

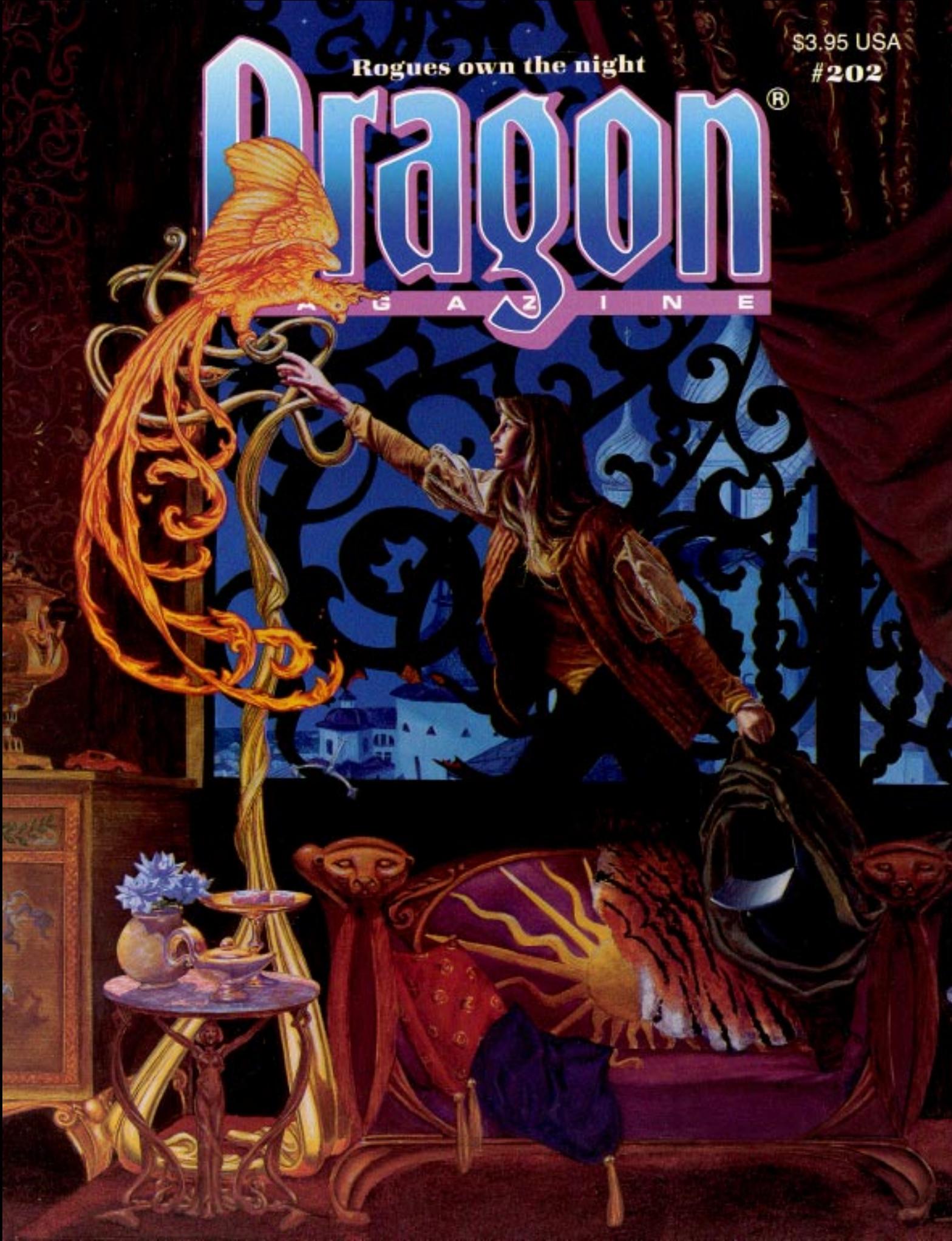
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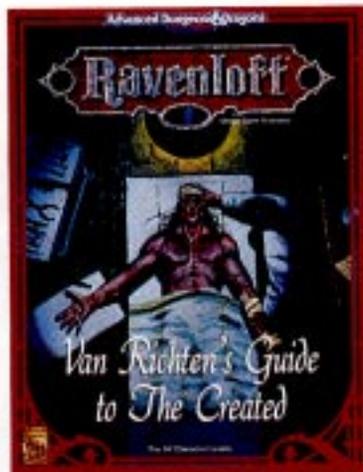
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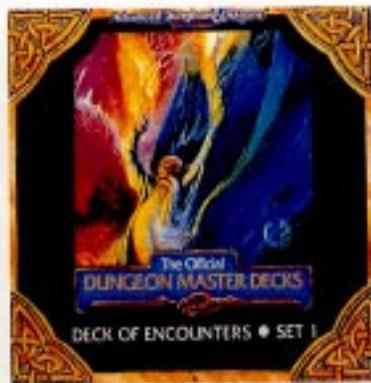
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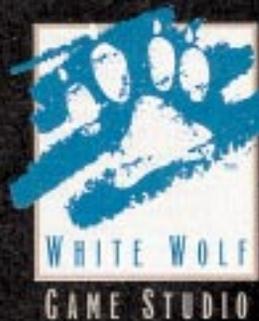
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February 1994

