your player characters." The utility of such a villain escapes me. Many villains in *High Tech Enemies* enjoy killing and have the attacks to do it. Not everyone would condemn the book on this count, for I have heard of campaigns that thrive on blood-thirst and power. But GM, take care.

What has gone before: Can you think of a gaming product with 96 authors? *Champions Universe* tries to weave the work of eight dozen CHAMPIONS supplement writers from time immemorial into one consistent campaign history. Just as *Dark Champions* plays on the fad for homicidal avengers, *Champions Universe* capitalizes on a popular trend at comic-book companies, the codification of the "universes" wherein all their heroes interact. TSR's *Gamer's Handbook of the Marvel Universe* and Mayfair's *Who's Who in the DC Universe* compendia translate this idea into game terms, although I've never seen much use in straight costume pageants of super-characters.

Champions Universe avoids this approach. After all, the *Enemies* books already offer more pageants than anyone could want. Instead, this book gives brief, get-back-to-you-later coverage of lots of background details: timelines, weird places of the world, sketches of major magicians and high technology agencies, a summary of alien races, the Paranormal Registration Act, updates of the Champions super-team, thumbnail sketches of the worlds main organizations and media groups, a business called "Aftermath Inc." that cleans up after super-battles a la Marvel Comics' Damage Control, and so on. New villains and NPCs, a long glossary of characters, and a wide-ranging scenario round out the package.

In its straightforward compilation of about 50 supplements, *Champions Universe* succeeds fairly well. It reads like a good fanzine article by an enthusiastic gamer who wants to highlight these products' glories. I enjoyed many bits throughout, despite the shaky spelling and grammar that have plagued the last batch of Hero Games products. Yet while reading this book I kept asking, "What does this accomplish? Who needs it?" If you already have a campaign, much of this book becomes redundant. If you can't devise a campaign world of your own, the material here seems (a) too sketchy to help much and (b) not thought through.

Take one instance among many: The geography section mentions in a single offhand paragraph (page 59) that the

Australian Outback hides a buried alien artifact that absorbs power from everything in the universe. "It uses [the stored energy] to create a strange mental plane of existence called the Dreamtime." Uhh, okay, if you say so, but could you elaborate? What adventure ideas does the Dreamtime inspire? *Champions Universe* wastes no space to reply, for the breathlessly paced text moves willy-nilly onward to Antarctica.

A campaign supplement better focused than *Champions Universe* could have real use. For instance, a "secret origins" chapter could consolidate all the rationales that past supplements have used to create heroes and villains, such as the Q'rrm Effect from the old *Atlas Unleashed* scenario. A GM could tailor appropriate origins from this menu in creating new villains, or suggest an origin to new players. The chapter would discuss the narrative function of each origin and offer ways to develop its implications in the campaign. *Champions Universe* does nothing like this, and the Q'rrm show up only in a dry list of alien races.

In the same way, a "universe" supplement could propose plausible rationales for genre inconsistencies. Why, in a world of VIPER agents with heavy blasters, do police still carry ordinary sidearms? *Champions Universe* might have given pretexts for this and many other issues, with suggestions for mini-campaigns centered around each rationale. Instead, it merely lists high-tech agencies established in past supplements. (*High Tech Enemies* offers a scenario outline to account for the technology gap.)

You see that this idea of a "campaign supplement" differs from the one in *Champions Universe*. Don't look for a quick-and-dirty rundown of someone else's campaign; get a tool kit of parts to build your own. Even if you do need a pre-fab super campaign, *Champions Universe* won't fill the role without other supplements to prop it up.

For a sturdy set of super-hero campaign tools, try these four CHAMPIONS game books: the fourth-edition Big Blue Book of rules, *Classic Enemies*, *Classic Organizations*, and *Normals Unbound*. Together they cost about \$70—pricy but good value. (In some campaigns *Ninja Hero* has also become vital.) Alongside these, *Champions Universe* may prove handy in a small way.

What? You don't recognize the last of those essential four? Coming right up.

The brighter side: Whereas most CHAMPIONS game supplements cram in villains like malevolent super-powered sardines, few writers show interest in those less flashy staples of a comic-book campaign, the non-powered characters—the "normals." Cops, paramedics, reporters, sweethearts, kid siblings, occultists, celebrity stalkers, crusading disk jockeys, and fan clubs represent the innocents your heroes fight to protect,

bland but vital support functions the group needs, adventure hooks, the baseline that makes superhuman powers awesome, and the entanglements that make life interesting between combats. *Normals Unbound* rectifies a severe 11-year lack in the CHAMPIONS game with its repertory of unpowered but interesting people.

Everyone in this delightful book fills a clear campaign role or provokes story ideas. Meet Matthew Armbruster, the likable fast-lane robotics executive who built the villain Mechanon—and Matthew's wife, Congresswoman Shanna Armbruster, passionate supporter of metahuman civil rights—and her godfather, Senator Jeremiah Relm, chief advocate of metahuman oppression, who has not pried closely enough into his funding sources. Meet Betsy Clarke, high-school history teacher ("anyone getting close to her will quickly get drawn into the lives and problems of her students"), her good friend, Streetgang Task Force leader Sergeant Addie Parsons, and Parsons's opponent, illegitimate businessman Ananias Topps.

Not all these folks exactly fit the "normal" bill. Your players may get a surprise when they meet Iggy the Vampire, professional undead person—or Patsy Conrad, the teenager who visits a make-believe place—or Mister Rapentap and his spooky immortal children—or, I kid you not, Sparky the Wonder Dog. Even the prototypical "normal," your hero's weak old Aunt Mary, turns out in *Normals Unbound* to write award-winning science fiction novels. For one and all, Brannon Boren and Patrick Bradley, a pair of talented first-time authors, write profiles that sparkle—and coming after most of the Hero Games line of the last few years, sparkling prose refreshes like water in the desert.

Any super-heroic campaign can use the folks in this book, but CHAMPIONS game GMs should feel greater relief than most GMs of other systems. In the CHAMPIONS game, many player characters take the DNPC (Dependent NPC) disadvantage to get more Power Points they can spend on greater abilities. Those DNPCs get in the way during adventures, pry into secret identities, and otherwise cause trouble. But who are they? The game rules don't describe them except with point totals. In my old CHAMPIONS campaign, two heroes took the same DNPC, and for the life of me I could never recall her looks or personality. Ineptitude played some part in this, but the countless other details I had to track didn't help. If I'd had *Normals Unbound*, I could have pulled out occult bookstore owner Lynda Crichton, or maybe even "Crystal" Claire Vossier, the uncontrollable New Age psychic, and solved the problem. Taking cues from her relationship to other NPCs in this book, I'd have found scenario ideas aplenty. Wow, I wonder if I can restart that game. . . .

Normals Unbound dramatizes a neglected truth of super-hero games: Super

powers make up less than half a good campaign. Even if your favorite hero can mind-control the Himalayas or swallow the Alaskan oil pipeline, your greatest fun comes when that hero interacts with others and develops relationships over time. Through their well-drawn personalities and flexible narrative roles, these NPCs heighten the campaign experience.

Evaluations: Most of the best CHAMPIONS game supplements share that goal of "heightening the campaign experience." To the degree a supplement ignores this, it lacks long-term use. *Normals Unbound* exceeds the pedestrian *High Tech Enemies* in creating original, useful characters essential to a well-run campaign. *Champions Universe*, although well intentioned, suffers for its "almanac" approach of dry and sketchy lists instead of campaign tools, but bits of it may prove useful.

With Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises back on its feet and with a savvy new editor, the CHAMPIONS game line looks ready (for a third time) to heighten the super-heroic gamer's campaign experiences. Here's hoping.

Other HERO SYSTEM game support

The monster book: Hero Games has at last released an expanded and updated *Hero Bestiary* (192 pages, \$18). Written by Doug Tabb with Darrin C. Zielinski, Brian Nystul, and Mark Bennett, this thick volume devotes unusual amounts of space to mundane beasts as well as fantasy monsters, so let's hope most FANTASY HERO campaigns need not only dragons but also, say, ostriches. Other campaigns hardly need the *Bestiary* at all, but super-heroes should have fun pummeling the "myriad of movie monsters" promised on the book's back cover. In case you wonder how many movie monsters constitute a myriad, the answer is six.

Campaign Classics: Iron Crown has published five or six curious hybrids that cover offbeat adventure topics like Robin Hood, pirates, Vikings, and mythology. These 160-page "Campaign Classics" (\$15-16) give statistics for both the HERO SYSTEM game and ICE's ROLEMASTER* game, and they make an ill-matched pairing. Each supplement obviously favors one game and relegates the other to stepchild status. Aaron Allston's tremendous *Mythic Greece: The Age of Heroes*, clearly a HERO SYSTEM product, stands high above the rest—at least it did before it went out of print—and swashbucklers and privateers will find a treasure in *Pirates* by Gorham Palmer, clearly a ROLEMASTER game fan. But really, reviews of these things hardly matter, because each of them almost corners its own niche market. For example, if you run an ancient Egyptian campaign, you'll buy *Mythic Egypt* even though it did put me to sleep three times in 10 pages.

The magazine: Unbelievably, the Hero Games quarterly magazine, *Adventurers Club*, has for the first time in its 11-year

run actually started appearing almost quarterly. "By rough estimate, this issue is something like five-and-a-half years late," wrote new editor Bill Robinson in issue #18, last fall. "[I]f the magazine ever did come out four times in one year, the AC would have to go bi-monthly just on principle." Yet Robinson and Bruce Harlick swore up and down that they, alone among numberless AC editors, would make this old train run on time. Sure enough, issue #19 really did show up a few months later, and at this writing #20 has just appeared. Did someplace hot recently freeze over?

Adventurers Club offers the usual house-organ support of scenarios, characters, source material, and rules variants. It has a lighter touch than some one-company magazines, but its coverage of all the different HERO SYSTEM game genres means that any one issue may offer little for your own campaign. Style and grammar still fall short of professional standards, and four bucks an issue seems a steep price on that count, if nothing else. Send inquiries to: Iron Crown Enterprises, P.O. Box 1605, Charlottesville VA 22902.

The BBS: The semi-official computer bulletin board system of the HERO SYSTEM game, Red October, recently celebrated its fourth birthday. Based in Austin, Texas, this free and staggeringly active board features discussion areas, playtest manuscripts and campaign chronicles available for free download, and a "Gamers Wanted" area. Many longtime Hero designers call regularly. Red October now supports off-line readers with shareware programs that let long-distance callers greatly reduce their time online and still keep up with the incredible traffic. Set your modem to N-8-1 and dial: (512) 834-2548. Red October runs 24 hours and supports all modem speeds up to 16,600 bps.

Computer aids: The HERO SYSTEM game's complexity has prompted some fans to respond with software that expedites the GM's formidable tasks. Both of the programs I've seen run on MS-DOS computers; you can download them from Red October. The shareware *GM's SuperPowered Companion* sequences combat, rolls dice, calculates STUN and BODY damage, and tracks total damage, among other useful tasks. Inquire to: SuperPowered Software, P.O. Box 1936, Dublin OH 43017.

The freeware *Herobase* database lets you easily update and print out your HERO SYSTEM game characters. Inquire to: Carl W. Oakes, 261 Peachtree Avenue, Vacaville CA 95688.

The new commercial program *GMAid*, also for MS-DOS machines, claims powerful abilities in both running combat and storing characters. I have not yet seen the program. It costs \$30 plus \$3 shipping from: New Generation Systems, 4291 S. Quintero Way, Aurora CO 88013.

Fans of the CHAMPIONS paper RPG

eagerly anticipate the ultimate computer aid: the CHAMPIONS computer game itself, designed by Steve Peterson (co-designer of the RPG) and several others. At this writing, the game lags far, far behind schedule, but the publisher, Hero Software, has released its character generator as a stand-alone product. *Hero Maker* reduces the hours-long process of generating a complete CHAMPIONS character to 15-20 minutes. As for the game proper, it may possibly, conceivably, perhaps appear this Christmas. Maybe.

Short & Sweet

GANGSTERS* game, by Don Greenwood (The Avalon Hill Game Company, \$29.95). Listen up, you mugs. In this abstract, fast-paced board game, four players send racketeers, thugs, and vamps into 1920s Chicago to extort money, buy property, and seduce or hit rivals. Innovative rules use dice to determine pieces' movement rates and replacement costs, and time limits reward strategy and fast thinking. Bribe cops to look the other way, or send them against your opponents. The first player to amass ten grand or a large property base wins. I don't like seeing criminals glamorized; that said, this design shows a charm and excitement independent of its subject. Don Greenwood has designed games for the Avalon Hill Game Company for about as long as I've breathed. Enjoy this tasty fruit of his long experience.

After working as an editor & designer at Steve Jackson Games from 1984 to 1986, Allen Varney went free-lance. He has published three board games and has written two dozen role-playing books and supplements for TSR, West End Games, Hero Games, Tor Books, and others.

[The following reviews were cut from Rick Swan's "Role-playing Reviews" column in DRAGON® issue #196 because of a lack of space. They are now presented here.]

Dragon Kings, by Timothy B. Brown. TSR Inc., \$20. Power-mad players who feel constrained by the level limits imposed by the standard AD&D rules should delight in this DARK SUN® supplement, which features tips for taking characters all the way to 30th level. While the first section of the book offers interesting rules for creating stratospheric-level warriors, along with useful but nonessential BATTLESYSTEM™ options, the real action is in the 50-plus pages of high-powered spells. Sample eye-poppers include *mountain fortress*, which conjures a fortified tower more than 100 yards tall, and *prolific forestation*, which creates up to a 480-yard radius forest with as many as 36,000 (!) trees. Lonely wizards might consider casting *raise nation* to animate as many as 4,000 skeletons from an ancient civilization. Dungeon Masters may shudder at the thought of coming up

Continued on page 82



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THE MARVEL[®]-PHILE

Heroes of the streets arise!

In the last few years, the MARVEL UNIVERSE[™] has seen an astonishing number of normal humans taking to the streets and fighting crime with little more than their wits and a strong right hook; there have not been as many non- or low-powered heroes on the streets fighting crime since the Golden Age of comics in the 1940s. When the MARVEL SUPER HEROES[™] (MSH) game was created, this type of hero was rare, and wasn't given much attention. The times and the heroes have changed, so it's time for the game rules to get up to speed.

In this special MARVEL-Phile, I'll provide an addendum to the MSH Advanced Set's character-generation rules to allow for the low-powered heroes to join your MSH campaign without being overwhelmed by the powered heroes. These low-powered, street-level heroes will not fit into all campaigns in any case. If you're running a high-powered or cosmic campaign with beings like Silver Surfer or Adam Warlock, these vigilante-level heroes will still be severely outclassed.

Vigilante heroes are defined by the following general guidelines:

- Your hero's primary abilities (FASERIP) are within maximum human limits (see pages 5-6 of the MSH Advanced Set's Judge's Book for human limits);

- Your hero carries weaponry or technology that is available to the general public (or a group the hero belongs to like Code Blue or SHIELD);

- If your hero has gizmos (whether a shield, gun, or webline) of her own devising that grants her abilities of less than Amazing rank.

These guidelines are not concrete, but they serve to distinguish street-level heroes from other gadget-laden humans like those in the Avengers. While it's true that Captain America, Hawkeye, and the Black Widow don't have any powers, their equipment is far beyond the available level of technology for most street heroes. These extraordinary gadgets, when coupled with their owners' formidable skills, allow them to operate against opponents like Kang or Dr. Doom.

Origin

The MSH Advanced Set detailed five origins, complete with their own advantages and disadvantages for players to generate their heroes. We need to add a sixth origin type, "Normal human," to account for non-powered or very low-powered heroes.

The original origins were set to reflect the MARVEL UNIVERSE in 1987; I've altered the percentages on the Origins table from page 5 of the Advanced Set Player's Book to indicate the emergence of the Normal-human hero in the 1990s. These changes are detailed on the new table below, followed by a full description of the Normal-human origin and what sets it apart from the other character origins.

New Origins table

D100 roll	Origin
01-25	Altered human
26-50	Mutant
51-75	High technology
76-90	Normal human
91-95	Robot
96-00	Alien

Normal humans

As the name implies, these characters are simply human, albeit highly trained and focused individuals devoted to fighting crime and injustice. Though this type of hero was most prevalent during comics' Golden Age, there has been a resurgence of nonpowered costumed heroes in the 1990s. While they seldom possess powers, normal humans have a wider range of talents and contacts. Any "powers" they might have are gained through equipment. The original Bucky, Mockingbird, the



Punisher, Shang-Chi, Silver Sable, and the original Union Jack are all examples of normal-human heroes.

—Normal humans add one rank to any three primary abilities (or three ranks to any one, or two ranks to one and one rank to another ability), provided their abilities do not exceed maximum human limits.

—Normal humans automatically gain three additional talents (these do not count toward the maximum rolled on the Secondary Abilities table below).

—Normal humans gain one additional contact. Again this does not count against the number of initial contacts rolled on Secondary Abilities table.

—Normal humans have no innate powers; any powers rolled must be incorporated into their equipment and have a maximum rank of Incredible for whatever power effect they have.

Abilities

As we've altered the Origins, we also have to adjust the numbers for the Generating Primary Abilities table on page 6 and the Generating Secondary Abilities table on page 7 of the *Player's Book* to allow for the greater levels of ability that compensate for the lack of powers. Remember to roll for powers (equipment), talents, and contacts separately on the Secondary Abilities table. The Secondary Abilities table below is for Normal-human heroes only.

Power generation

The number before the slash is the number of powers the hero currently possesses, and the number after the slash is the maximum number possible for the hero. Remember most vigilante heroes are nonpowered personally, and hence, all power slots represent specialized equipment. Just about any power in the MARVEL UNIVERSE has been artificially duplicated by some scientist or other. Even the rare mental powers have been recently created by Spider-Man (Emotion-control gun used against Carnage and crew) and the Black Knight (psi-screen armor that protects vs. mental and psionic attacks). Determine powers as you normally would in your campaign.

Power ranks are rolled on the Random Ranks table above.

Talent generation

The character's number of initial talents are rolled on the new Secondary Abilities table. The number before the slash is the initial number the hero possesses, while the second number is the maximum potential number of talents; this maximum can be exceeded only by bonus talents from the character's Origin. Determine talents

Normal-human ranks table (Column 6)

Rank name	Initial rank	Normal human	Human Maximums (If roll exceeds maximum, reroll.)
Feeble	1	01-05	
Poor	3	06-15	
Typical	5	16-50	
Good	8	51-75	
Excellent	16	76-85	Maximum human Strength
Remarkable	26	86-95	Max. Endurance
Incredible	36	96-00	Max. Agility
Amazing	46	–	Max. Fighting, Reason, Intuition
Monstrous	63	–	

as you would normally.

Talent ranks are rolled on Column 1 of the Generating Primary Abilities table in the *Player's Book*. If the player rolls less than the corresponding Primary ability, the hero gains the talent with the ability's standard rank number i.e., Good (10), not Good (8).

Contact generation

Each hero gets a number of initial contacts as rolled on the new Secondary Abilities table. Normal-human heroes get an additional contact due to their origin.

A hero does not have to establish all his contacts at the start of the campaign—the others can appear as need be or as the result of role-playing. For each established contact, the hero must provide a name. Characters with secret IDs can assign contacts to his heroic ID, his secret ID, or both. The secret ID has less risk to the hero, because if your contacts don't know you are a superhero, you cannot be called upon by them to perform heroic acts.

Example character

Now that we've got the mechanics in place, let's try them out and create a new heroine for the MARVEL UNIVERSE.

Origin & Abilities

I've already determined that the character's origin is a Normal-human hero. Therefore, using the new table, I generate the following ability scores:

Roll	Ability	Initial rank & number
97	Fighting	Incredible (36)
22	Agility	Typical (5)/Excellent (16)
64	Strength	Good (8)
53	Endurance	Good (8)/Excellent (16)
76	Reason	Excellent (16)
88	Intuition	Remarkable (26)
32	Psyche	Typical (6)

Our new character's Health is 76 (total of Fighting, Agility, Strength, and Endurance), and her Karma is 48 (total of Reason, Intuition, and Psyche).

Normal-human Secondary abilities table

D100 Roll	Powers I/P	Talents I/P	Contacts I/P
01-10	0/1	3/6	2/4
11-35	0/2	4/6	2/5
36-65	1/2	3/5	3/4
66-85	1/3	4/5	3/5
86-95	2/3	2/4	4/4
96-00	3/3	3/4	4/5

Powers, Talents, & Contacts

I roll three times on the Secondary Abilities table. A 30 for powers grants her no powers, but leaves the potential for two (of technological origin) later. A 38 for her talents gives her three talents as well as the three from her Origin for a total of six. She has two more talents pending, to be gained through game play. Finally, a 59 on the contacts column allows her three contacts in addition to the one from her Origin gives her four contacts right now.

She has no powers now, so I don't need to worry about them yet.

Before choosing her talents, I need to think about her background. I think I'll give this heroine an espionage background, so I'll give her the following talents: Detective/Espionage, Law enforcement, Martial arts A and C, Guns, and First aid.

In keeping with her background, three of her contacts will be with the FBI, her college criminology professor, and SHIELD. This leaves one contact left to be determined through role-playing.

Background

I've decided this is a female hero with no secret identity. Given the good physical and mental abilities, the character's a fighter and a scholar—I choose to make her a young college graduate and neophyte SHIELD agent.

The rest of her origin, including her motivation and codename, are up to each Judge and whatever she wishes to do with the character. We've quickly generated a character on par the Black Widow, so finish her up and put her on the streets fighting crime!

Villains

The MSH system is set up to be a broad-based system that allows much flexibility in game play. Unfortunately, that same flexibility makes it difficult for the Judge to accurately gauge which villains are most appropriate to use against the PC heroes.

A vigilante-level campaign focuses on the "down-and-dirty" crime-fighting. Heroes in this campaign tend to deal more with drug-dealers, crime bosses, and gang wars than with aliens, evil doppelgangers, and gamma bombs. Street-level heroes tend to be normal humans trained to fight crime, but can be low-powered heroes as well. A majority of these heroes have secret identities, operate alone, and do not work within the law all the time. SHIELD campaigns are also considered vigilante-level campaigns, provided the emphasis is on the nonpowered spy-thriller action, not the high-tech gadgets or super-agents.

Sample campaigns

I've laid out some basic campaigns and some villains to populate said campaigns.

Golden Age: This 1940s campaign typifies the era when so many heroes took to the streets in 3-piece suits and domino masks to fight crime with their fists. Typical villains include Nazis, Bundists, gangsters, racketeers, etc. The recent "Invaders" miniseries is an example of this era. For more on this type of campaign, see "With Great Power" in issue #85 of the RPGA™ Networks POLYHEDRON Newszine.

SHIELD: SHIELD will always be the first and foremost of the super-spy agencies for me and it has great potential for a campaign. Given the wide range of weapons and equipment available, characters can push the power envelope on this campaign with plasma guns and super-lasers. Villains for SHIELD (and other spy agencies) for this level are Baron Wolfgang von Strucker and HYDRA, the ZODIAC cartel (its first incarnation), Fenris, and AIM. Shang-Chi, the Master of Kung Fu, and his M.I. 6 allies also fit into this campaign type.

"Crimebusters:" In the vein of pulp fiction, this campaign is the standard for the comic-book genre. The heroes' mission is to fight crime and injustice where they find it.

This campaign focuses on stopping normal and low-powered villains such as muggers, bank robbers, terrorists, and the odd ninja or two. Daredevil best highlights the solo hero for this campaign type, while such teams as Silver Sable and her Wild Pack take on larger numbers of the same. The villains' goals are anywhere from scoring a big haul from a bank robbery to destroying cities. Villains for this type of campaign include many of the lesser villains who fought Spider-Man, Iron Man,

Ant-Man, and others: The Vulture, Dr. Octopus, the original Enforcers, the Living Brain, the Black Cat (before she reformed), Blacklash, Discus, Stiletto, Lady-Killer, the Constrictor, the Leapfrog, the Melter, the Porcupine, Egghead, Crossfire, Bombshell, Oddball and the Death-Throws; ad infinitum. Other heroes (beyond PC heroes) might include a stint with Code Blue or the old Freedom Force ("Crimson Commando and Super Sabre could use your expertise for a mission.")

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Role-playing Reviews

Continued from page 78

with scenarios to challenge 30th-level PCs—what are they gonna do, fight planets?—but help presumably is on the way. Isn't it?

RIFTS* World Book Two: Atlantis, by Kevin Siembieda. Palladium Books, \$15. Thanks to the late show and old *Superman* comics, I assumed Atlantis was populated by people with fish tails who lived inside a big glass bubble. Guess again, says RIFTS game impresario Kevin Siembieda. Atlantis exists as a brutal wilderness dominated by the Splugorth, a monstrous alien race resembling spine-covered lumps of slime. The Splugorth engage in a variety of antisocial activities, not the least of which is a thriving interdimensional slave trade. A grotesque collection of creatures adds to the nightmarish ambiance, including the goo-secreting krelong and the zembahk, which looks like an ambulatory intestine with an oversized eyeball. The book's best section discusses Atlantean magic, an intricate system of tattoos, runes, and grisly bio-wizardry techniques that utilize parasites and surgery. Despite the absence of strong adventure hooks and an occasional lapse into silliness—the bio-surgery section walks a fine line between imaginative fantasy and adolescent gross-outs—the book is packed with so much compelling material that it's hard to resist.

GURPS Space Adventures, by David L. Pulver, Thomas S. Gressman, and William A. Barton. Steve Jackson Games, \$17. Two of the three entries in this collection of adventures for the GURPS Space game are no more than competent, unremarkable science fiction. But the third, "Beware the Health Police" by ace designer William Barton (assisted by Jeff Koke and Steve Jackson), blasts off in to realms unknown with a dazzling mix of cosmic adventure

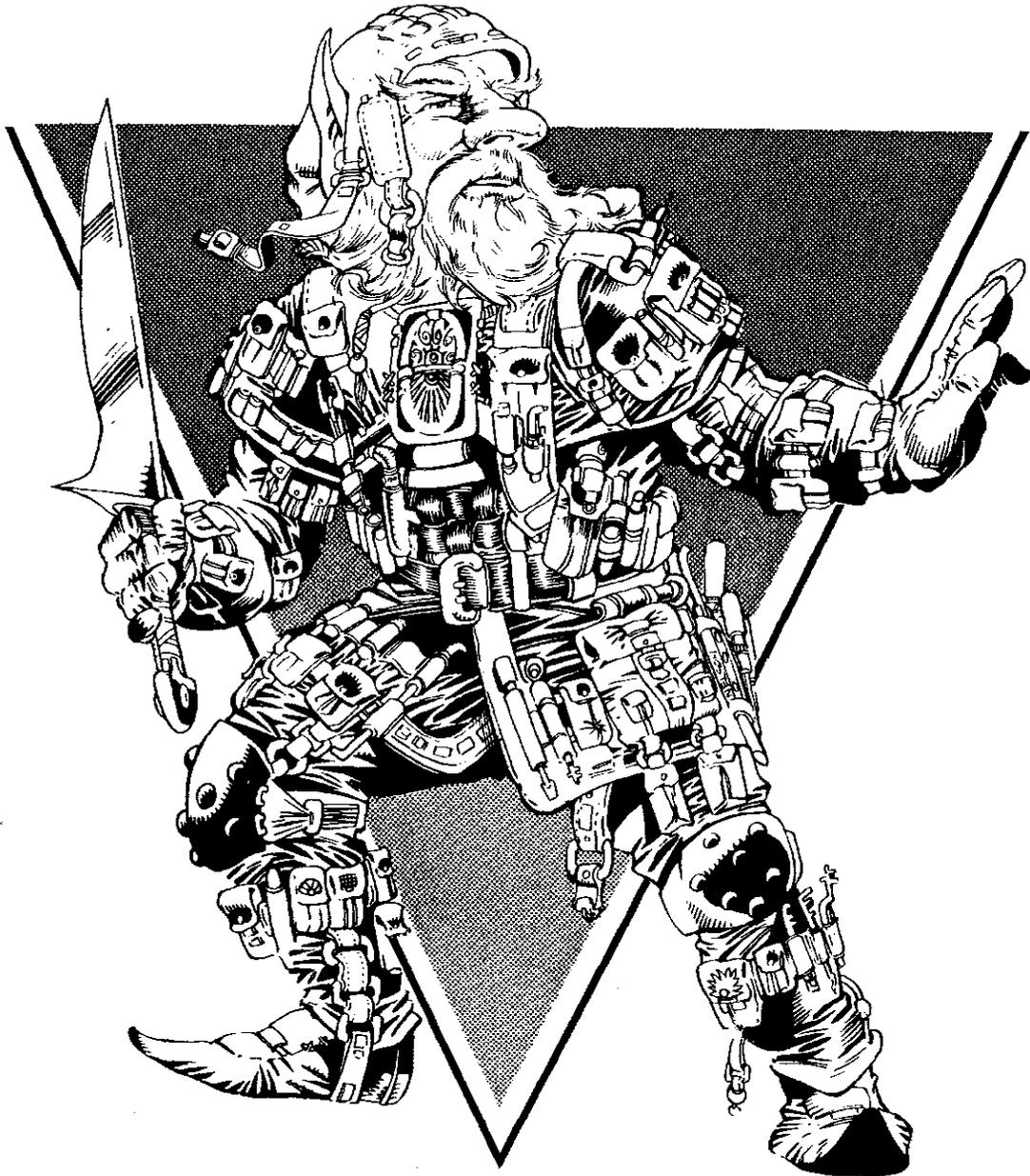
and comic invention. A chance engagement with a patrol ship results in a forced vacation on Survias, a health-obsessed planet where bacteria are the bane of civilization and hypochondria is a way of life. The plot involves a conspiracy to usurp the ruling class, but it's mainly an excuse to bounce the player characters from one lunatic encounter to another. A hospital official coerces the PCs into dangerous nose-hair experiments, the police attack them with spray disinfectants, a hover-ambulance carts them away for emergency toe surgery—and then things *really* get nuts. Great, goofy fun.

CORPS* World Book 1992, by Greg Porter. Blacksburg Tactical Research Center, \$10. Intended for the CORPS game, an intriguing RPG of international conspiracy, this impressive sourcebook provides data for about 150 countries, making it sort of a world almanac for role-players. Each country listing includes ratings for political corruption, standard of living, and human-rights violations, along with a capsule history of recent events. There's also plenty of fascinating trivia, ranging from the gun laws of Switzerland to the nuclear capacity of Thailand. Readable and informative, it's recommended to referees of any modern-era RPGs who want to inject a dose of reality into their campaigns. For information, write to: Blacksburg Tactical Research Center, 1925 Airy Circle, Richmond VA 23233.

Tales of the Reaching Moon, edited and published by David Hall. \$3.00/issue. A lively, handsome fanzine from England, *Tales of the Reaching Moon* dissects the RUNEQUEST* game with the precision of a brain surgeon. On the table in the Winter '93 issue are errata from the Avalon Hill Game Company's recent *Sun County* supplement, a scholarly analysis of the Cult of Revenant, and an intense adventure loosely based on *Apocalypse Now*. In a lengthy interview, RUNEQUEST contributor Sandy Petersen reflects on the game's early days and the outlook for the future (he's less than enthusiastic). For casual players, *Tales of the Reaching Moon* might as well be printed in Sanskrit, as evidenced by cryptic references to "Larcemal . . . third among the Five" and "the Orlanthi sun-god Elmal, formerly a loyal thane of Orlanth's who later evolved into Yelmalio." But if that's music to your ears, consider taking an issue on your next trip to Glorantha. For information, write to: David Gadbois, P.O. Box 49475, Austin TX 78765; or to: David Hall, 21 Stephenson Court, Osborne Street, Slough, SL1 1TN, England.

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Beyond the Dark Horizon

New spells and magical items for the DARK SUN® campaign world

by Gregory Detwiler

Artwork by Tom Baxa

The following is a collection of spells and magical items specific to the DARK SUN® campaign world of Athas. (Of course, similar spells and items could be developed on other worlds with slightly different materials.) Though unofficial, they are done in the spirit of the campaign rules, and could serve as examples of ways in which DMs could expand the DARK SUN campaign on their own.

Wizard spells

Erdlu claw (Alteration)

Level: 1

Range: Touch

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 5 rounds/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

When this spell is cast on a humanoid being, its fingernails grow into talons, precisely like the claws of the erdlu bird. Once in this state, they do damage as hand razors (S-M: 1d6 + 1; L: 1d4 + 1). The spell was developed by elven mages (Pre-servers, of course) who belonged to no-

mad tribes, and it has since been adopted by all magic-using races who are both humanoid and do not already have clawed hands. The claws do no damage to creatures that can only be struck by magical weapons. In general, this spell is memorized by a mage as a weapon of last resort, if an enemy actually closes for melee. There are unconfirmed rumors that the spell is used in the process of enchanting real hand razors.

The material component is a single erdlu claw.

Giant fur (Alteration)

Level: 1

Range: Touch

Components: V,S,M

Duration: Special



Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: 1 creature
Saving Throw: None

This spell causes the recipient's body hair to grow thickly in a matter of seconds, covering him with a layer of matted hair that provides armor protection equivalent to that of padded armor (AC 8). Any member of a mammalian race, intelligent or not, may benefit from this spell, even if he keeps his hair shaved off like a dwarf or mul (thri-kreen and other nonmammalian beings are not affected by this spell). Successive castings on a targeted individual have no effect until the initial casting is no longer in effect. The armor does not hinder movement or prohibit spell-casting—it's the recipient's own body hair, after all—and the hair shrinks back into his body at the spell's end. The spell lasts until successfully dispelled or until the wearer takes cumulative damage totaling greater than 8 hp + 1 hp/level of the caster. This spell's protection is cumulative with shield and Dexterity bonuses, but not with protective spells like armor.

The material component for this spell is a strand of giant hair.

Petrification (Alteration)

Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V,S,M
Duration: 5 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched
Saving Throw: None

This spell petrifies nonliving wood, so it cannot be used in combat against live treelike monsters. If cast on a wooden weapon, it causes that weapon to have the properties of a weapon of stone, such as flint or obsidian. This effectively reduces the weapon's attack penalty from -3 to -2, and its damage penalty from -2 to -1; the weapon is now also completely fireproof. To a native of impoverished Athas, this can mean the difference between life and death in combat. The *dweomer* lasts until the spell's duration ends or until an enchanted missile strikes its target. Low-level mages often create their first magical weapons with this spell. One large or two small weapons may be affected by this spell (as per enchanted weapon). Weapons normally made of wood (clubs, staves, etc.) gain no additional benefits other than being fireproof.

The material component is a chip of petrified wood.

Boneiron (Enchantment)

Level: 2
Range: Touch
Components: V,S,M
Duration: 5 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1 turn
Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched
Saving Throw: None

This toned-down version of enchanted weapon transforms bone weapons into their regular metal counterparts with

regards to attack and damage capabilities. All penalties are thus removed, and there is no chance of the weapon breaking. Casting the spell on a single weapon repeatedly will not cause the weapon to become +1 or better. As with enchanted weapon, the only time the *dweomer* ends early is when an enchanted missile hits its target. The spell may be used in the creation of regular magical weapons.

The material component for this spell is the tooth of a carnivorous animal.

Bonewood (Alteration)

Level: 2
Range: Touch
Components: V,S,M
Duration: 5 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched
Saving Throw: None

This spell toughens wooden weapons sufficiently so that they are the equivalents of their bone counterparts; thus, their attack and damage penalties drop from -3 and -2 respectively to -1 in both cases. The weapons are also fireproof while the spell lasts. One large or two small weapons may be affected by a single casting of this spell; missiles will lose their enchantment early if they hit a target. Repeated castings provide no additional benefits. Anyone wishing to create a relatively powerful bone weapon must use enchant an item and permanency spells as well. Aside from being fireproof, normal wooden weapons such as clubs and staves gain no additional benefits.

The material components for this spell are a 3" strip of wood and a bone of roughly equal length.

Erdlu hide (Alteration)

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

The mages of elven nomad tribes developed this spell to provide an unarmored mage with effective armor when he needs it the most. This spell causes the recipient's skin to become as tough as the scale-feathered hide of an *erdlu*, giving him the equivalent of scale mail (AC 6). This armor adds no weight or encumbrance to the wearer, lasting until successfully dispelled or until the wearer sustains cumulative damage totally greater than 8 hp + 1 hp/level of the caster. A protected mage may still cast spells. It is cumulative with Dexterity and/or shield bonuses, but not with any other protective spell, such as *giant fur* or *armor*.

The material components for this spell are a pair of the scaly feathers of an *erdlu*.

Ranike cloud (Evocation)

Level: 3
Range: 10 yards

Components: V,S,M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: 40' wide, 20' high,
20' deep cloud
Saving Throw: None

This spell creates a cloud of pungent smoke exactly like that produced when the sap of the *ranike* tree is burned. This smoke limits visibility as a blizzard or dense fog does, but its main asset is its ability to repel all insects and insectlike creatures, including *thri-kreen*, that come in contact with it. Once those creatures are engulfed in the cloud, they immediately flee the area in the manner of undead turned by a cleric. Intelligent insects like the *thri-kreen* may run before they are touched, once they see what's coming. The material component is a chunk of wood from the *ranike* tree.

The cloud moves away from the caster at a speed of 10' per round, rolling along the surface of the ground. A moderate breeze can alter the cloud's course, but it will not move back toward its caster. A strong wind breaks it up within four rounds, and stronger winds keep the cloud from forming in the first place. Very thick vegetation disperses the cloud in two rounds, but the only place on Athas that qualifies as such terrain is the *halflings'* forest. The smoke does not sink as many vapors do (like a *cloudkill* spell); it also cannot penetrate liquids or be cast underwater—not a great concern on Athas.

Reverse fossilization (Enchantment)

Level: 3
Range: Touch
Components: V,S,M
Duration: 5 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched
Saving Throw: None

This spell causes stone weapons to become equivalent to their bone counterparts, cutting their attack penalty from -2 to -1 (damage is the same). This spell is not as potent as *stoneiron* (see later), but is far more common on Athas due to its relative simplicity. One large or two small weapons may be enchanted by a single casting of this spell; missiles will lose the *dweomer* when they hit a target.

The material component of this spell is a piece of fossilized bone.

Stoneiron (Enchantment)

Level: 3
Range: Touch
Components: V,S,M
Duration: 5 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched
Saving Throw: None

This low-powered version of the *enchanted weapon* spell causes stone (flint, obsidian, etc.) weapons to have the attack and damage scores of ordinary steel weapons, eliminating all penalties and chances

of breakage. One large or two small weapons may be affected by a single casting of this spell, and the dweomer can be dispelled early only if an enchanted missile strikes its target. The only way to make the effects permanent is to use *enchant an item* and *permanency* spells as well; repeated castings do not improve the weapon's abilities any further.

The material component for this spell is a small chunk of stone, of the same type as the weapon to be enchanted.

Woodiron (Enchantment)

Level: 4

Range: Touch

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 5 rounds/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Weapon(s) touched

Saving Throw: None

This is a specialized version of *enchant-ed weapon* that works only on wooden weapons. When the spell is cast on a wooden weapon, that weapon becomes as hard as its iron counterparts on other fantasy worlds, with no penalties to attack or damage. Weapons normally made of wood, such as the club and quarterstaff, are granted a bonus of +1 on both attack and damage rolls. Only one spell can be cast on a weapon at a time; the effects are not cumulative, even with normal wooden weapons like those mentioned above. Wooden shields are also affected by this spell, becoming +1 for defensive purposes. Both weapons and shields are fireproof for the spells duration.

Missiles of wood enchanted in this manner lose their dweomer as soon as they hit a target; otherwise, the spell lasts for its full duration. It is also used in the manufacture of regular magical weapons and shields.

The material component for this spell is a chip of the bronze-hard agafari wood of Nibenay.

Erdlu egg (Enchantment)

Level: 5

Range: Touch

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 day

Casting Time: 2 turns

Area of Effect: 1 egg

Saving Throw: None

This spell causes an old erdлу egg filled with sand (the material components) to become a fresh erdлу egg, with contents fit to eat. On any other world, the duration would be too short to do any practical good, but on Athas, the disappearance of the egg's water will not come about until after it has already been sweated out of the recipient's body. Elven nomads developed this spell as a means of creating an emergency food supply. Once the created food is eaten, the shell disappears, so a new shell is required for each casting. Thus, possession of this spell doubles the number of erdлу eggs any tribe has.