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### COVER

This month's cover painting, "Firebird" by Robin Wood, has quite a history. The concept was one of the first sketches Robin sent to us way back in 1984. It took ten years to get on our cover, but the wait was surely worth it. Robin's inclination to anachronisms is present in this piece too, including two other "birds of fire."

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## Notes from a Semi-Successful Game Master

Doing what I do for a living, I guess it comes as part of the territory that I hear a lot of stories about gaming campaigns. I also hear about numerous campaigns that die premature deaths. They die for many reasons, from player apathy or scheduling conflicts to *Monty Haulism* or even a few botched dice rolls. The majority of these deaths are preventable, though. After hearing one such story recently, I've decided to share three of the lessons I've learned from 13 years of role-playing. I either learned these the hard way, or I picked them up from game masters much more talented than I.

**Have the players help create the world.** If the DM creates her own campaign settings, she should collect all the people who'll play in the game and have a brainstorming session. Give everyone a chance to contribute ideas for the campaign. The DM directs the discussion and concentrates on developing the best concepts. Afterward, the DM develops the campaign fully, taking the ideas and running with them. Campaigns like these tend to last longer since everyone has some personal investment in them.

I took part in a gaming group with friends and coworkers that did this about two years ago. After each session, we'd discuss what we wanted to do the following week. I've seldom had more fun gaming than I did then. I'll carry the memories of those games (and the people who played them) with me for the rest of my life.

This brainstorming also can be done with published campaign worlds. If the players are familiar with the setting, ask them about countries, regions, races, and other aspects of the world that they like or dislike. If the DM wants to run an all-dwarves campaign, a group of elf-PC fanatics isn't going to be very happy. Above all, remember that the campaign belongs to everyone in the group, not just the DM.

**Don't unnecessarily kill PCs.** I'm probably going to get a lot of flack for this one, but I do believe this. Let me give an example of why. About three years ago, I discovered Chaosium's fantastic CALL OF CTHULHU\* horror RPG. All fired up, I set up a scenario for some friends who'd

never played the game. I wanted to show them what a wonderful system it was, and I wanted to scare the socks off them. I thought the game went reasonably well—only two of the five PCs died. Imagine my surprise when the players didn't have much interest in playing again. While there could have been other contributing factors, I'm now sure that one reason for the lack of interest was that the players didn't want to devote the time to create a character only to have that character get her face eaten by some slimy beast or be shoved out a second-story window by a haunted bed.

Players often invest a lot of thought and effort in their characters, just as a DM invests much into the campaign. To have one's character die, especially in a needless or pointless manner, can be very upsetting. I especially dislike "Save vs. poison or die" situations. Where's the story value in the death of a PC simply because the player missed one die roll?

The threat of character death should be present in every role-playing campaign, without it the players can become lazy, or worse, boring. There are options besides the "do or die" scenario. If the dice call for a PC's death, but the DM doesn't feel that the death is deserved (for foolhardy actions, etc.), declare that the PC falls into a coma, breaks a limb, loses her memory, or suffers some other major—but not fatal—mishap.

Also, a heroic death, or one that adds value to the story being told, is another matter. If the PC's death serves a purpose in the campaign (saving the other PCs, sacrificing a character to destroy a larger threat, etc.), the player may actually enjoy having his PC go out in a blaze of glory.