Kank shell (Alteration)

Level: 5

Range: Touch

Components: V,S,M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

This is a defensive spell developed by mages of the elven kank-herding tribes, enabling the recipient to go without armor in the terrific heat of Athas until he actually needs it. When the spell is cast, the beneficiary's body or torso is transformed into the chitinous carapace of a kank, giving him the protection of plate mail (AC 3). This armor lasts until successfully dispelled or the wearer takes cumulative damage totalling over 8 hp + 1 hp/level of the caster. It has no effective weight or encumbrance, and does not affect spell-casting. It cannot be added to other spells, such as *giant fur*, but is cumulative with shield and Dexterity bonuses.

The material component for this spell is a fist-sized shard of kank shell.

Isolate templar (Abjuration)

Level: 6

Range: 100 yards

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 turn/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 1 templar

Saving Throw: None

This is a specialized, offensive version of *anti-magic* shell, designed to affect one humanoid creature. When this invisible field surrounds a templar, that templar is automatically cut off from his sorcerer-king in regard to acquiring priestly spells. If the templar is maintaining a spell, such as *wall of fire*, then that spell automatically ends as the supporting magical energies are cut off. The templar is thrown back on his own resources, including magical items, normal weaponry, and whatever psionic powers he has. The templar still retains those spells granted but not yet cast.

Unless the sorcerer-king is watching the individual templar or a messenger tells him what's happening, the sorcerer-king will not realize that this spell is in operation. Only a sorcerer-king can cast a *dispel magic* spell powerful enough to get rid of an *isolate templar* spell. By the same token, the spell cannot be successfully cast on a sorcerer-king to cut off all his templars from spells.

The material component of this spell is a gemstone of at least 1,000 gp value.

Priest spells

Clerics of the Air can use the following spells: *petrification*, *boneiron*, *bonewood*, *reverse fossilization*, *stoneiron*, and *woodiron*. Clerics of the Earth may use *petrification*, *bonewood*, *reverse fossilization*, *stoneiron*, and *woodiron*. Clerics of Fire may use *reverse fossilization* and *stoneiron*, but only with weapons of obsid-

ian. Clerics of Water can use *petrification*, *boneiron*, *bonewood*, and *woodiron*. Both Clerics of the Earth and those of Water may use *ranike cloud*, and all clerics may use *isolate templar*.

Which spells a druid may use depends on the Sphere he specializes in. Druids may use *isolate templar*, though in their version the magical field is visible and composed of either violet mist, flame, blown sand, or steam, depending on the druids Sphere.

In all cases, the above spells are of the same level as clerics' spells as they were as wizards' spells.

Heart call

Level: 5

Sphere: Necromantic

Range: 30 yards

Components: V,S,M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 1 person

Saving Throw: Special

This spell was developed by the sorcerer-king of Draj, and so far as is known only his templars make use of it. When this spell is cast, the templar points a hand at the targeted individual, who must then save vs. death magic. If he fails, his heart is literally torn from his breast, ripping through any covering clothing or armor in the process, and it flies toward the caster's hand where it may be grasped. This means instant death for the victim. If the victim makes a successful save, he takes damage equal to that of a *cause serious wounds* spell (2d8 + 1 hp).

The material component of this spell is a dried-out chunk from the heart of a humanoid being.

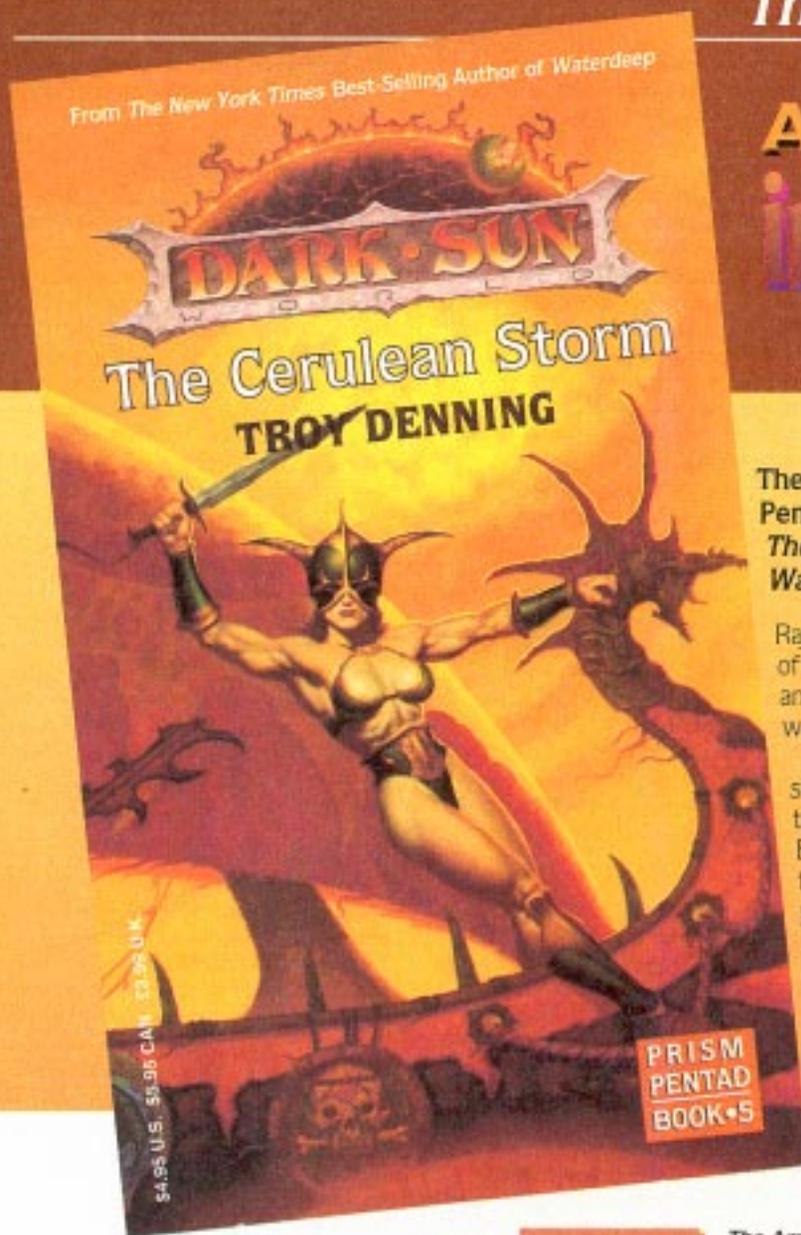
Athasian magical items

Ranike rod

This rod is made of the wood of the ranike tree and is a useful weapon against the giant insects of Athas. In combat, it strikes as a club +1 and may be used by any PC class that can wield a club. Whenever it strikes a giant insect, including a thri-kreen, it gives off a puff of smoke like that created by burning ranike sap, expending one of its 41-50 (1d10 + 40) charges in the process. This cloud stays around the target, no matter what the victim does, reducing it to utter helplessness if a saving throw vs. rods is failed at -4 on the roll. The foe can neither attack nor defend, and its only movement is to fall to the ground and thrash blindly in agony. This helplessness gives any enemy that strikes at the victim a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the cloud dissipates. If the *ranike rod* is used in further attacks, it will not release more clouds on an already-struck victim until the original one has dissipated in four rounds, thus saving charges. It may not be recharged. The rod is worth 1,000 xp to a wizard who makes it.

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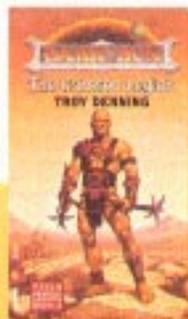
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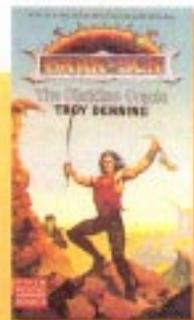


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Ranike staff

This enchanted staff has the same powers as the *ranike rod*, though it strikes any target as a *quarterstaff* +1. It is also restricted to 25 charges (1d6 + 19) at most. If two charges are expended at once, the staff creates a billowing cloud of ranike sap smoke, 40' wide, 20' high, and 20' deep. This cloud's movement is controlled by the staff's wielder as long as there is no strong wind. Wind dissipates the cloud as it does a *cloudkill* spell. The cloud travels at a speed of 10' per round and lasts for 12 rounds. The smoke is not heavy like *cloudkill* vapor, so it will not sink into low areas, making it useless in driving out a colony of giant ants from their underground nest. However, it is still a useful weapon, particularly against the thri-kreen. The staff may not be recharged; it is worth 2,500 xp to the mage who fashions it.

Erdlu canteen

This magical canteen is made from the empty shell of an erdlu egg; the entire shell must be available for the canteen to be created. Once per day, upon utterance of the command word, the canteen fills itself up with the fresh red yolks of an erdlu—a refreshing treat to any inhabitant of Athas. This item is meant to serve as a personal canteen for a lone traveler. It is possible for a member of some adventuring group to create yolks more than once per day, but the canteen must never create them more than seven times in a single one-week period. If the owner foolishly tries for the eighth time in a week to create yolks, the energy of their creation also causes the *erdlu* canteen to explode, doing 1d4 hp damage to anyone in a 5' radius and literally leaving its owner with egg on his face. The *erdlu canteen* is worth 1,500 xp to the mage who creates it.

Petrified weapons and shields

These items are wooden weapons and shields that have been permanently enchanted with *petrification* spells, making them equivalent to weapons made of stone (flint, obsidian, etc.) instead of wood. These weapons may still break in battle, but until they do, they strike with attack and damage penalties of -1 and -2 instead of the -2 and -3 penalties of normal wooden weapons. These items are also fireproof, and this is the only real benefit a wooden shield will gain from this treatment unless it's a spiked buckler. Wooden weapons such as clubs or quarterstaves are also limited to being fireproof as a benefit. These weapons hardly seem worth the trouble of enchanting, but the process is good practice for apprentice mages, so *petrified* weapons are fairly common. Besides, when fighting an opponent with a torch—a common event in the arenas of Athas—it's a comfort to know that a wooden weapon won't be burned into uselessness. It is also possible to bury *petrified* items for use as hidden markers, as they do radiate a dweomer

that can be located by a *detect magic* spell. These weapons are worth 100 xp each to their creators.

Purple-leaf blades

These are magical knives, daggers, and swords created from the razor-sharp blades of purple grass that grow in the Athasian wilderness. Each weapon is made from an individual blade of grass that has had one or more *plant growth* spells cast upon it. The type of weapon gained depends on how many castings were used in the process of enchantment: A knife rates one casting; a dagger two; a short sword three; a long sword, broad sword (the latter created by trimming off the tip a bit), or bastard sword four; and a two-handed sword five. Because of the shape of the grass blades, only straight-bladed swords may be created in this manner; no curved weapons such as khopeshes or scimitars are possible.

A *purple-leaf blade* does the same damage as its regular steel counterpart. It does not break in combat, but if a natural 20 is rolled upon hitting an opponent, the blade bends out of line. It takes one round of effort to straighten the blade out, after which it may be used as before. These weapons are both fireproof and rustproof. They are worth 10 xp per casting of a *plant growth* spell required in their creation; a knife is thus worth 10, a dagger 20, a short sword 30, etc.

Bonewood weapons

These wooden weapons have been enchanted to have the properties of those of bone. Aside from being fireproof, there are no additional benefits to weapons normally made of wood, such as clubs and quarterstaves, but all other weapons have their attack and damage penalties reduced from -3 and -2, respectively, to -1 in both cases. *Bonewood* shields are also possible, but their only benefit is to be fireproof. These weapons still break when a 20 is rolled. As with *petrified* weapons, *bonewood* weapons are more common than their effectiveness would seem to warrant, due to the relative ease of their construction and the practice they provide for magical apprentices. Such a weapon is worth 10 times as many experience points for a mage making it as the gold-piece cost of a normal iron weapon (e.g., a *bonewood glaive-guisarme* is worth 100 xp).

Fossilized weapons

Technically speaking, these should be called *reverse fossilization* weapons, but *fossilized* is much shorter. These are weapons of stone, whether flint, obsidian, or some other rock, that have been permanently enchanted to have the properties of bone weaponry. This gives them an attack penalty of only -1, instead of their original -2; damage is the same for both bone and stone weapons. These weapons, unfortunately, still break in battle if a 20 is rolled, but at least they give aspiring

young mages some defense until they are ready to handle serious enchantments. The experience-point value for the mage creating *fossilized* weapons is five times the gold-piece value of a normal metal weapon; a *fossilized footman's mace* is thus worth 40 xp.

Woodiron weapons

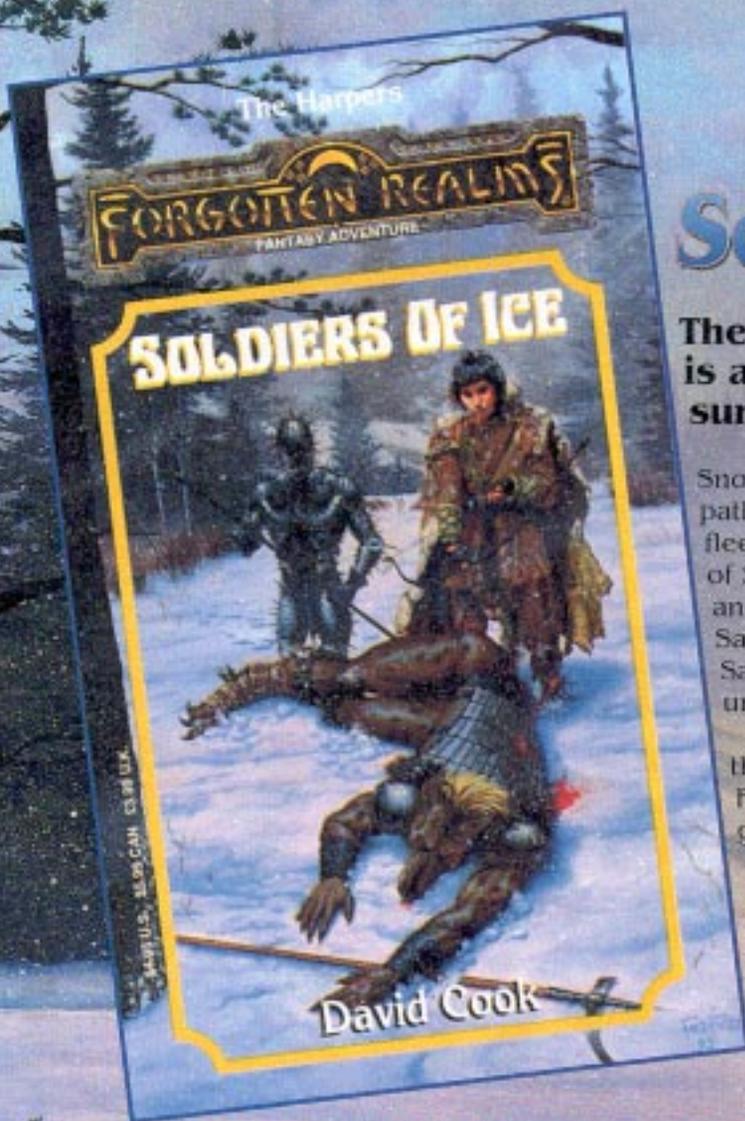
These are wooden weapons which have been given the properties of metallic weaponry through enchantment, thus eliminating all penalties for attacking and damage. They are also fireproof and unbreakable. Weapons normally made of wood, such as the club and quarterstaff, are now +1 on attack and damage rolls; they do not have this bonus otherwise and cannot hit creatures that can only be harmed by weapons of +1 or better. Shields may also be *woodiron*, being effectively +1 for purposes of defense as well as being fireproof. Multiply the gold-piece value of a normal weapon or shield by 25, and you have the experience-point value of these weapons for the mage creating them. For example, a *woodiron short sword* is worth 250 xp. These weapons are invaluable on Athas, though they would no doubt be disdainfully sniffed at elsewhere, as they give fighters good weapons without cutting into Athas' woefully small supply of iron.

Stoneiron weapons

These weapons are similar to *woodiron* weapons, in that they have the strength and normal combat abilities of regular iron weapons. However, these weapons are made of stone. Effectively unbreakable, they are another means of giving selected Athasian warriors weapons as good as steel arms without cutting into the world's scanty supplies of iron. Because stone is a better beginning material than wood, *stoneiron* weaponry is less valuable in experience points as are *woodiron* weapons, the experience-point total being 20 times the price of a normal iron weapon in gold pieces. For example, a *stoneiron warhammer* is worth 40 xp to the mage creating it.

Boneiron weapons

These weapons fall into the same category as the last two classes, except that they are made of bone. Chitin weapons are also covered in this category. As with the other two classes of weaponry, these weapons act as ordinary metallic weapons, having no penalties in battle and being unbreakable. Since bone is the best of the nonmetallic substances used in weapons creation, a mage does not need to expend so much magical energy in its transformation. Thus, the experience-point value in making a *boneiron* weapon is only 15 times the gold-piece value of a regular metal weapon. A *boneiron trident* is thus worth 225 xp to the mage creating it, a *boneiron battle axe* 75 xp, etc.



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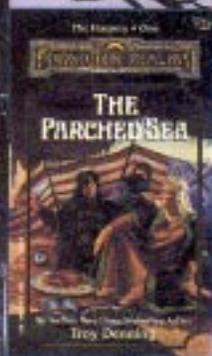
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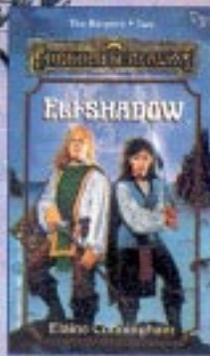
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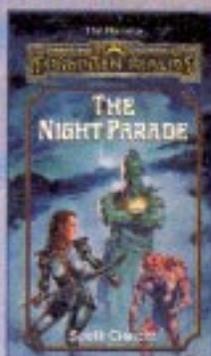
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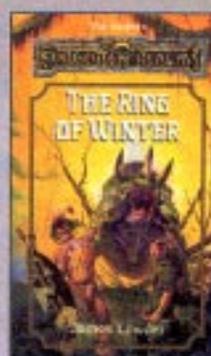
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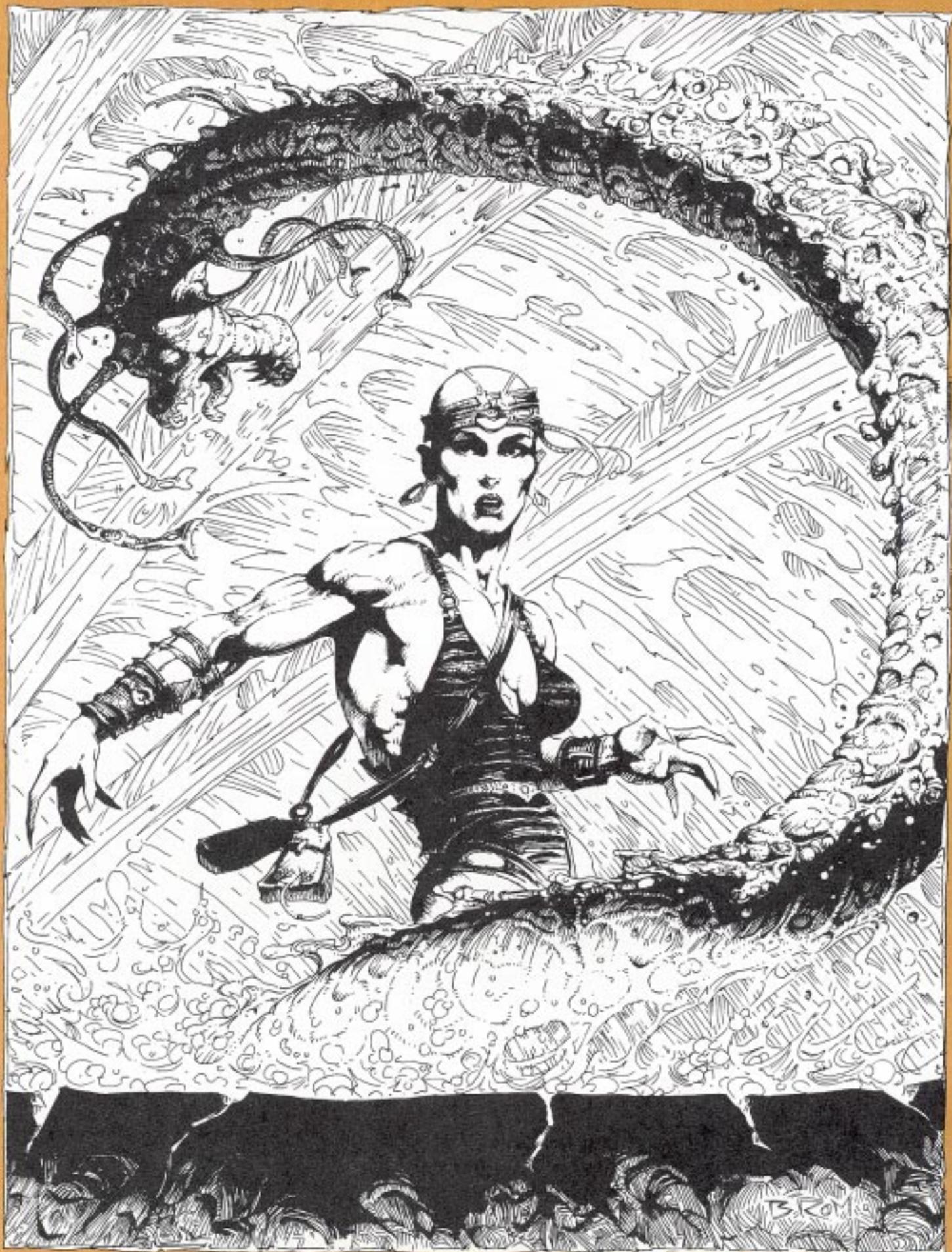


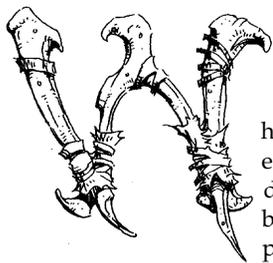
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Who is responsible for this?" Lazra clenched the gem so tightly her fist shook. Her back to the workers, she stared at the tree the gem had destroyed: Once, the fragrant-blossomed cherry tree had been the pride of the king's garden. Now it was

withered beyond recognition, its leaves blackened and curled.

She whirled to face the workers, holding the gem by the chain that pierced it. The dark crystal swung back and forth. From a distance, it looked like any other gem. You had to look at it closely to see the arcane symbols etched into each facet.

Her eyes ranged over the eight slaves who had been gathered here. They knelt on the ground between two half-giant guards, some still clutching their gardening tools. The huge red sun was high overhead, and even the lush vegetation that surrounded them did little to break the heat. Nervous sweat trickled down their faces.

Lazra strode up and down the line of workers. Just four feet tall, she was little more than half the height of the human slaves. But her badge of office—the black cassock she wore over her muscular dwarven body—gave her a power over them that they couldn't hope to match by mere size.

She stopped in front of the most frightened-looking worker. Holding the gem in front of his eyes, she let it dangle there. "Well? Was it you?"

"No, Most Holy High Templar of the King's Garden. No! It wasn't me!" He was a boy, clad only in the ragged remains of what had once been elegant silk pants. Probably a petty noble, by the soft look of him. He was lucky not to have wound up doing hard labor building King Kalak's ziggurat. He'd had a good chance of surviving his sentence as a slave. Until now.

"So none of you will admit to this senseless act of destruction?" Lazra asked.

The slaves refused to meet her eyes.

"All right then. You will die, one by one, until one of you tells me who hung the gem in the tree." She pointed to the frightened-looking boy and caught the eye of one of the hulking guards. "Him first."

"No! Wait! I—"

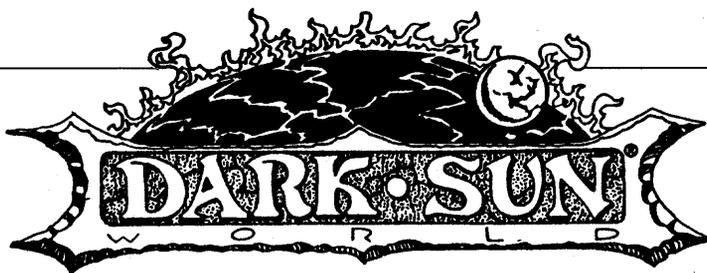
The half-giant's wide iron sword whistled down, striking the boy's shoulder and neatly splitting him in two. The other workers screamed and cringed as his blood sprayed them, but none dared run. The half-giants, twice as tall as any human, would cut them to ribbons before they even reached the high walls that encircled the gardens.

Lazra swung the gem before the faces of the grovelling slaves. "Well?" she asked them. "Who would like to be the next to die?" She singled out a woman who had closed her eyes and had gone pale with fear. "You?"

The half-giant lifted his still-dripping sword.

"Stop!"

Lazra turned to confront the slave at the end of the line. It was Indigo, the freewoman who had been sentenced to slavery only last week, the mul who had proved too rebellious for the ziggurat work crews. Lazra had asked for a strong-backed slave to haul ornamental stones for the



Ashes to Ashes

by Lisa Smedman

Illustrations by Brom

garden's new walkway, and a fellow templar who had wanted to get even over some past insult had transferred Indigo to Lazra's work crew. The half-breed had the worst of both races, human and dwarf. Her bronzed back was welted with whip marks. Her cheeks were covered with tattoos that resembled tiny blue tears. Lazra would give her something to cry about.

"Why?" Lazra's voice was thin with fury.

Indigo shrugged, and glared defiantly at Lazra. "I don't like taking orders, especially from templars. I'm a free woman."

"Then die like one," Lazra retorted. She signalled to the guard.

Before the half-giant could bring his sword into play, Indigo dove for his knees. Touching one hand to her cheek, she slapped his leg and shouted, "Maji jeruhiwa!"

The half-giant screamed in agony as a gaping wound opened on his leg. The other guard, startled, hesitated a moment. Touching the tattoo on her cheek a second time, she flung a hand toward him and made a grasping motion. "Kupinga!"

The half-giant suddenly became rigid, then slowly teetered. With a thud that raised a cloud of dust, he fell to the ground.

Lazra screamed in rage as she realized the extent of the trick that had been played upon her by her fellow templar. This slave knew how to use magic, and now she was making her escape. Already the fleet-footed mul had reached the garden wall and was climbing.

Conjuring up a spell of her own, Lazra cast it at the fleeing woman. Immediately, the flowering vines that draped the wall began to twist like snakes, entwining the mul.

But the slave proved even stronger than she looked. Ripping the vines from her body, she tore them to pieces as fast as Lazra could send them toward her. Hauling herself out of their leafy grip, Indigo reached the top of the wall. She flipped a rude gesture at her former captor, then disappeared into the city beyond.

The silk merchant lifted the last bolt of cloth away, revealing a trapdoor in the floor of the warehouse. Cautiously, Indigo opened it. The dark space underneath smelled dusty and old.

"This leads to the undercity?" she asked.

The merchant nodded. "Just follow the support pillars until you see the well."

"Right." Indigo dropped down onto the floor below, then reached up for her lantern. As soon as she had it lit, the merchant began closing the trapdoor.

"Good luck."

As the echoes of his voice died away, Indigo lifted her lantern and peered into the gloom. The ceiling was low enough that she could touch its beams without raising her hand far above her head. The space to either side was choked with dusty cobwebs, but a clear space led off into the distance, following a row of pillars. The ceiling sagged in several places under the weight of the buildings overhead; combined with the darkness, it made Indigo feel claustrophobic. Best to get moving.

Indigo had intended to leave Tyr immediately after

yesterday's escape from the king's gardens. But then she heard, through her contacts in the elven market, that there was good coin to be had if you were a water elemental who knew how to speak with the dead. She had quickly gone to check out the story and had found there was gold to back up the rumors.

Her employers turned out to be part of a secret society of mages known as the Veiled Alliance, and it was a strange errand they wanted her to run. Deep in the subterranean passages that lay beneath the city of Tyr, they said, was an ancient well. One of their spies, a human named Evrim, had discovered it as he was telepathically relaying what he had learned about the underground passages to mapmakers above. He had paused to get a drink of water. Then, before the spy could relay a key piece of information about a trapdoor leading to the city treasury, something had risen from the well and killed him. Indigo was to use her magic to locate Evrim and learn the location of the trapdoor.

The monster in the well must have been a water elemental. At least, that was Indigo's best guess. Why else would her employers have wanted someone who worshipped the elemental sphere of water? Now, with an expensive metal sword in her hand and her up-front half-payment safely hidden back at the inn where thieves wouldn't find it, she was looking for the well. Unless, of course, something better came along.

Indigo had gone barely one hundred feet when she heard a faint clicking noise. Pushing her way through the cobwebs, she put an ear against the wall. There. The clicking was louder now. Was that a faint hint of light, coming from a crack in the bottom of the wall?

She thumped the stonework with the flat of her hand. There was a hollow space behind it, all right. Scraping away the dirt that encrusted the wall, Indigo held the lantern closer. She could just see the outline of a door. There was no handle, but a hard shove with her shoulder ought to do the trick. Setting her lantern on the floor, Indigo ran at the door.

With a groaning of rusted hinges, the door fell onto the floor. Immediately, Indigo's eyes were struck by a brilliant light. Coughing from the dust, she shielded her eyes and raised her sword. From all around her came the tinkling of glass.

The falling door had torn a hole in the most beautiful spiderweb she had ever seen. Made entirely of crystal, it completely filled the small room the door had revealed. Gems glittered everywhere in its many strands. One of these, as long as Indigo's palm, was sending out a cone of bright light. As it passed through the strands of the web, the light was broken into thousands of colorful rainbows that danced on the walls as the web shivered.

Indigo grinned. The gems in this room would make her a very wealthy woman indeed.

Then the light dimmed, and a spider dropped on her head.

Lazra sipped her sapwine, savoring its bitter taste and ignoring the other patrons of the tavern. The inn was on the edge of Tyr's elven market, bordering the warrens that housed some of the city's shadier citizens. It was

where Lazra came when she wanted to get away from the backstabbing bureaucracy that served King Kalak. Swapping her templar's robes for commoner's clothing, she had slipped anonymously into the evening crowd.

The tart, sappy taste of the wine reminded Lazra of the trees she cherished and nurtured. For ninety-six years she had been keeper of the king's gardens. She had made it her life's work—her dwarven focus—to create the most beautiful, most diverse collection of plants this desert world had ever known. It was bad enough that all of the plants had been ailing since water supplies were diverted to quench the thirst of the army of slaves that labored day and night on the king's ziggurat, but yesterday's loss of one of her favorite trees was even more troubling.

The cherry tree had been more than a mere ornament in the garden. It was a tree of life, a living shield against defiling magic. Without its protective properties, should a defiler cast a spell anywhere in the vicinity of the garden, a wide circle of its plants would be reduced to lifeless ash. If enough spells were cast . . .

Lazra shuddered. A dwarf who failed in her focus became a banshee, doomed to forever repeat her hopeless task. Thank the elements there was more than one tree of life in the king's garden!

Swirling the murky wine in her glass, Lazra contemplated the complexities of acquiring a new tree to replace the one she had just lost. It would mean going, cap in hand, to one of the templars whose magic was powerful enough to enchant a normal sapling. Lazra cursed. If only she hadn't been born a dwarf, she might herself have been granted the spell by King Kalak. But the innate resistance to magic that her dwarven heritage conveyed made the higher magics an impossible dream. She had tried non-magical methods of creating a tree of life—planting its seeds, grafting pieces of it onto other trees—but so far nothing had worked.

Lost in her thoughts, Lazra did not at first notice the half-elf who slipped into the seat across the table from her. A lanky man nearly twice her height, he was obviously no pauper; both ends of the spear he carried were tipped with metal blades.

The half-elf wiped his chin with a slow, deliberate motion and nodded a greeting. "My father was a templar," he said in a low voice.

The words startled Lazra. Had she been recognized? As servants and bureaucrats of the king, templars held great power in Tyr, but usually that power was backed up by the strong arms of half-giant enforcers. Without her black robe, Lazra would have trouble summoning assistance if the patrons of the bar turned ugly.

Instead, she answered with a noncommittal, "I think you mistake me for someone else. My mother was a gardener, and so am I."

The half-elf winked. "You come of good stock." Then he leaned forward across the table and spoke to her in rapid, conspiratorial tones. "My name's Caer. I haven't much time; the templars are looking for me. They've captured three members of the alliance already."

Lazra felt her eyes widen, but she kept the rest of her face carefully composed. This man was a member of the Veiled Alliance, the band of rogue magicians dedicated to

destroying King Kalak. Already their machinations had halted construction of the ziggurat for several days, sending the aged king into spasms of fury. Through blind luck, Lazra's response must have been a password of some sort. Now she was in this man's confidence. If she could learn more about the alliance's plans, she could earn such favor with the king that her requests for tools, seeds, a greater share of the city's precious water supply—all would be granted.

"What's our next move?" Lazra asked, her sapwine forgotten.

The half-elf handed her a heavy gold ring. It was ornately crafted and set with a pale green stone. "Give this to Sadira," he said, pressing the ring into Lazra's hand. "Tell her to give it to her champion. It will shield his thoughts when the time comes to strike the blow against Kalak."

Lazra swallowed hard. If Kalak died, every spell he had ever granted his templars would vanish like dust on the wind—her own spells as well. "When will the attack be made?"

"Three days from now. At the gladiatorial games celebrating the completion of the ziggurat," he said. Then he glanced at the window. "Templars!" he hissed.

Before Lazra could ask another question, the half-elf had slipped out the inn's back door and was lost in the warrens.

Indigo flung herself to one side as the spider landed on her. As she hit the web, she realized she'd made a mistake. The glass strands sliced into her side like obsidian knives, and she gasped with pain.

The spider, still clinging to her, plunged one of its forelegs into Indigo's shoulder. The crystal tip dug deep, grating against bone. When the spider pulled it free, blood welled from the puncture. Indigo tried to retaliate, but although her sword blow should have struck the spider, her weapon slowed as she tried to complete the stroke. Within a few inches of the spider's body, it felt as if the sword were passing through thick syrup. Then the monster sank its fangs into her arm, and numbness began to spread through her body.

Spinning around, supporting herself by the door frame, Indigo staggered out of the room. The beam of her lantern struck the spider, sending sparkles of light dancing through the passageway. The entire body of the spider was made of crystal. And crystal, like glass, could be broken.

Roaring with pain, Indigo charged headlong at one of the stone pillars. She smashed into it full force, crushing the spider against it, and gave a yell of triumph as she heard a splintering crack. As the spider fell from her shoulder she scooped up a piece of timber, then brought it down square on the thing's back. The monster, stunned, was no longer able to project the magical aura that had protected it before. The blow connected, and the spider shattered into thousands of tiny shards.

Indigo touched a hand to the tattooed tears on her cheek, and cast a spell. "Sumu kupua." Gradually, the feeling in her fingers returned as the poison was pushed from her body.

Cautiously, Indigo held her lantern just inside the spi-

der's lair. There was no movement, no second glittering monster crouched in the web. Using her sword, she broke a path through the crystal strands, plucking the gems like ripe fruits and popping them into the pouch at her belt. This mission was going to be profitable, indeed! Picking up the glowing crystal, which had reverted to its full brilliance, she turned it over in her hands.

Triangular in cross-section, the crystal was about six inches long. The beam that came out of one end was about ten feet long and cast a brilliant white triangle of light nearly three feet wide. It was brighter than any lantern beam and had to be magic. She slid the crystal into her pocket.

Tithian, high templar to the king, rolled the gold ring between thumb and finger. Pressing his thin lips together, he regarded Lazra over the curve of his hawkish nose. "You say a member of the Veiled Alliance gave you this? You, a templar?"

"As I told you, I wasn't wearing my robe. He mistook me for someone else." Lazra ground her teeth. She had asked for an audience with King Kalak himself, and instead she was talking to Tithian. He was only one step removed from the king, but he was just as likely to pretend he had gathered the information himself and never mention Lazra's name.

"The information is redundant," Tithian said, closing his hand around the ring. "Sadira is already known to me."

"She is?" Lazra's mouth dropped open. "Then you have her in custody?"

Tithian shook his head. "She's more use to me where she is."

"But the date of the attempt on King Kalak's life. You didn't know that, surely."

"No." Tithian rose from his chair, indicating the audience was at an end. "But steps have already been taken to control whatever situation arises."

"What steps?"

Tithian gripped Lazra's arm tightly with his long fingers and glared into her eyes. "If there's a need for you to know, I'll tell you," he said. "In the meantime, keep this information to yourself."

Steering Lazra firmly out the door, Tithian closed it on her protests.

Lazra fumed. So her information was useless, was it? She smiled grimly to herself. Then she'd find something useful to tell King Kalak, instead.

The undercity proved more of a maze than Indigo expected. She wandered through the darkness, her frustration growing as she kept circling through the same passages, unable to find the well where Evrim had died. Exhaustion had forced her to sleep twice already, and her food and lantern oil were running low. She was following the curving line of pillars that formed a support for the city wall overhead when at last she spotted something she hadn't noticed before. There, close to the floor, was a spot where the cobwebs had been torn away.

Pushing her way through the dusty strands, Indigo followed the faint trail. She let out a whoop of joy when

she saw where it led. There on the floor was Evrim's body. He was curled into a tight ball with his arms wrapped around his head. His face was turned toward Indigo; it was a mask of misery.

She studied Evrim from a distance before approaching. The black templar's cassock he had been wearing was intact, and there were no wounds on the body. That fit with her idea that he had been drowned by a water elemental. The well from which it must have sprung was only a few feet away from the corpse.

Indigo licked her lips. She could smell the water, even from here. Unlike most of the wells on Athas, this one didn't have a brackish or acidic odor. Instead it gave off the sweet smell of pure water.

The well was surrounded by only a low lip, and the water in it was level with the floor. The lid that normally covered it was fully open, leaning against the wall. It was made of a gray material, streaked with red. Indigo's heart thudded against her chest when she realized what it was. Iron! The lid was worth a fortune! She could retire on this adventure alone.

Evoking the protection of the sphere of water, casting a spell upon herself that would ward off attacks by evil creatures, Indigo crept forward. When the water elemental rose from the well, she would be ready to embrace it, to learn from it. Who knew what secrets it might impart to her? Her mind spinning with the possibilities, she completely ignored Evrim's corpse. There was still plenty of time to complete her mission. Her employers could wait until she was good and ready.

Kneeling before the well, Indigo placed her sword on the ground and spread her arms wide. "By the power of the sphere of water, I summon you. Come forth, bearer of ancient wisdoms."

Something began to stir deep within the well. Suddenly it shot up to the surface. But instead of the amorphous wall of water Indigo was expecting, a serpentine head reared out of the well. A fang-filled mouth opened wide, and tentacles around its head lashed like writhing snakes. Indigo scrambled for her sword, but the monster was quicker. Spraying water in a sheet from its gills, the translucent green worm lunged toward Indigo. Its tentacles brushed her skin, and instantly a horrible chill convulsed her body. Struggling for breath, she felt her heart beat once, twice, pounding against the suddenly rigid wall of her chest. Then she fell, stiff as a statue, to the floor.

Lazra haunted the inns that fringed the warrens, looking for the half-elf who had mistaken her for a member of the Veiled Alliance. She peered at tavern patrons, wondering which were members of the Alliance and which were ordinary citizens. Whenever someone made eye contact with her, Lazra slowly wiped her mouth with the same flat-palmed gesture Caer had used.

It was exhausting overseeing the tending of the king's gardens by day, then making the rounds of the taverns late into the night. As the day of the gladiatorial games approached, the condition of the plants in the garden worsened. She'd already lost several of the more delicate plants, and the leaves of the hardier plants were starting to curl and brown.

Most alarming of all, the trees of life themselves were starting to wither. Not from lack of water—the magical trees could grow even on barren, sun-blasted rock—and not as the result of some magical trinket. For the trees to show a visible deterioration, strong magic indeed had to be at work.

Lazra pushed her half-empty glass of sapwine away and started to stand. Enough of this futile search. The ziggurat had at last been completed, and tomorrow things would get back to normal in Tyr. The plotters would be arrested, her gardens would have their water, and Tithian, until now so busy overseeing the ziggurat's construction, would perhaps spare her the time needed to investigate the blight that was affecting the trees of life.