**Be a storyteller.** When running a scene, the DM must do more than list the contents of the room. Lists are dull. Rather, use the characters' senses to describe the scene. Don't tell them what's there; tell them what they see, hear, smell, feel, and taste, then let the players draw their own conclusions. Not only does add to the game's atmosphere, it can provide information important to the story.

One terrific example to this took place in

a another CALL OF CTHULHU campaign, this one run by David "Zeb" Cook. For the scene where our characters met our patron, Zeb turned off all but one of the lights in the house (He didn't need to say our patron was in a darkened room.), wrapped himself in a blanket (Zeb didn't have to tell us the PCs' patron was very ill.), and spoke in a slow, rasping voice. (We didn't need to be told that our PCs' patron was also rather old.)

All DMs needn't take such measures, but we all should remember that part of being a DM is telling a story with the help of the players. It's as if the DM is the author of a novel, and the PCs are the heroes of the story. The DM advances the plot and presents the characters with obstacles, the players work to have their PCs overcome these obstacles and react to the advancing plot. Together, the group thus "writes" the characters' story.

I hope these tips help to prevent more premature RPG campaign deaths. DMs (and players) are encouraged to write with any further suggestions for longer-lasting campaigns. Maybe we all can learn something new.



*Dale A. Donovan*

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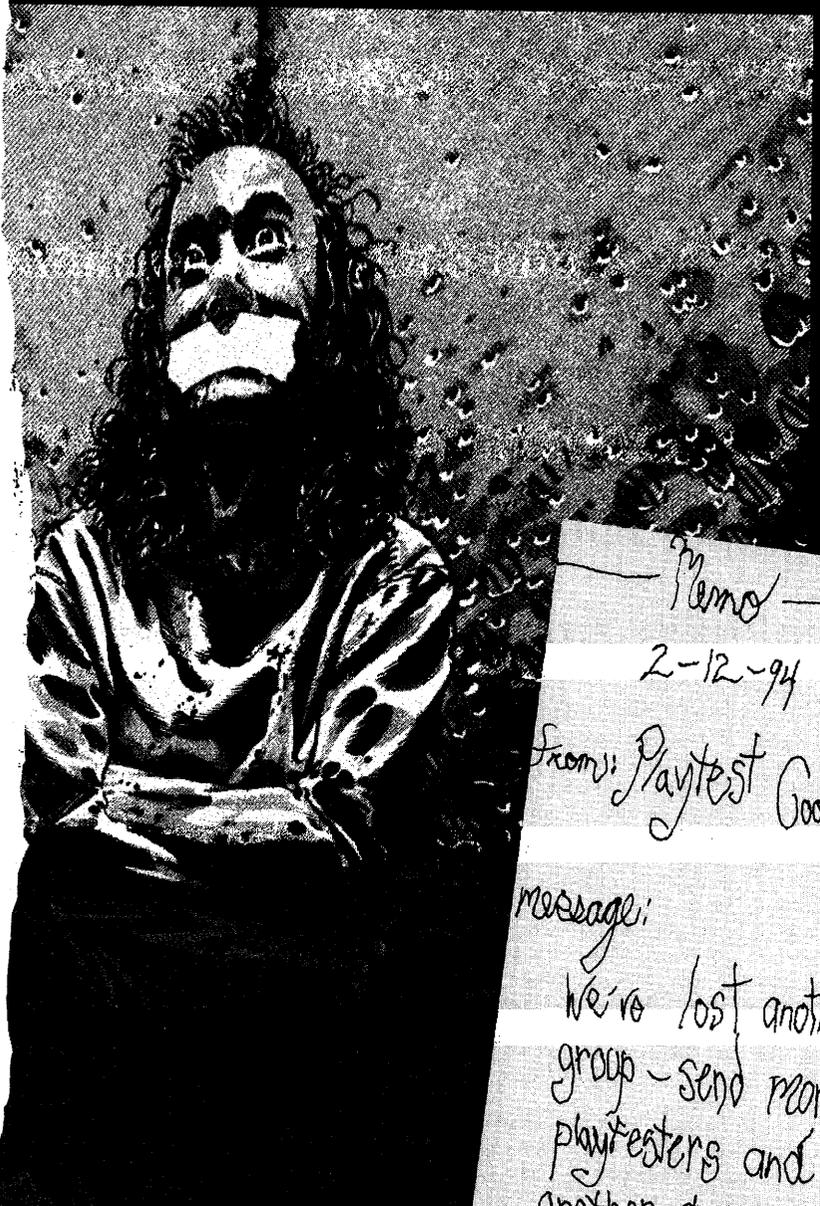
An Open Letter to the Gaming Community from  
White Wolf Game Studio:

Over the past few months, we at White Wolf have  
been playtesting our next Storyteller series  
game. Several vile rumors concerning the playtest  
have recently come to our attention.

There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that  
our playtesters' sanity has been threatened.  
Furthermore, we firmly and categorically deny  
that the sudden institutionalization of a group  
of playtesters in Harrisburg, PA has anything to  
do with our game. Surely the gaming public has  
better things to do than spread such outright  
falsehoods.

Thank you for this opportunity to set the record  
straight.

White Wolf Game Studio



Memo  
2-12-94  
From: Playtest Coordinator  
message:  
We've lost another  
group - send more  
playtesters and  
another dozen  
straight jackets

Don't Run Home to Mama!



The fourth game in the Storyteller series, coming in early August.

# L e t t e r s

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.

## Too many rules?

Dear Dragon,

I've been a great fan of the D&D® game and TSR's novels for many years now. But, like many people, I spend more time reading fantasy fiction than I do gaming, and when I'm the DM, I like to incorporate some of the novels' magic and creativity into the game.

It distresses me, therefore, that most of the articles I see in DRAGON Magazine are on statistics, mapping, and other technical aspects of the game. Though these articles are very important, I would like to see more on how to make campaigns more interesting and creative, and thereby, more challenging. Imagination is what the D&D game and fantasy in general are based upon, and using imagination to make gaming more realistic, and more fun, would benefit all gamers.

I have many ideas to share, and would like to hear what concepts others have come up with, as well as their opinions on this topic.

Lisa Campos  
18175 Vallea Circle  
Huntington Beach CA 92646

You've struck on one of the primary dilemmas in putting together this magazine, Lisa. Finding a balance between rules-oriented and role-playing articles is always a challenge. A magazine's theme often plays a large part in determining the mix. As a random example, two of issue #199's theme-section articles on monsters (articles on new troll types and humanoid combat tactics) were technically-oriented. Gamers can add these new "rules packages" directly to their campaigns. These can lead to more interesting role-playing. How will the PCs react the first time they encounter one of the new species of troll? Also, the article "Pin Back Their Ears," while it detailed new rules for lycanthropes in the D&D game, added a challenging new dimension to role-playing werebeasts as PCs in the game. Such creative additions to a game system often require those ideas be grounded in terms everyone who plays that game can understand, e.g., the rules. A game's rules are the foundation upon which campaigns are built. It seems to me that if an article expands that foundation by adding new dimensions to the rules, the campaigns built on those rules can expand too. When you encount-

er a technical article, think about how that piece can be applied to your campaign in a way that is interesting and challenging not just to the PCs, but to the players. Carrying the above example further, consider how would your party react if one of the PCs became infected with lycanthropy. Applying the rules from "Pin Back Their Ears" could lead to numerous situations requiring creativity and imaginative role-playing. Rules needn't be viewed as a game's limitations, but rather as a springboard from which your imagination can be launched. We will keep an eye on the balance of technical vs. role-playing pieces in the future

## "Bedeviled" responses

We received quite a few responses on what the title of our cover art for DRAGON issue #197 ("The Bedeviled Met His Fate") meant, most of which are too long to print here. Reproduced below, however, are two shorter answers:

I think there was a typo regarding the cover [of issue #197]. The real title is: "The Three Deviled Eggs Biff Ate" (shortly before battle). Poor Biff! This explains his facial expression—time for a *potion of pepto*.

Daniel Weaver  
Springfield MA

I think Brom called the painting, "The Bedeviled Met His Fate" because the elf depicted in it is a TSR employee grimly preparing to negotiate a pay raise.