Then Lazra saw the secretive hand gesture of the man sitting in the shadows against the far wall. He had just stepped in from the street and still hadn't lowered the hood that protected him from the desert's night chill. Slipping into the seat beside him, Lazra nodded her head. "My father was a templar."

Caer flipped back the hood and grinned. "And my mother was a gardener. Welcome, friend. Did you give Sadira the ring?"

"I gave it to someone who knows her," Lazra answered. If Caer had the ability to magically detect a lie, he would find only truth in her words.

"Good. What do you need?"

Lazra was ready for the question. "The champion wants to know which of the king's weaknesses he is to exploit."

Caer frowned. "Our spy should have told him this."

Lazra shrugged. "There have been some difficulties."

"Don't tell me we've lost another one," Caer groaned. He shook his head slowly. "Like you, I'm told only as much as I need to know. So far, that doesn't include our target's weaknesses, just his strengths. He's using an ancient and terrible form of spellcasting: dragon magic. Like defiling magic, it drains the life from plants. But it goes one step further, draining the life from living creatures as well—humans, elves, dwarves . . ."

"That's not so!" Lazra shook her head. "Our king—that is, our target—draws his magic from the four elements and the greater cosmos, like any other elemental. He gives it back to the people, to his templars, not the other way around."

"I didn't expect you to believe me." Caer shook his head. "But you can see the effects of it already, as the king works his magic to meet our challenge. Just wait until the attempt is made on his life. If he gets the chance to defend himself, every plant in the city will die. And so will a lot of his subjects."

Indigo's mind slowed to a sluggish crawl as the creature hovered over her, its teeth bared to strike. Would she feel its fangs when they pierced her flesh? Stupid. She had been stupid and greedy both. Now she was going to die.

One of her hands was colder than the other. Why? Although she could not move her head, Indigo forced her eyes to the side. Her right hand was under the surface of the well water. When she had fallen, she had landed against the lip of the well. It just might save her.

As the monster swayed over her, deciding where to bite, Indigo called up the words to a spell in her mind. Normally, she would say them out loud, but there was a chance—just a chance, if the well was deep enough and the water pure enough—that thinking the words alone would be enough.

Kupoozsha kupua.

Flexibility suddenly returned to Indigo's body, just as the monster plunged down at her. Rolling out of the way, she sprang to her feet and ran.

She managed to get only a short distance. Suddenly everything went dark. The icy-cold feeling in Indigo's mind told her this was no ordinary spell. She could feel invisible fingers plucking at her consciousness, peeling off layer after layer, digging deeper. Mind-magic!

At once, her body was wracked with spasms of pain. She could feel her skull being peeled back from her brain, feel monsters with razor-sharp teeth tearing at her gut. Her fingers exploded like crushed sausages as a heavy weight smashed them parchment thin, and searingly hot coals burned the soles of her feet. Her back was torn apart, the bones separating like beads on a broken necklace.

Indigo clung desperately to what little of her mind remained. A tiny voice, deep inside, told her that the pain was only illusory, that no real damage was being done to her body. But when thousands of daggers plunged into her oversensitive skin and something began scooping her brain out through the hole in the top of her head, she nearly gave in.

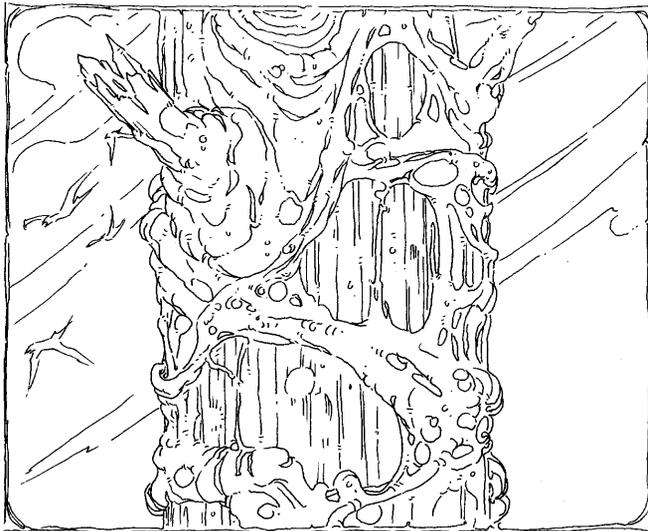
In her agony, she caught only the briefest of glimpses of the corridor in which she stood. Instead of carrying her farther away, her staggering steps had led her back to the lip of the well, within striking range of the monster. If its tentacles touched her a second time, she would have no magic to save herself with. Her spell was gone, cast already. Clutching her head as it exploded with pain, she sank slowly to her knees.

Light. A flash of light had passed briefly over her eyes. It was the crystal in her pocket, its beam now pointing up into her face. It was Indigo's only hope. Feeling blindly for it, she wrenched the crystal from her pocket and hurled it into the well.

On the day of the Royal Games celebrating completion of the ziggurat, Lazra stood in the king's gardens, one hand brushing the fronds of a feather-plant. They coiled around her fingers, mistaking them for a struggling insect. Deceptively beautiful, the fronds contained a perfume that attracted and stunned insects. The toxin produced only a mild tingling sensation on Lazra's fingers. After a moment of struggle, the plant gave up the attempt to pull her hand into its bulbous digestive center and uncoiled.

Lazra rubbed her sticky fingers together. Like people, plants could be deceptive and sneaky, but only in an effort to feed themselves. When people put on a false front, you never knew what their motivations were, or what lay behind the mask.

She had lived long enough in Tyr to understand the harsh realities of life in the city. Your fellow templars were your friends only as long as it suited their purposes, as long as it gave them a leg up on the bureaucratic ladder.



Lazra had done her share of backbiting to gain her position as head keeper of the king's gardens. Having achieved this honor, she had kept it through merit alone; none of the other templars could match her skill with plants. There had been jealousies and the resulting setbacks, but the saboteurs her rivals had sent were easily dealt with. The same could hardly be said of the king.

Lazra looked up at the golden tower that dominated Kalak's palace. If it were true that the king himself was draining the life from her garden, everything she had worked to create here could be destroyed. If she somehow denied the king access to the life forces of her beloved trees, and if the Veiled Alliance failed in its attempt against the king, at the very least Kalak would take away all of the spells he had granted Lazra. She had to choose between her templar's magic and her life's work.

She was alone. The slaves, like everyone else in the city—commoner and noble alike—were required by decree of King Kalak to attend today's gladiatorial games. Lazra could hear the roar of spectators in the stadium. Kalak would be watching the games from the balcony of his palace, and the Veiled Alliance would be preparing to strike.

Each shout frayed Lazra's nerves further. There was no tranquillity in the garden today, but there was a way to regain some measure of calm.

Lazra placed her hand on one of the trees of life. The rough bark of the oak was dry under her fingers and its leaves were wilted and limp, but sap still flowed in its trunk. Closing her eyes, she chanted the words of her spell.

The tree greeted her. *Welcome, quick-moving one.*

"Hello," Lazra answered. "Are you feeling any better?"

No. The voice echoing in Lazra's mind was slow and thoughtful. *Something pulls the life from me still. The magic you summoned yesterday did not help.*

Lazra's shoulders drooped. The chant for dispelling magic had been her last hope. Then her head jerked up, as she heard the snap of dry branches. Someone was pushing his way through the shrubs, coming toward her.

"Lazra! The high templar demands your presence! All templars are supposed to be at the stadium! Lazra! Where are you?"

Opening her eyes, Lazra saw the head and shoulders of the half-giant guard who had been sent to fetch her. The trunk of the oak hid her from him; she had only a moment to act. "Mmea milango," she said, tracing a square on the trunk with her forefinger. "Wazi!"

The bark softened under her touch. Pushing against the tree, Lazra slid her hand inside it. As the half-giant crashed through the last of the hedge, she disappeared completely into the trunk.

Lazra had used her ability to hide inside trees before, but never had her mind been linked with the plant at the same time. This time, she could feel every ring of the pulpy interior of the trunk, could sense the faint breeze that stirred her branches, could feel the sap sliding through her limbs. She could taste the dry earth she was rooted in, could feel the thump of the half-giant's footsteps as he rounded the tree, looking for her. She could feel the oak's slow shiver of fear as it sensed the obsidian axe he

carried.

Experimentally, Lazra felt her way down into the roots of the oak. Pushing them here, prodding them there, she sent them up through the ground, breaking the surface around the half-giant's feet. Her original intent had been to trip him, if he took his frustration at not finding her out on the oak, but then she realized what she had done. Instead of bare roots, tiny saplings had pushed their way above ground. Excitement flowed through her like sun-warmed sap. At last she knew the secret of creating a tree of life without need of the powerful spell!

There was more. Other voices slowly whispered in Lazra's ears. She could sense each of the other trees of life in the gardens, recognize each of their unique voices. All were tinged with pain. She felt it now herself, a slow ache as if some unseen force was sucking the sap from her veins. Abruptly, it intensified. With her dwarven senses, Lazra heard an explosion come from the direction of the stadium, then screams.

The powerful one begins a spell.

The pain was intense now; if Lazra had been experiencing it as a dwarf, she would be doubled over in agony. As it was, she groaned as the smaller branches of the oak dried up and snapped with a brittle noise. Suddenly, Lazra could see the invisible lines of force that stretched across the sky in coiling streamers, leading from the branches of the trees to the pinnacle of the ziggurat.

We die.

"No! We fight back!"

Focusing her will, she summoned a spell that would give her time to think. It was a simple piece of magic, one designed to allow her to momentarily step out of the flow of time. She cast it, and there was a sudden wrench that tore the breath from her lungs. Not only had she slowed time for herself, the trees of life had all succumbed to the spell, too.

The pain eased, and the invisible streamers of energy slowed. Feverishly, Lazra cast through her mind for a spell that would cut them off. There was only one in her repertoire that might be of any use, and it was a very minor magic. Like all of her spells, it had been granted by King Kalak. Would it work against him?

All she had to lose was her life. "Mahali patakatiifu au pa salama," she chanted. "Create for me a place of sanctuary."

Suddenly, the flow of the magical drain was reversed. The invisible coils came rushing back toward the trees, spiralling faster and faster. Then all at once they snapped as if severed by an unseen sword. Bright light exploded in Lazra's head, and then there was utter blackness.

Water splashed against Indigo's knees as the wormlike creature vanished back into the well. There was no explosion, no spectacular display of magic when Indigo threw the crystal into the water, but it did the trick. The monster dove down deep, pursuing the glowing light.

In that instant, the pain that had been wracking Indigo's body vanished. She jumped to her feet and grabbed the edge of the heavy metal lid. Bracing herself, heaving with all her strength, she levered the lid back into place. It crashed home with a satisfying clank. Then she dragged Evrim's body well away from the hole.

Exhausted, Indigo sank to the ground. There was no way she was taking that lid anywhere. Let it keep that horror in its place. She still had a mission to complete—and a lot of coin to collect.

Indigo studied the dead spy. Evrim's body had a hard, leathery feel, as if every drop of moisture had been drawn from it. Looking closely, she saw punctures on his shoulder. The spacing was just about right for them to have been made by the monster that lived in the well.

She cast a spell over the dead man, Evrim's eyes fluttered, then sprang open. Immediately, he began to tremble. "It's hopeless," he sobbed. "We'll never be able to defeat him."

Indigo sat back on her haunches. "Defeat who?"

The man only sobbed harder.

Sighing, Indigo made the sign the Veiled Alliance had shown her. Holding the two middle fingers of her hand together, she spread the other two fingers wide. She had to grab the dead man by the hair and shake him to make him open his eyes again.

Evrin continued to go through the motions of crying, but his corpse had no tears left in it. "Why do you torment me?" he asked. "I'd rather be dead. It's hopeless. Our task is hopeless."

"You might think so," she answered. "But I don't. Now quit snivelling and tell me about the trapdoor that leads to the treasury."

"The treasury?"

"You heard me!" Indigo raised her fist, then shook her head. How could you threaten a man who was already dead?

The man's bitter laugh surprised her. He pointed with a dried finger. "It's down five pillars, on the left, concealed by illusory webs. But it leads to the templar's quarters, not to the treasury."

Indigo made a face. "It does?"

Evrin laughed. "Why would a dead man lie to you?"

As his eyes faded back into the glaze of death, Indigo curled her lip. So. Her employers had told her the trapdoor led to the king's treasury, even though they knew the truth from Evrim's last report. Had they been counting on her greed?

Furious, she sat down to summon her contact. As a wild talent mentalist, she had a single power at her disposal. She didn't like using it, but there were times when it came in handy.

But calling up such power in her agitated state was far from easy. Indigo sat for the longest time before she was able to clear her mind. Then slowly, as the energy within her rose to her conscious mind, she felt her body lighten. Suddenly, she was floating above herself, her spirit-self connected to her body by a long silvery cord. A swirling gray mist, punctuated by floating chunks of rock, surrounded her. In the distance, she could see the silver cords of other travelers.

Forming in her mind an image of her contact in the secret society, Indigo waited patiently as a pool of color slowly materialized at her feet. There was a brief sensation of movement, and then she was standing in a dead-end passageway of the stadium. Screams filled the air, and mobs of people surged past the opening. At the end of the

short passageway, Indigo's contact stood over the body of a templar. Suddenly sensing her presence, the half-elf whirled to face her.

"Indigo!" Caer blurted. "Where—" Then his eyes traced the silver cord that vanished into mist, a few feet from Indigo's body. "Did you complete your mission?"

Indigo nodded. Quickly, a nervous eye on the mobs whose screams filled the stadium, she told him the location of the trapdoor. "You said it led to the treasury," she told him accusingly. "But Evrim told me the truth."

Caer smiled. "Of course. But my little white lie made you contact me that much quicker, didn't it? You're a little late—but better late than never."

As Indigo growled, he held up a hand. "Don't worry. You'll still be paid, if either of us escapes here alive."

Then Indigo noticed the weakness that was creeping into her bones, gradually sapping her vitality. Caer too must have been feeling it. One hand clutched his side.

Eyes widening in alarm, Indigo reached for the silver cord that bound her to her body and yanked hard. There was a sudden, blinding rush, and all at once she found herself back in the undercity, sitting cross-legged in the dark.

Unkinking her tense muscles, she rose to her feet. It was time to leave the city, and fast. Something very strange was happening in that stadium, but it wouldn't hurt to have one quick peek in the templars' quarter, to see what treasure might be acquired on the way out.

Counting pillars, Indigo found the spot Evrim had indicated. She pushed her way through the illusory web, which vanished like mist as she walked through it, and found the trapdoor. She lowered it and climbed out.

She emerged into a mosaic-decorated patio that fronted an elaborate building in the templars' quarter. Before she could decide which building was likely to hold the most loot, there was a noise behind her. She whirled around and saw dozens of heavily armed warriors boiling up through the trapdoor. When one of them raised his sword, Indigo threw up her hand, making the gesture Caer had taught her.

"Greetings, sister!" the man yelled. "It's a fine day for killing templars, isn't it!"

"It certainly is!" she answered. "But I've got to meet my contact."

Indigo knew better than to openly take sides in a rebellion. She fled down the street, away from the rebels. She wanted only to recover her coin from the inn, then lie low until the confusion ended. But as soon as she rounded the corner, she had to leap out of the way of a howling mob that was pursuing a ragged templar down the street.

Catching the arm of one of the pursuers, Indigo stopped the man. "What is it?" she asked. "What's happened?"

"Tyr has a new king!" he shouted, joy lighting his eyes. "The slaves are free and the templars are fallen. We're free!" Wrenching his arm from Indigo's hand, he ran down the dusty street.

So the slaves were free, were they? Then Indigo saw a familiar set of doors. There was someone she just couldn't resist spreading the good news to.



When she awoke, Lazra was lying face down in a circle of ash. Spitting the gray powder from her lips, she raised her aching body and looked around her. Cold fingers of agony clenched her heart as she saw the ankle-deep powdery remains of what had once been her garden. Only the trees of life still stood—and they were blackened skeletons. Even as she watched, the oak that had sheltered her crumbled away into ash.

It took a moment for her ears to register the cheering that came from the direction of the stadium. Then the heavy wooden doors to the garden, plainly visible now that the screening vegetation was gone, flew open.

"We're free!" shouted the figure that stood in the doorway. "The slaves of Tyr are free! I'll never have to pull weeds in your stinking gardens again!"

"You!" It was Indigo, the escaped slave. Furious, Lazra staggered to her feet. "I'll teach you a lesson you'll not soon forget, slave!" Spitting out the words of a spell that would send a blinding beam of light into her opponent's eyes, Lazra flicked her fingers in the elemental's direction.

Nothing happened. Lazra's eyes widened. Had Kalak sensed what she had done and punished her? Or was he dead?

Laughing, Indigo turned and ran.

Lazra plunged after the mul but managed only two steps before tripping over something that was hidden under the ash. Picking herself up, she turned and kicked at the thing in fury. Ash flew everywhere. Then Lazra saw the tiny oak sapling. It was growing, even as she watched.

She fell to her knees beside it and brushed the last of the dust from its bright green leaves. "A tree of life," she said in wonder. "It has to be magic to have survived." Then she scrambled through the dust. Another sapling! And another!

Hurriedly, she ran over to the doors of the walled garden and closed them. Sliding home the bar that locked them from the mob outside, she turned to look over the tiny green shoots that stood bravely in a sea of ash. Her magic was gone, but it could always be relearned, this time from a cleaner source. Now that she knew the trees' secrets, she could create an entire forest of them. Perhaps one day, that forest would cover all of Athas, protecting it from defiling magic.

Lazra smiled. Her focus hadn't been thwarted.

It had just changed slightly.

Ω



The Tale of Albrenegan: a dragon from the ARS MAGICA* game

by Ken Cliffe, ©1993 White Wolf



The DRAGON PROJECT

Albrenegan is a dragon of Mythic Europe, which is the setting for the ARS MAGICA fantasy storytelling game, from White Wolf The ARS MAGICA game is about magical folk of mythical, medieval times. As members of the mystical Order of Hermes, these Magi (wizards) live with their servants in Covenants. There, they plumb the depths of sorcery and delve in to the mysteries of the world: the elusive but pervasive powers of the Church, the enigmatic manners of faeries, and the vile ways of the Dark Path.*

Albrenegan's story

As a Mythic European inhabitant and ARS MAGICA creation, the dragon Albrenegan is unique, ever dangerous, and most importantly the subject of much storytelling potential. He brings characters into conflict with mortal armies, aggressive Magi, and the threat of magic let loose upon the land. This beast is no mere dungeon dweller.

Albrenegan is the orphaned hatchling of a once-great Iberian dragon known as Albrenega. Although a powerful being, as all Mythic Europe's remaining dragons are, Albrenega made the error of proclaiming that her flames were hotter than any human's, particularly hotter than those of House Flambeau's arrogant Magi. When the challenge was heard by the many surrounding Magi of Flambeau, who were fighting the Spanish Reconquista against the Moors, they rallied together and hum-

bled Albrenega. Indeed, in their zealously they murdered her in her mountain retreat.

Although many in the Order of Hermes were outraged at the wizards' actions, no one wanted a war within the Order's ranks. The Magi of Flambeau were therefore allowed to flaunt their victory. As tribute to their power, the dragon's killers, in A.D. 1091, founded a Covenant on the site of her aerie and called it Fire Nest.

The Covenant still stands and thrives over 100 years later. Its members all belong to House Flambeau. Many of the Covenant's older Magi are the very folk who slew Albrenega so long ago. Under them, the Covenant's younger upstarts preserve the memory of the Magi's greatest victory—as well as the Covenant's bravado.

What no one realizes is that an extensive cave system lies beneath the Covenant (the original Flambeau were too cocky to prop-

erly search the dragon's retreat, and no one has thought to do so since). In these caves lay the last of Albrenega's eggs, which hatched 10 years ago.

The hatchling, Albrenegan, now sleeps in those caves, nourished and tormented by magical energies and haughty words echoing down from above. Not only has the serpent learned something of the world from half-heard shouts, but he has learned about his mother's death. Visions of that death, and residual effects from House Flambeau's magical experiments, haunt the dragon's dreams.

In his dreams, Albrenegan appears as a monstrous, rampaging beast-magical influence from the Flambeau allows him this inflated identity. His anger at his mother's murderers is so intense that his thoughts have recently begun projecting into the material world. When stories of the dragon's death meet his serpentine ears, his dreams express his rage, and his

dream self arrives in the world to exact revenge.

In the past several months, a massive dragon has appeared as if from thin air at Fire Nest Covenant and has delivered destruction upon the fortress, disappearing as quickly as it came. Several inhabitants have been killed in the attacks, and no form of magic seems to affect the beast. Of course, the Flambeau have assailed the dragon with their destructive spells, not realizing they have no effect because the dragon does not truly exist. If they would only think to try the *Imagonem* Form (the magic of illusion) on the creature, they might defeat it and, inadvertently, the young dragon that sleeps beneath their Covenant. However, in their blindness the Flambeau continue to suffer the beast's brutality, and that is why the help of other Magi, with open minds and new ideas, is needed.

Albrenegan's profiles

Albrenegan possesses two sets of statistics, the first for his dream self and the second for his newborn self.

The dream dragon

Magic Might: 65

Vital Statistics: Size +7, Intelligence (wily) +1, Perception (alert) +3, Strength (bulging muscles) +10, Stamina (hearty) +12, Presence (awesome) +8, Communication (incomplete words) -2, Dexterity (graceful) +5, Quickness (swift) +12

Virtues and Flaws: Self-Confident +3, Strong-Willed +1, Short Attention Span -1, Fury (at talk of dragons' deaths) -3

Personality Traits: Wrathful +4, Angry +4, Patient -2

Reputation: None

Confidence: 6

Combat Totals:

Bite Totals: First Strike +8, Attack +13, Damage +35

Claw Totals: First Strike +5, Attack +9, Damage +15, Parry Defense +3

Tail Lash Totals: First Strike +12, Attack +5, Damage +10, Parry Defense +4

Wing Bash Totals: First Strike +3, Attack +7, Damage +8

Fiery Breath Totals: First Strike +10, Attack +8**, Damage +50

Body Levels: n/a

Fatigue Levels: n/a

Dodge Defense +5 (11 Action), Soak n/a, Fatigue n/a

** Can be dodged, but not parried

Encumbrance: 0

Abilities: Speak Latin (magical terms) 3, Hermes History (House Flambeau achievements) 4, Hermes Lore (Reconquista) 3, Magic Theory (fire) 1

Powers:

Wrathful Fire, CrIg 50, 5 Points— Causes +50 Damage to all within a circle 10 paces in diameter. See "Combat Totals," above.

Stare of Mortality, ReMe 20, 0 Points— If the dream dragon makes eye contact with a subject, that person cannot move from his or her spot as long as eye contact is maintained. Victims cannot move or dodge, but can parry attacks. Eye contact can be avoided with an Intelligence stress roll of 6+. On a Botch, the victim remains motionless for as long as the dragon wills, but the dragon need not maintain eye contact.

Roar of the Ancients, ReMe 15, 0 Points— If the dream dragon roars, all within earshot must make a Stamina + Brave stress roll of 6 + to avoid fleeing in terror. A similar such roll is allowed per Round to stop running. In the event of a Botch, the victim continues to flee until Unconscious (Short-Term Fatigue roll per Round of running).

Winds of Fury, CrAu 15, 0 Points— By flapping its powerful wings, the dragon creates a great wind. To remain standing requires a Strength stress roll of 4+. All physical actions suffer a -3 penalty in the wind. Botches mean a victim is blown over, suffering 1d10 +2 Damage, which is Soaked normally.

Smoke of the Bellows, CrAu 15, 2 Points— A large cloud of smoke is created, covering an area 20 paces across. Those in the cloud act as if in complete darkness (see ARS MAGICA Third Edition game, page 153). If any roll made in the cloud Botches, a Short-Term Fatigue Level is suffered from smoke inhalation, aside from any other appropriate Botch results.

Vis: None

Involving the characters

There are several ways by which characters may find themselves at Fire Nest. They may have heard of the dragon and seek to defeat it themselves, or simply want to see and maybe converse with the beast. Maybe the characters support the Christians' war against the Moors and want to see the dragon defeated so Fire Nest's Flambeau can resume fighting. Or, maybe the characters want to see the dragon preserved, being among the last of its kind.

After traveling to Fire Nest Covenant, the characters must contend with the difficult, arrogant Flambeau Magi who reside there. The residents may welcome foreigners but are suspicious of strangers. After all, there is a war being waged and no one travels to Iberia for purely social reasons. Characters might claim to come in support of the Reconquista, but resident Flambeau expect strangers to prove their convictions. If characters are not prepared to fight and kill Moors (the Moors tend to be enlightened by Mythic European standards, and so might be sympathized with by characters), the Flambeau may turn on them. Furthermore, if visiting characters are opposed to Fire Nest's involvement in the war against the Moors, there might be outright hostility between Magi, which endangers any hope of solving the mystery of the attacking dragon.

If characters end up needing allies against Fire Nest, they might find them among the few rebellious Hermetic Covenants in southern Iberia that are actually

allied with the Moors. Dealing with these pseudo-rebels, the characters may find themselves in trouble with the whole Order. In fact, alliance with the rebels might break characters' ties with their own Covenant, forcing them to remain in Iberia, where their new and only allies reside, to continue fighting against the Reconquista.

If characters claim to have come to Fire Nest to deal with the dragon, they are not received warmly. Fire Nest's Magi are embarrassed by their failure to best the dragon, particularly given their reputation for killing Albrenega. Chief among those who are cold to characters is Vendur, leader of the Covenant. He was one of Albrenega's murderers and is quite powerful, but also unbalanced in his old age. After many magical Twilights, he mentally relives the attack on Albrenega, believing the current dragon to be her and believing newly arrived Magi to be upstarts intent on stealing his glory. Thus, Vendur is always the first to strike out when the new dragon attacks, and he commands others to join him in useless *Perdo* and *Ignem* spells.

When the dragon does arrive at Fire Nest, it's clear to characters that physical attacks are useless, as the Flambeau's efforts prove. Characters are therefore free to explore other avenues. Any use of *Intellego Imagonem* or *Mentem* magic suggests the dragon is made purely of rage and nothing more; it's the projection of another mind, apparently a childish one given its ranting: "*Not fair! Not fair! Want*

her back!" Characters mentally probing the dragon also learn its name, a definite clue that it's related to Albrenega and maybe seeks to avenge the legendary beast's death.

If characters fail to discover Albrenega's secret on his first attack, they may upon succeeding attacks. The observant realize (with a Perception + Legendary Beast Lore simple roll of 6+) that the dragon arrives whenever the defeat of Albrenega is recounted by the Flambeau. The sound of the tale, filtering down from above, assails Albrenega's ears and inspires further violent dreams. Putting two and two together, characters may realize the marauding dragon resides somewhere nearby and can overhear Fire Nest's residents.

If they manage to ingratiate themselves with Fire Nest's residents, either by supporting the Reconquista or proving brave in a fight against the dragon, characters gain the freedom to search the Covenant. However, discovery of an outsider in the Covenant at the wrong place and time can mean Hermetic trial for the careless. Given time, characters may learn of the caves beneath the Covenant and there discover the sleeping Albrenega.

Discovery does not resolve the characters' problems, though. In fact, it creates more. Clearly, the characters must wake the dragon to put an end to its dreams, or they may use magicks to alter those dreams (Rego *Mentem* spells of Level

Continued on page 118

The newborn dragon

Magic Might: 20

Vital Statistics: Size +2, Intelligence (creative) +1, Perception 0, Strength (powerful) +4, Stamina (tough) +2, Presence (unimpressive) -1, Communication (incomplete words) -2, Dexterity (clumsy) -1, Quickness (ambling) -2

Virtues and Flaws: Dreaming +2, Versatile Sleeper +1, Light Sleeper +1, Sharp Ears +1, Piercing Gaze +2, Soft Hearted -1, Weak Self-Confidence -1, Common Fear (Flambeau Magi) -2, Orphan -1

Personality Traits: Quiet +3, Calm +4, Brave -2

Reputation: None

Confidence: 2

Combat Totals:

Bite Totals: First Strike +3, Attack +4, Damage +15

Claw Totals: First Strike +2, Attack +4, Damage +8

Fiery Sneeze Totals: First Strike +6, Attack +4**, Damage +20

Body Levels: OK, 0/0, -1/-1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Fatigue Levels: OK, 0/0, -1/-1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Dodge Defense -1 (5 Action), Soak +15 (21 Action), Fatigue +2

** Can be dodged, but not parried.

Encumbrance: 0

Abilities: Dreaming 10, Speak Latin (magical terms) 3, Hermes History (House Flambeau achievements) 4, Hermes Lore (Reconquista) 3, Magic Theory (fire) 1

Powers:

Fiery Sneeze, CrIg 20, 3 Points – A small burst of fire is created, causing +20 Damage to all within a 5-pace area. See "Combat Totals," above.

Puff of Smoke, CrAu, 1 Point – A small puff of smoke is created, as per Smoke of the Bellows above, except the area affected is 5 paces across.

Vis: 10 *Ignem* in tongue, 15 *Creo* in brain

DRAGONMIRTH



By Matthew Guss

NO! NO! NO!
YOU'RE A
WIZARD, ROW!
YOU SHOULD BE
GOOD AT THIS!

IF YOU WANT IT
TO WORK, THE
WORDS HAVE TO
ROLL OFF OF
YOUR TONGUE...

THE HAND GESTURES
HAVE TO BE NATURAL,
EFFORTLESS, AND YOU
HAVE TO REALLY GIVE
IT FULL CONCENTRATION.
NOW, TRY IT AGAIN.

HEY MISTER,
SPARE SOME
CHANGE?

HOPELESS,
COMPLETELY
HOPELESS...

Yamoupa

BUT I SURRENDER.
I GIVE UP. AREN'T
YOU GOING TO TAKE
ME INTO CUSTODY?

OH, YOU'D LIKE
THAT, WOULDN'T
YOU?!

KEEP THAT @%&# UNDER
SIEGE UNTIL WE FIGURE
OUT WHAT HE'S UP TO.

WITH ALL RESPECT, MATRON
STRESS, WE SHOULD JUST
CAPTURE HIM. THE UPPER-
WORLD IS GETTING NERVOUS.

YOU JUST DON'T GET
IT, DO YOU, ELSA?!

OGREK IS BEYOND
STRATEGY. BETTER
MINDS THAN MINE HAVE TRIED TO
LINDO HIM. EVERYTHING HE DOES
ALWAYS @%&# WORKS OUT FOR HIM.

EXIT
Great!

WHAT DID
THAT LAST
WORD MEAN?

I'LL
TELL YOU WHEN
YOU'RE OLDER.

WELL, IF I'M NOT YOUR PRISONER, I
SUPPOSE I CAN HAVE AN EVENING
STROLL, TAKE IN SOME OF THE SIGHTS—
NOT SO FAST, BUSTER.

WE NEED TO DO
SOMETHING HE WOULD
NEVER GUESS WE'D
DO— ANYTHING THAT
COULD JINX
HIS LUCK—

WELL, YOCCHI SOUNDS LIKE A JINX.
ANYTHING SHE DOES GOES WRONG—

THAT'S IT!! WE'D NEVER TRUST
HER WITH ANYTHING!! FIND
YOCCHI! PUT HER IN CHARGE OF
THE ARMY!! MAYBE
WE CAN GET SOME USE
OUT OF ELSA'S ROTTEN KID!

OOPS. SORRY.
DID I HIT AN ARTERY?!

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SO IF I'M NOT FREE
TO GO, THEN I AM
YOUR PRISONER—

—I DIDN'T
SAV THAT—

GRRR... LET'S GO
LOOK FOR HER,
AND I'LL EXPLAIN.

YEARS AGO I DESIGNED AN ARMY OF
SUPERDROW— GENIUSES, TOTALLY
REGENERATIVE, MERCILESS, IMPERVIOUS
TO PAIN. ABLE TO LIFT SMALL HOUSES.
BUT THEY STARTED PLAYING PRACTICAL
JOKES. NEIGHBORHOODS WERE RE-
ARRANGED WHILE EVERYONE WAS AT
WORK. BODY PARTS SCURRIED AROUND,
SCARING THE BOYS. THEN, OUT OF
BOREDOM, THEY KILLED EACH OTHER OFF.
IT TOOK MONTHS. ONLY YOCCHI'S LEFT.

HOW SAD.
BUT WHY DID
YOU CREATE THEM?

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ISN'T THAT WHAT
EVERY PARENT WANTS?
CHILDREN INFINITELY
MIGHTIER THAN THEY
ARE TO USE AS
PAWNS TO CONQUER
THE WORLD?

SOUNDS FAMILIAR.

HOW ABOUT YOU?
ARE YOU
GOING TO
HAVE ANY
KIDS?

OH, I DON'T KNOW.
NOT RIGHT AWAY.

IT'LL BE A DECISION BETWEEN ME
AND JOE, OF COURSE, BUT I
IMAGINE ONE NIGHT, WE'LL
COME ACROSS SOME INNOCENT
YOUNG FELLOW ON THE HIGHWAY...
...AND, WE'LL
WANT TO KEEP HIM.

Hi, MOM.

GASP

SAHEM HURRY.
"DAD" IS IN TROUBLE.

OH— AT
CHESTER'S PARTY—

WELL,
AT LEAST YOU
HAD YOUR HEART
SET ON A BOY.

By Michael Ferman



"Sure, the hilt's a little heavy, but all the soldiers in the Swiss mountains swear by it!"

By Rex F. May



"How embarrassing! I just invaded a place I already conquered last year!"

Baloo

By Brian Frey



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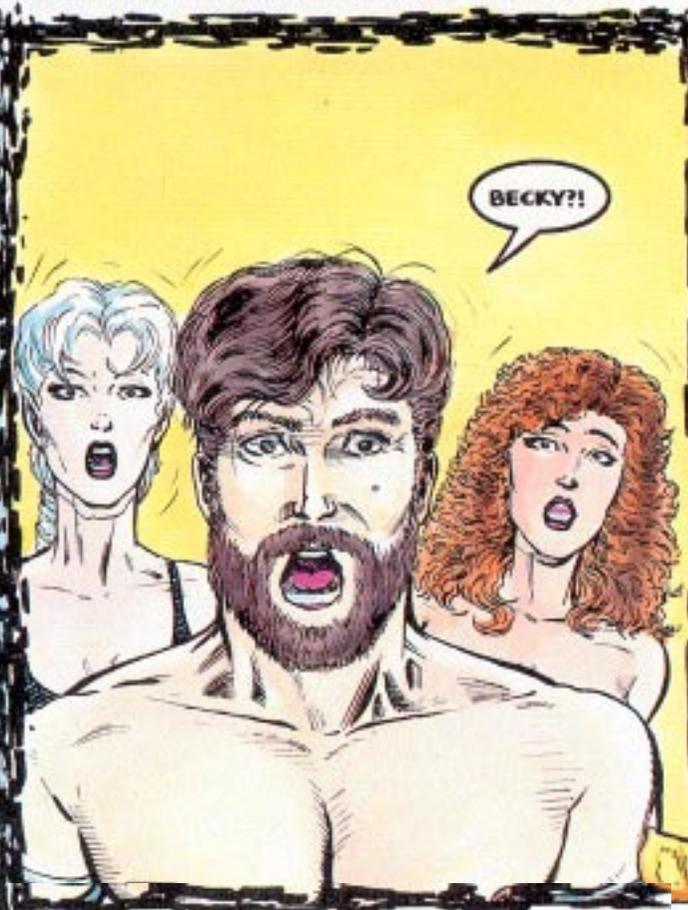