Peter Pires  
APO South Korea

If only it were that easy Peter. Seriously, honorable mentions go to Katerin Watson of Hamburg, Germany, and Marlene Hiltensauer of Klagenfurt, Austria, whose stories were the only ones I received that did not take place on Athas, the setting of the DARK SUN® campaign. Just because Brom did the art doesn't necessitate the events depicted taking place on Athas.

## A PBM "clearing house"

Dear Dragon,

I read Shayne Power's query in DRAGON issue #200, and your response put an idea into my head I am hereby volunteering to act as the clearing house you mentioned. Here's my mailing address, data number (I run a BBS in my spare time), and my FidoNet node number. If

you don't know what a FidoNet number is, don't worry about it. Let the games begin!

Ian Reid  
200 West 9th St.  
The Dalles OR 97058

The River Keep BBS  
(503) 298-8485  
FidoNet 1: 105/507

Since your letter was the first I received, Ian, you get the job. I hope you know what you're getting into. Everyone who is interested in participating in PBM (play-by-mail) gaming is encouraged to contact Ian. On behalf of a lot of gamers, I thank you, Ian. Keep us up to date on how it's going.

## Gleipner found!

Dear Dragon,

Concerning Jonathan Fox's letter in issue #200: Gleipner was the flimsy, silk-like ribbon used by the Aesir to bind Fenrir; the Fenris Wolf of Norse Mythology. It has six components: the sound made by a cat when it moves; the breath of a fish; the beard of a woman; a bird's spittle; the roots of a mountain; and the sinews of a bear. This dwarven-made magical ribbon was the only binding strong enough to hold Fenrir, who had snapped the mighty chains Laeding and Dromi, forged by the Aesir to contain him.

Michael McCausland  
Virginia IL

Thanks for the information, Michael. Also, Fenrir, who was ravaging much of Asgard, only allowed himself to be bound by Gleipner if one of the Norse gods put a hand into Fenrir's mouth. Tyr, the Norse god of courage and the sword, volunteered. When Fenrir realized he couldn't break his binding, he bit off Tyr's hand as revenge.

## And the coloring album, too!

Dear Dragon,

I can help Josh Wells, who wrote in issue #199's "Letters" column about details on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Coloring Album," I have a copy, and while it is not for sale, I can provide the following information to aid Josh in his search. The book's full title is: "The Official ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Coloring Album"; it is Copyrighted by Troubador Press in 1979; the cover has an illustration of a red dragon breathing fire on an adventuring party; the interior was illustrated by Greg Irons, and it was written by Gary Gygax. I don't know if