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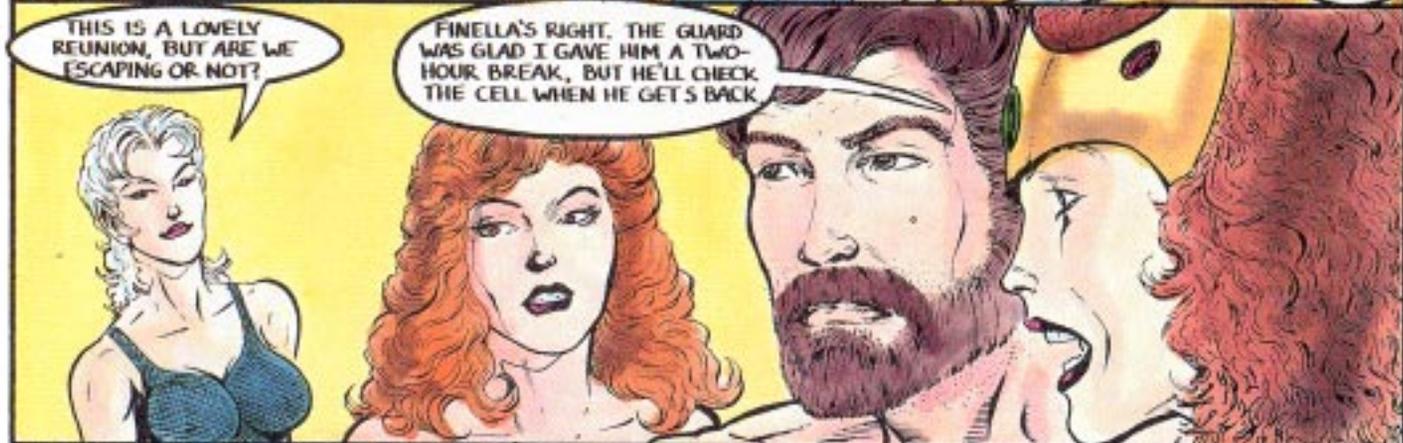
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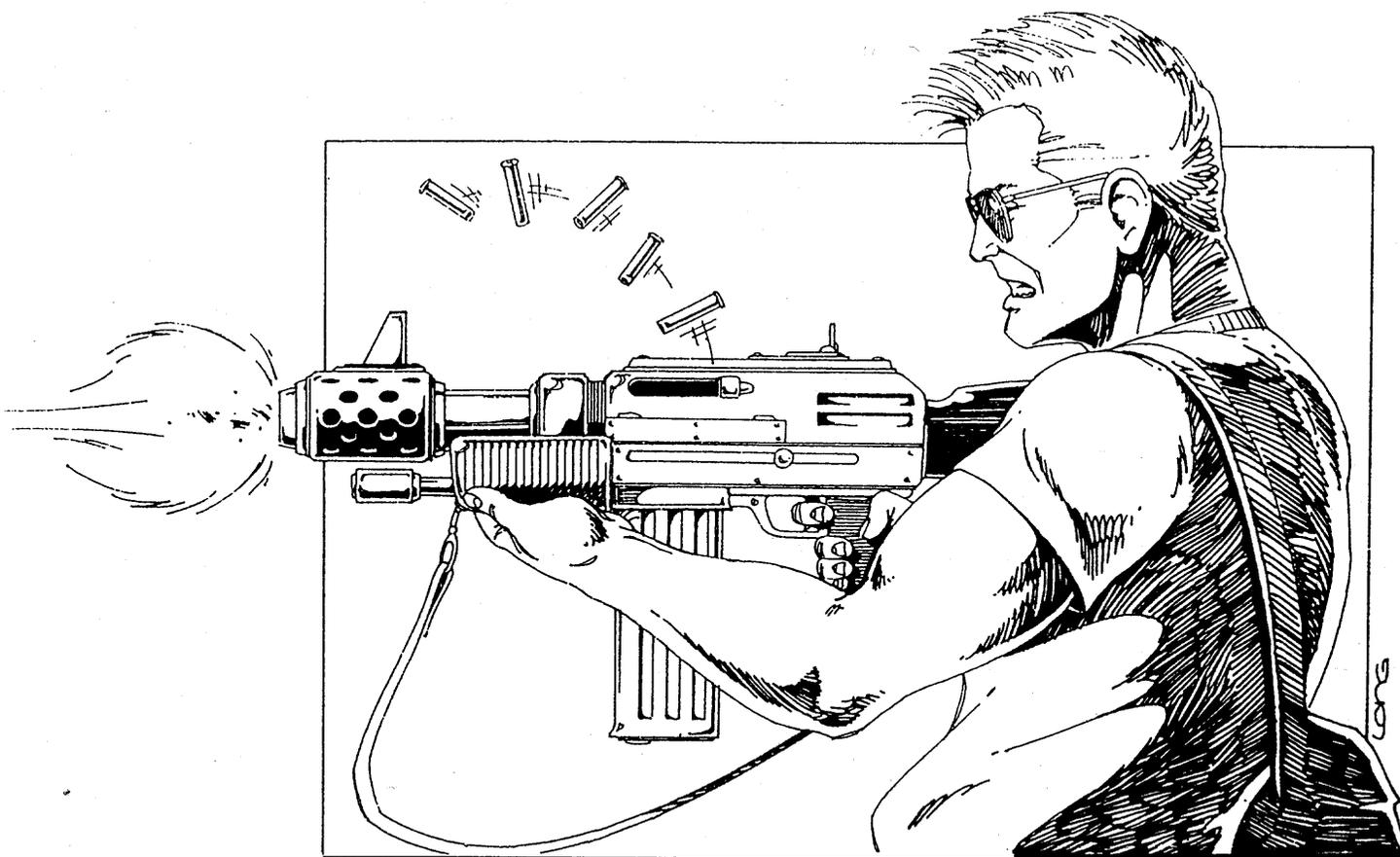
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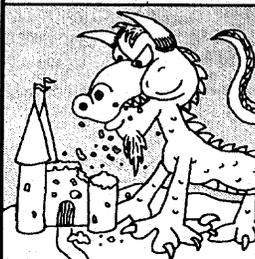
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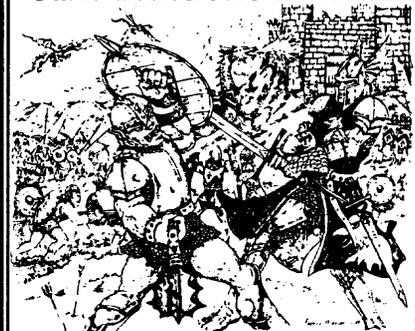
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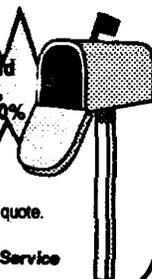
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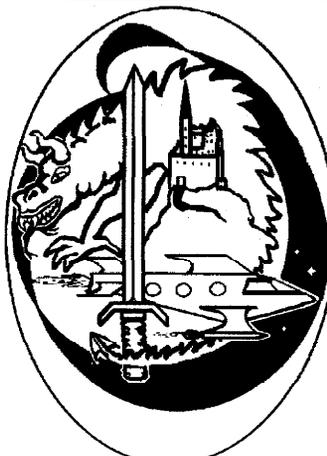
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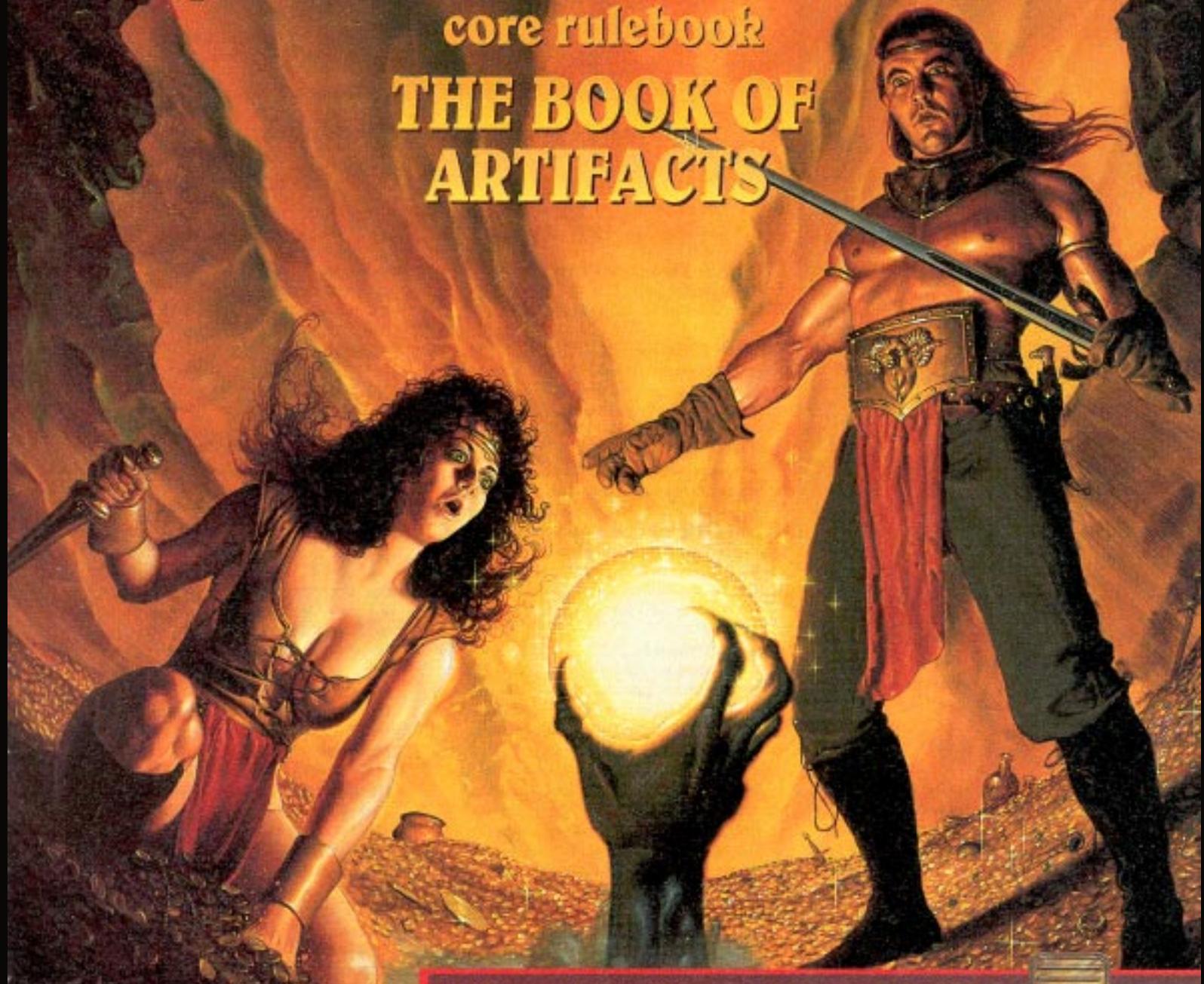


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Through the LOOKING Glass



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Buy now, paint later:
good advice before winter hits



Vampire (Black Dragon Pewter)

Reviews

Black Dragon Pewter

2700 Range Rd.
North Bellmore NY 11710

9786 Vampire

**** ½

This pewter figure is for gifts, not games. It stands 48 mm high, and its base has an ascending stone staircase. A one-eyed skull provides a prop for the well-dressed vampire behind it. He wears tight trousers with a thin belt; an open vest reveals a necklace and shirt with frilly cuffs. A long, high-necked cape swirls out behind, held on by a skull clasp. The vampire's thin face, widow's peak, and wrinkled forehead and chin frame a set of clearly evident fangs. For \$20, this is an inexpensive gift for a vampire lover.

9723 Princess

This pewter figure stands 90 mm tall to the tip of her pointed hat. This figure is of a classic princess, with her long dress piled on the floor and great billowing sleeves. The dress has a modest, square-cut bodice; a long belt sash with red and blue stones falls to the floor. Her face is reminiscent of Snow White in poise and complexion. The only down side to this figure was some rough finishing on one spot and a small pin hole. Still, this is a good figure to give as a gift. It's very reasonable at \$20.

RAFM Company, Inc.

20 Parkhill Rd. East
Cambridge, Ontario
CANADA N1R 1P2

2922 Deep Ones-Mutant Fishmen

This set consists of four 25-mm scale castings on irregular-shaped, landscaped bases. These figures from the CALL OF CTHULHU* game line represent Deep Ones, whose lineage includes sharks. None of the fishmen are wearing clothes, and all are unarmed. All have dorsal fins of varying sizes, starting from the head or the base of neck and running down to the pelvis.

Figure #1 has his hands up as if gesturing. His mouth is closed, and he is glaring. Figure #2 is arguing, with mouth open and teeth and tongue exposed. His left hand clutches a fish. Figure #3 is sitting, reading from a book, and appears to be slightly older than the other two. The last piece in the set is an altar with finny markings, 30 mm X 15 mm X 8 mm. All you need now a good victim figure.

The pieces had mold lines in inconvenient places and a little unwanted flash, but was otherwise a good set. These figures also could be used as sahuagin in TSR's AD&D® game. This set is recommended at \$4.95 per pack.

3503 Armored Minotaur

This figure is made of lead and perches on a small, circular, undetailed base. The minotaur is 46 mm from cloven hooves to the top of his horned head. The figure has the hairy legs of a bull, but these are protected by a curved plate held on by laces and hinged at the knee. His forearms are protected by plates held on the same way, and his three-fingered hands are covered

Once again, it's time to get ready for winter gaming — and miniatures painting. If you have a miniatures army you've wanted to fix up to squash the brightly painted legions of your friends, now is the time to start preparing your work space and tools to get the job done.

Consumer warning: Certain prices may be out of date now, as some companies may have changed both their miniatures' metal and prices. Treat the prices given as subject to change.

I want to thank Chris Osburn for his painting of the KRYOMEK* units in this column. Now, on with the reviews.

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

by studded gloves. His right paw hefts a huge battle axe. His back is protected by an overlapping plate kilt and a base plate, with a small open split at the base of the spine and by the shoulder plates. The stomach to lower chest is exposed to show ridged, hard muscle. The face is bovine, including a ring in the nose, shaggy fur on the trunklike neck, flared nostrils, and sunken eyes. A helmet protects the head.

This is an imposing figure whose only problem was thick flash by the knees and groin. It's an excellent figure that would be at home with the imperial minotaur Ral Partha. It's recommended at \$4.95.



Deep Ones (RAFM Company)

Old Guard Hobbies

27508 Ford Rd.

Garden City MI 48135

1002 The Mini-Castle

The Mini-Castle is a five-piece, easy-to-assemble kit. The walls are made of expanded polyurethane, and each wall measures over 420 mm long x 155 mm tall at the round towers and 125 mm tall at the top of the wall. Three walls are identical, each molded to resemble a stone wall with a broad walk and stairs leading from the top of the wall. A round tower with a plank door and stairs at ground level is at the right side of each piece. The top of each tower is engraved to represent planks with a trapdoor. Numerous arrow slits and firing positions grace the walls; the top of the tower two small windows face inward. The last wall piece has a stone arched gate 100 mm high. This arch and the pewter gate blocks all entry into the structure. This wall also has a more elaborate staircase that goes around the stables. A small manor house with shake or slate shingles sits to the left of the gate. This tower is part of the keep and can be entered only from the top of the wall or the manor house. When assembled, the castle has a large central courtyard.

This is a typical countryside outpost and is an excellent piece of work. My piece had only one flaw, and that is excellent for this material. Even though the buildings are not totally hollow when purchased, they can be easily cleaned out. The price is reasonable at \$69.95.

1003 The Great Gate

This five-piece set includes two lead-free metallic gates and three expanded polyurethane buildings. The main building is a large castle gatehouse measuring 220 mm x 220 mm x 138 mm. The interior is hollow, and the outside is molded to appear as if it is stone. The front has a number of arrow slots, while the back is accessed by a single staircase and a plank door. Several windows face out onto what will be a courtyard, as well as the twin round towers in back. These rear towers provide additional protection to the large flat roof of the gatehouse.

The other two pieces are short adaptor



Mini-Castle (Old Guard Hobbies)

Princess (Black Dragon Pewter)



Armored Minotaur (RAFM Company)





Giant Rat Stand (Ral Partha)



Black Ice Icons (Ral Partha)



Sylph (Ral Partha)



Flashman (Ral Partha)

pieces of wall with structures attached. Piece #1 is a stone house that probably would be either a warehouse or barracks. The house has a single plank door and two shuttered windows. The roof has shingles and is stone supported. A chimney stands straight up next to the walkway, and a set of stone stairs winds around the left side. Piece #2 has a water cistern and trough complete with a lion's head nestled between the stairs and the building. The building is a mini-fortress with a defensive wall to hold invaders who have gained the inner court. The plank door is reinforced with metal and the studs are clearly visible.

This set is needed only if you want to build a large castle, namely the Old Guard Hobbies keep we reviewed several months ago in issue #185. The quality of this kit is excellent. I highly recommend it at \$69.95.

Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

5938 Carthage Ct.
Cincinnati OH 45212-1197

Minifigs

1/5 Graham Rd., Southampton
UNITED KINGDOM SO2 0AX

93-028 Pan-European Heavy

Tank

**** 1/2

Steve Jackson Games' OGRE* system is enjoying a resurgence of popularity and, at the same time, the return of its vehicle castings. The heavy tanks shown here are made of lead, but that metal is being replaced by Ralidium, Ral Partha's new miniatures alloy. The pack contains two 25-mm scale heavy tanks, each 30 mm long x 15 mm wide x 12 mm tall. The vehicles have fully enclosed tracks for propulsion, exposed only at the ground contact. The vehicles have sloping fronts that make excellent shot traps and turrets that look almost like a KV-1 turret from World War II. For a modern tank, it is behind the M-1 in fashion. It's highly recommended at \$4.50 per Ralidium pack.

11-473 Giant Rat Stand

Giant rats are one of the most common monsters found in many fantasy dungeons or sewers. As these creatures usually travel in packs, it is hard to find enough figures to do such a pack justice. Ral Partha's Giant Rat Stand is scaled for 25 mm, is made of Ralidium, and comes two stands to a package. The stands are identical, each showing 11 individual rats milling about. A stand measures 40 mm x 8 mm; the rats are stacked up almost 15 mm high. Each stand had quite a few stray "strings" from vent holes, so cut carefully to avoid cutting off any tails or ears. I feel that the stands would have better served gamers by spreading the rats out horizontally instead of vertically, but this way is easier to produce. I do recommend these, even at the pricey amount of \$5.25 per pack.

11-474 Sylph

**** ½

A sylph is a beautiful creature who dwells at high altitudes the way a nymph does in the woods. This sylph is scaled to 25 mm but measures out to a demure 23 mm. The figure is well proportioned and wears a long robe split down the middle and a girdlelike belt. Her arms are bare except for wisps of cloth bound through bands. A pretty face is framed by hair with a slight wave to it. Facial features are good, although the expression is much more serious than I would expect. Veined gossamer-like wings sprout from the middle of her back. Even though it was necessary to trim flash from the wings and base bottom, I still recommend this figure, even at the Ralidium figure price of \$2.15 each.

20-528 Black Ice Icons

**** ½

What monsters lurk in the computer networks of FASA's SHADOWRUN* game? Here, computerized critters are called icons. The three icons in the pack are scaled to 25 mm. Although my set is made of lead, but they may now be of Ralidium. Two of the miniatures are on bases with good circuitboard-style detailing. All three are blocky crystalline creatures.

The spider is 35 mm long x 30 mm wide x 14 mm high, with very prominent jaws and beady eyes. The legs are block-jointed, and the abdomen is pronounced. There is no base on this creature.

The samurai icon is 20 mm tall. His helmet has a half moon symbol on it, and he wields a sword in two hands. This figure has a base. This figure had a number of "strings" from vent holes.

The cat icon is stalking along the circuits and is about the size of a sabertooth tiger in 25-mm scale. This would be a really nice model except for the area where the cat meets the base. This cat is over 30 mm long.

All these figures have uses in different cyberpunk and other game systems. If you want to get an "icy" effect, double gloss your figures' high points. These are recommended at \$5.50 a pack at the new prices.

20-784 The N-Thorn

I want to start by thanking Andy Kennedy for his help with the assembly of this and the following BATTLETECH* 'Mechs.

This 'Mech comes as a four-piece, easily assembled kit. The figure represents a 20-ton 'Mech scaled for 25 mm. The 'Mech stands 38 mm high from base to fin and is mounted on a plain oval base. This kit is currently made of lead but is being converted to Ralidium. The figure strides along but otherwise matches exactly its picture in FASA's *Technical Readout 2750*.

In my BATTLETECH games, this 'Mech has done a good job protecting fixed locations where it can slug it out toe-to-toe. I recommend it even with its \$4.25 price.

20-786 Flashman

**** ½

This four-piece kit assembles into a 48-

mm-tall model of a 75-ton 'Mech. The figure is made of lead, but scheduled for conversion to Ralidium. The 'Mech is molded to a rough-surfaced hex base that has a obvious mold line. The 'Mech is very close to its drawing in *Technical Readout 2750*, only the right arm is slightly different.

One problem with this figure is that the base and upper body do not join tightly because of the peg. Lower the height slightly and clean the hole for it to work. It is a powerful 'Mech but costly at the new Ralidium price of \$6.25.

20-788 Sentinel

This 38-mm high 'Mech represents a vehicle weighing 40 tons. Made of lead, the figure has a textured hex base. The 'Mech closely resembles its picture with some minor but noticeable differences. The figure has an area in the left chest that did not fill correctly and gave it "battle damage." The shoulder and upper torso ridges are also not as defined as in the book. This is an iffy call at \$5.75 for quality and practicality, but an undamaged figure would have considerable value in a BATTLETECH campaign because of its game capabilities.

20-787 Champion

**** ½

This 60-ton 'Mech comes as a six-piece kit. The figure has its legs slightly offset; if you try to "level" it, the 'Mech tilts. This is another lead kit scheduled to be converted to Ralidium. Scaled to 25 mm, it is set on a landscaped hex base. It looks exactly like its picture in *Technical Readout 2750*, but its military value is questionable. At \$6.25 for the Ralidium version, there are more useful 'Mechs available.

Grenadier Models, Inc.

P.O. Box 305
Springfield PA 19064

Grenadier Models UK, Ltd.

25 Babbage Rd.
Deeside, Clwyd, Wales
UNITED KINGDOM CH5 2QB

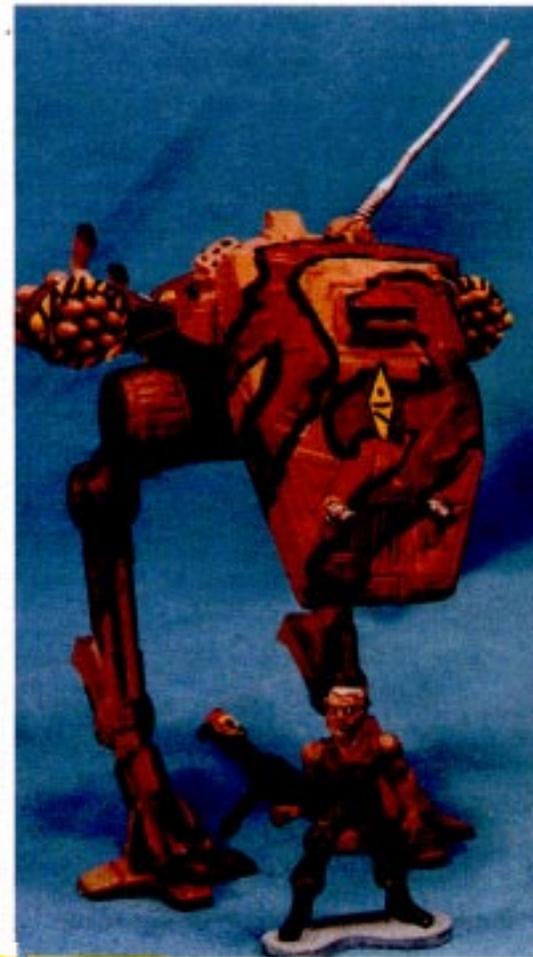
Fantasy Force (KRYOMEK)

Holyrood Business Park, The Bridge
146 Duddingston West, Edinburgh
SCOTLAND EH16 4AP

RC-01 Raven Scavenger Alpha 2.1

RC-02 Raven Scavenger Beta

The Raven Alpha is a lead kit scaled for 27 mm, consisting of a number of parts that form a 20-ton mechanical support unit. The cockpit is in the front wafer head and holds one person in a standing position. You may want to add a base for support and safety. The head is two parts that must be cleaned and have their edges trimmed before they fit together well. The legs on the lower body connection must dry thoroughly after gluing before constructing the rest of the figure; check to



Raven Scavenger Alpha 2.1 (Grenadier Models)

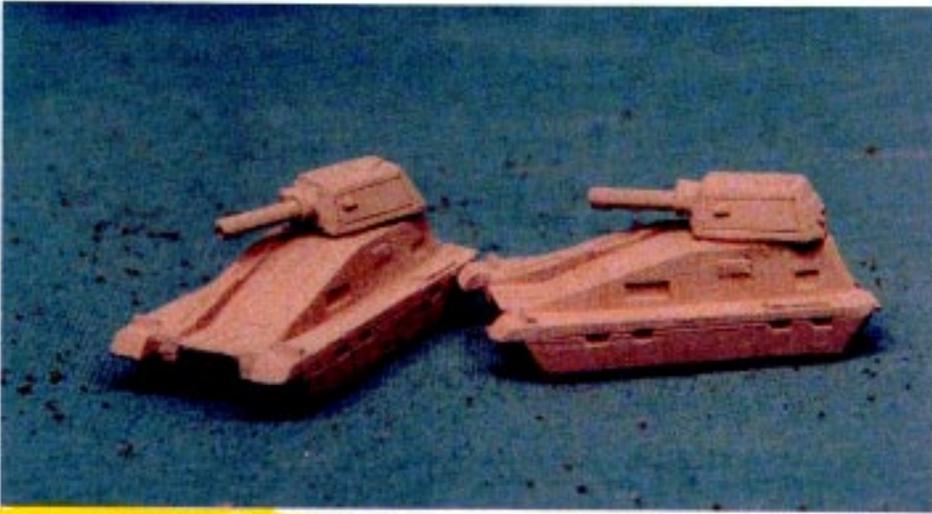
make sure that the feet are solid on the ground. The figures are about 90 mm high and 70 mm wide across the body, minus exhaust, and over 50 mm deep. The legs are birdlike and hinged in three places. The motor is midbody mounted, and parts can be observed on top. Exhaust exits from a stack to the rear. The actual cockpit is 48 mm tall x 20 mm deep x 30 mm wide. Vents, escape hatches, vision slits, and lights are common equipment.

The Alpha is armed with two turret-type gatling guns mounted on wings stretching out from the body. A heavy machine gun covers the rear from a remote control pivot turret. The Beta, otherwise very similar to the Alpha, has a rear-mounted chain gun and two seven-shot heavy-duty missile pads on special stub mounts that replace the gatling guns.

I have heard that these are available in very limited quantities. If so, I recommend that if you can find one you pick it up quick, as they could be used in any SF game as guards, recon, or gladiators for SHADOWRUN* games. Even with the care needed to assemble these, the kit is well worth the \$24.95.

#404 Pole Arms

These weapons are made of the new



Pan-European Heavy Tank (Ral Partha)



Royal Paladin (Grenadier Models)



CYBERPUNK* Cops (Grenadier Models)

Grenadier Luminite compound and allow you to add different appearances to your 28-mm scale pike armies. The set contains two sets of four different halberds and four different glaives. Each set is mounted to a sprue and must be cut off then either squared or rounded, as only a few have the proper ends. These are humans' weapons, but they would look good being carried by orcs or other large humanoids. The cost is \$5.95 for each pack.

8131 Royal Paladin

This 25-mm scale lead-free casting is mounted on an undetailed oval base. The figure represents a young paladin just starting out on the road to glory. The character is dressed differently than most paladins. Knee-high boots run into loose multilayered pants with a padded groin protector. A simple shirt is covered by an intricately done chain-mail shirt reinforced by strips of leather or metal blended into a pattern and edged with thick cloth. The belt is an ornate set of jeweled links with no discernable buckle, supporting a pouch on the left hand side. The left arm supports a battered shield with a griffon embossed on it; his right gauntlet-ed hand wields a simple long sword. A knee-length cape secured with chain and clasps sweeps from his shoulders. Neatly trimmed full hair and beard frame a strong-featured face with good resolution. Eyes, lips, and nose are all in proportion and have no defects. Only the left ear is slightly evident beneath the headband.

This figure could fill the bill as any one of a number of classes, and not being the typical highly armored "tin can" is a plus. Even at \$2.25 each, this is recommended.

CYBERPUNK* #3405 Cops

**** 1/2

This three-figure set provides slightly different types of police officers than were previously available in miniature form. The figures are currently made of lead (but will soon be in Luminite) and are scaled to 28 mm. The figures are all basically similar with differences in posturing, weapons, etc.

The standard uniform seems to be knee-high boots, quilted pants, a regular shirt, and a quilt-pattern half-vest (a bulletproof vest, perhaps). Each cop also has gloves and various sized shoulder pads. A standard belt and buckle support a billy club or holder on the left side and a very large pistol on the right leg, all secured by thongs around the legs. All wear riot helmets with visors or glasses, and each has a badge with an indeterminate design on the left breast and helmet front. Each also wears a name tag with small writing. One trooper has smooth pants, but he may be a motor officer. All the officers have neutral facial expressions.

The troopers are armed with assault rifles or weapons that looks like World War II-era Russian submachine guns. Their postures denote work-time actions—stopping someone, running for cover, etc.

These are nice generic policemen that can be used in anything from the CHAMPIONS* to CYBERPUNK games. I expected these figures to be beefier due to armor, but that is not true. The extra height, which you'll notice if using these figures with 25-mm figures, could be due simply to taller police or biologically enhanced officers. These are worth the \$4.95 price tag.

#618 Mad Scientists ***** 1/2

For every hero, there is at least one villain. This set presents three typical arch-villains all scaled to 28 mm. Two villains have oval bases with no decoration other than one prop. The figures are of lead (no date has been announced for use of a lead-free compound).

The first villain is your typical evil chemist. His street shoes are partially covered by wrinkled trousers, and he wears a long sleeved lab coat. His left hand holds a flask, and the right has a test tube. In a typical monster-movie form, the villain's face is scarred and slightly deformed on the left side, and he is bald as a billiard ball. He even has a monocle (either that or his left eye is bugged out). This figure had mold lines on the base and shoulders, but they were easily fixed except for the wrinkles on the left shoulder.

The second villain is a mechanic or tinkerer wearing sharp-toed boots, a one-



Mad Scientists (Grenadier Models)

piece jump suit, and a tie. The suit is partly covered by an apron. His right hand clenches an unknown object; his left holds a toothed instrument. A discarded rubber glove from his left hand lies on the ground at his feet. A hat covers most of his curly hair. His face reminds me a lot of the fourth Dr. Who, Tom Baker. Mold lines

needed to be cleaned on both shoulders and the base top.

The last villain is wheelchair-bound. The wheelchair is an early 1920s style, of rattan or wicker. The rattan detail is good, but the wheels need trimming and the chair is slightly back-heavy. The scientist molded onto the chair is a wild-haired,

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bespectacled old man with a sharp chin who seems to be laughing. A long lab coat covers the rest of the body except for the collar of a shirt and a bow tie. The character has one hand on his knee and his right hand holds—a brain!

These figures are generic but can be lots of fun, even if you don't use miniatures. With the wide variety of possible game uses, these figures are cheap at \$4.25 per pack.

Next month is our yearly horror parade, including some contemporary gift and display figures. We'll make no bones about it. If you want to write to me, the address is: Robert Bigelow, c/o Friends Hobby Shop, 1411 Washington St., Waukegan IL 60085. Please have patience, as my time for replies is limited. If you want to talk (which I would prefer), you can call me at: (708) 336-0790, 2-10 P.M. CDT M,W-F; or 10 A.M.- 5 P.M. CDT Sa-Su. I am happy to help you however I can. Ω

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The Dragon Project

Continued from page 101

25 +). For all the characters know, the dragon may awaken and be as hostile as its dream self. In truth, he is not. Albrenegan is actually timid and reasonable, having vented his anger in his dreams.

Although the characters have now done what they sought to—put an end to the attacks on Fire Nest—the question of Albrenegan's fate arises. If the Flambeau Magi become aware of the dragon, they claim him as theirs, in compensation for the damage he's caused them. According to Hermetic law, they have full right to him. That means further torment for the innocent beast, a cruel punishment. Of course, characters can try to liberate the dragon, but being caught may again mean Hermetic trial, one the characters are not likely to win. Ultimately, Albrenegan prefers to be set free, allowed to get away from those who killed his mother and will undoubtedly do the same to him.

If characters prove friendly to Albrenegan but Fire Nest's Flambeau seize him, the dragon might refuse their orders, even upon pain of death, unless friendly characters are there to soothe and guide him. If the characters want to see Albrenegan live, they must remain at Fire Nest to tend to him, coaxing him to follow Flambeau orders. Before long the dragon is commanded to attack the Moors, and the

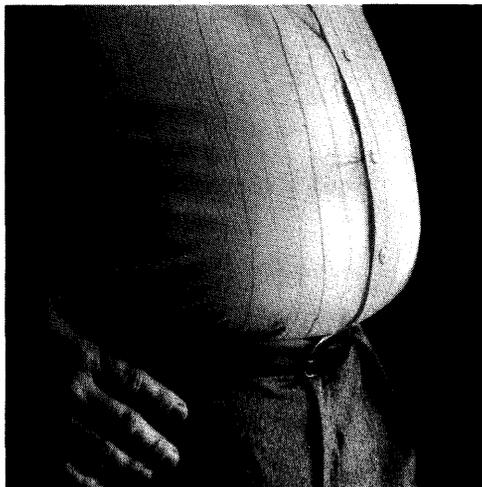
babysitting characters must join him. If the characters are opposed to the Reconquista, a moral dilemma arises—death for the dragon or death for the Moors. The solution might be to fake the dragon's death on the battlefield and flee with him.

The leader of local Reconquista troops, Lord Ramon, a seasoned veteran and honorable warrior, might help the characters free the dragon. Though he recognizes the value of wizards and a dragon on the field, Ramon trusts neither and would sooner have only God and swords by his side. Ramon can therefore order the dragon into a remote region, where imagined enemies are "detected," and where an ambush on the beast and its tenders can be faked, allowing them to flee.

If the characters can free Albrenegan, they may abuse him themselves, demanding services in return for his salvation. The dragon can also return to the characters later in the Saga (campaign), in need of help or to deliver trouble. Maybe the Magi of Fire Nest one day discover the characters cheated them of the dragon and pursue the characters with Wizards War. At the least, Fire Nest and the characters' Covenant become rivals, if not enemies. Ω

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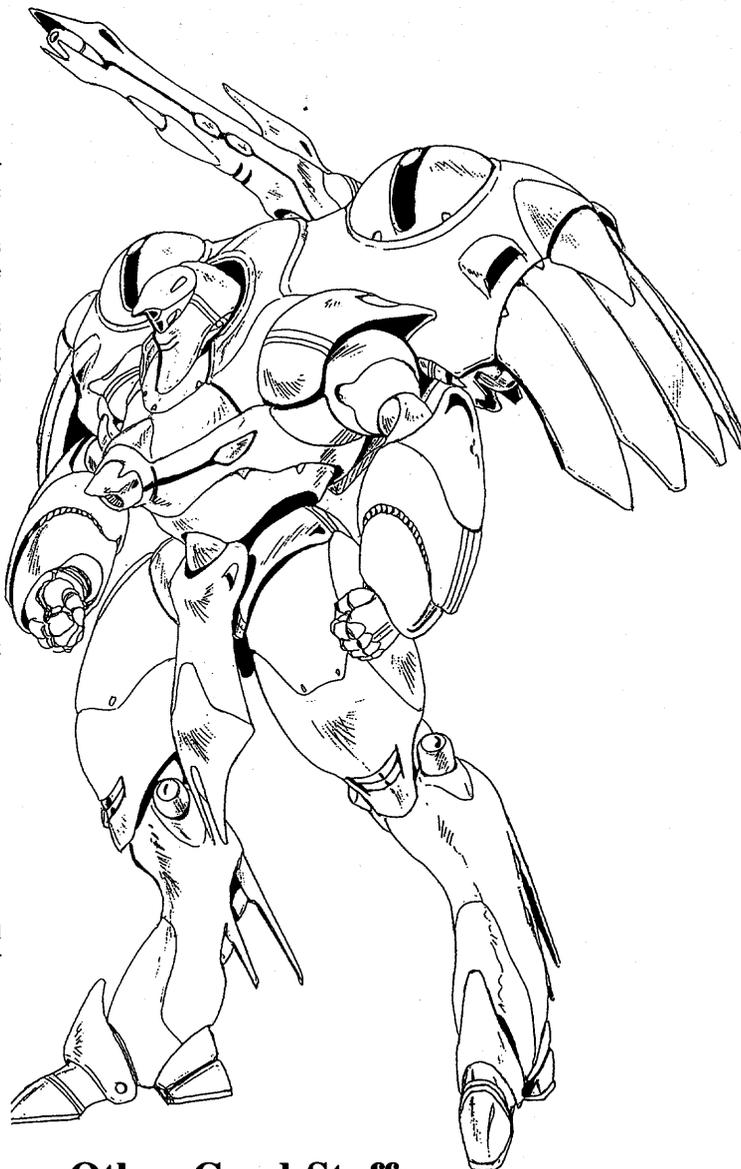
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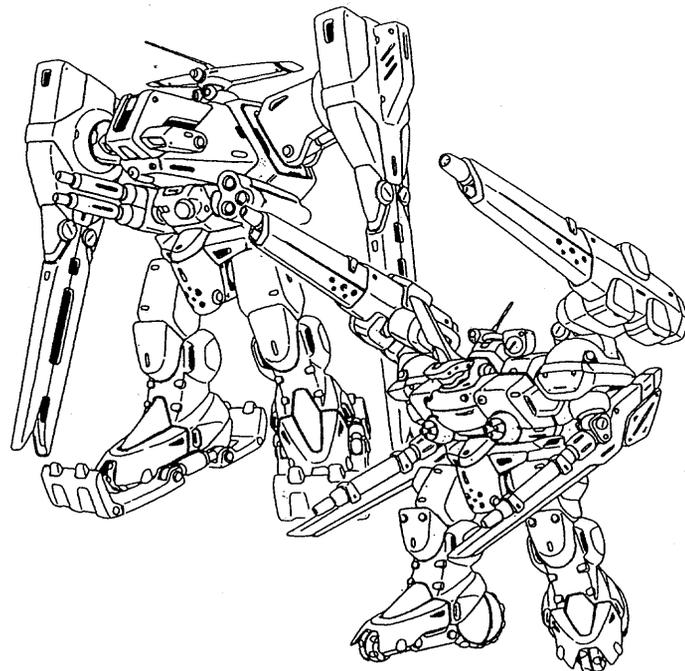
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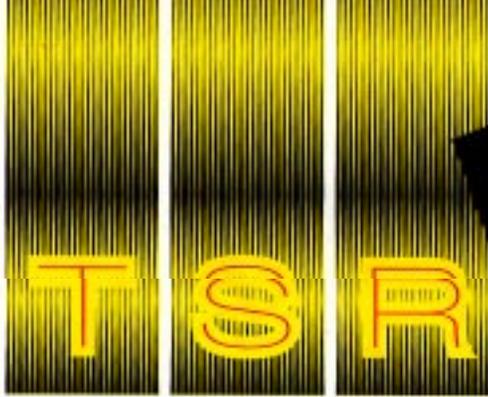
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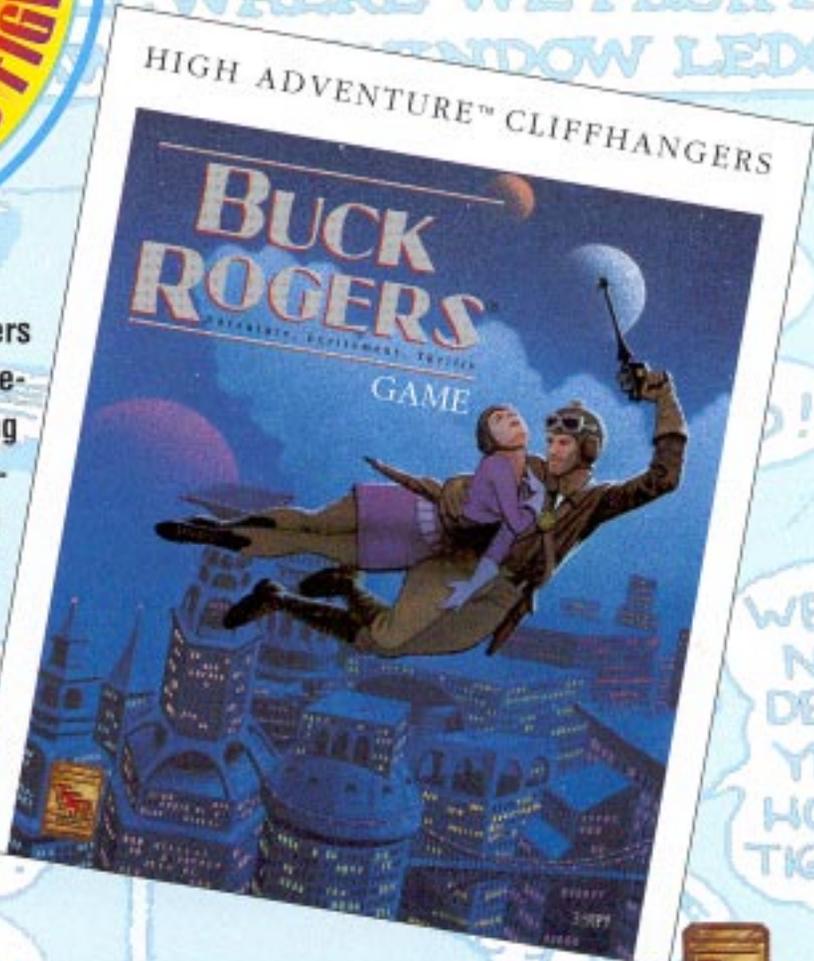
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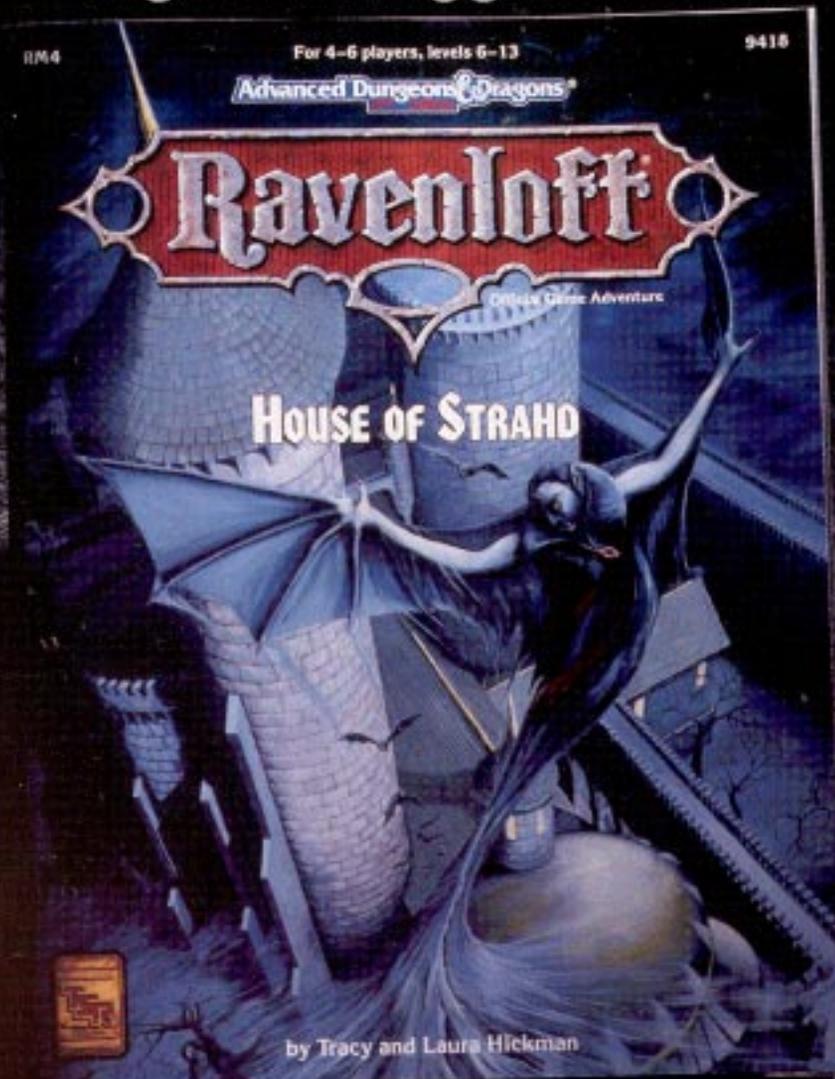


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