Continued on page 84

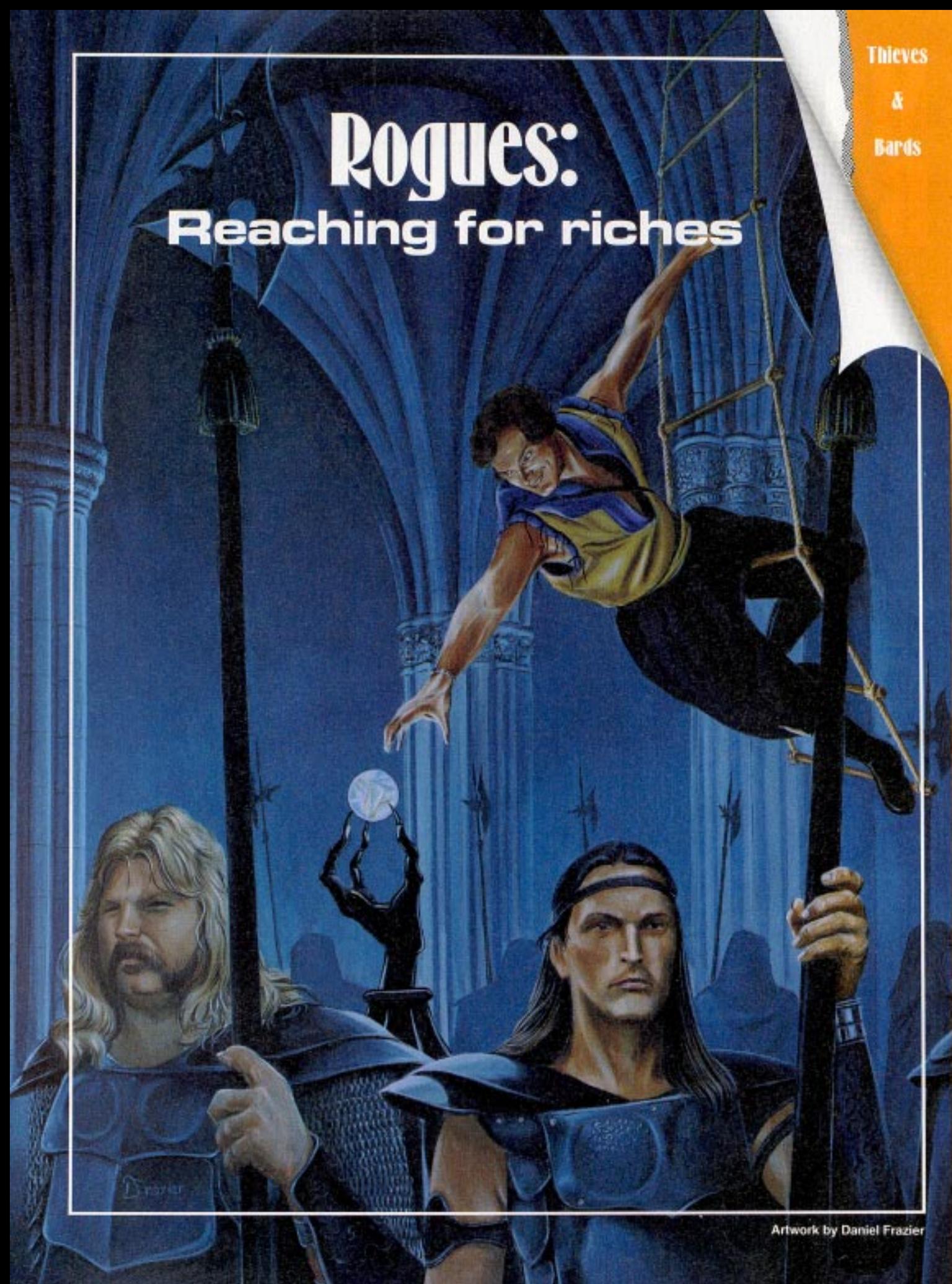
Thieves

&

Bards

# Rogues:

## Reaching for riches



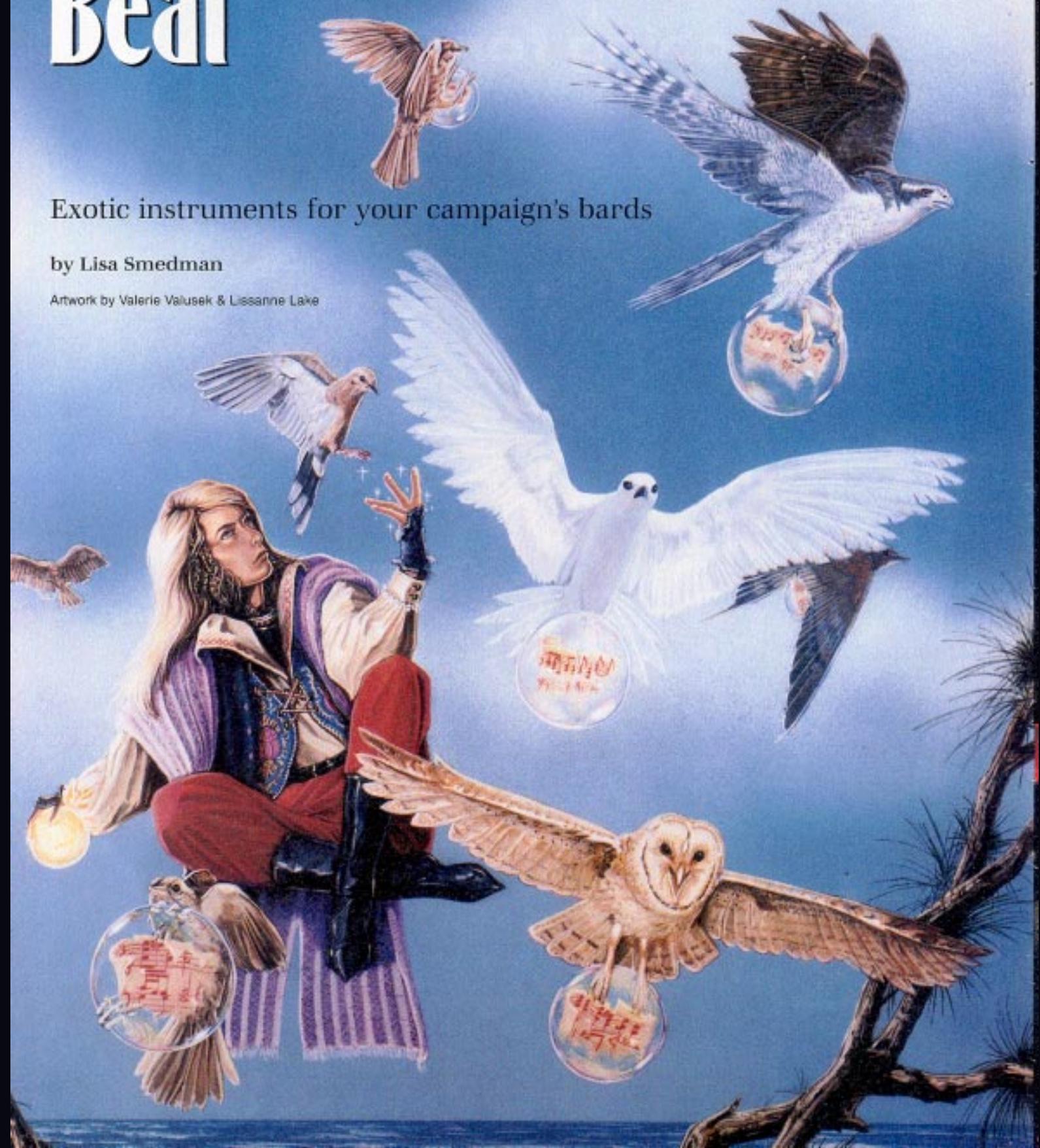
Artwork by Daniel Frazier

# Magic to a Different Beat

Exotic instruments for your campaign's bards

by Lisa Smedman

Artwork by Valerie Valusek & Lissanne Lake



In the typical AD&D® campaign, the bard is a wandering minstrel, singing and playing on street corners or in the halls of kings, indulging in a little light-fingered thievery, and occasionally casting a flashy or theatrical magic spell to enchant and delight an audience or show off for friends. Bards may be street buskers, gypsies, jesters, storytellers, operatic singers, or heralds. Typically, their musical instruments, lifestyles, and outlooks are inspired by a European tradition and a narrow historical time period.

Yet music spans the globe—and the millennia. As early as 15,000 years ago, people were making music with simple bows and bone flutes. Africa, Australia, the Pacific Islands, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas all offer examples of unusual instruments and widely varying musical traditions and approaches.

How does a DM adopt these other musical traditions to a gaming system? There are two basic approaches.

The first involves simply flipping through an encyclopedia of musical instruments until you spot something unusual or intriguing, then making up the traditions that go along with it. The shape of the instrument, its decoration, the materials from which it is made, and the manner in which it is played can be used as springboards for developing the customs and traditions of the bards who use it.

Easily portable instruments, for example, suggest wandering minstrels. Other bards might be rooted in one spot due to the sheer size or immobility of their instruments. One example of an organ from the fifteenth century featured pipes that were up to 32 feet long, and a bellows that was worked by an assistant who held onto a support bar and worked huge pumps with his feet. Equally immobile were the slit drums of the Indian state of Assam, which were so large that each was housed in its own roofed building. In the Pacific islands, some drums were hewn from standing tree trunks. Sometimes carved with human features, these drums drew their magical power from the spot in which the tree was rooted.

The second approach involves extrapolating bardic traditions from a particular musical culture. The instruments themselves may not be unique, but the context in which they are played, the methods of training for the musicians, and the rituals surrounding the instruments can offer a wealth of ideas. Some cultures, for example, require their musicians to wear ceremonial clothing while performing. Other cultures ascribe magical powers to certain instruments and have strict rituals governing who can handle them and how they must be stored. All these details are fodder for the Dungeon Master, who can use them to develop not only bardic traditions but also new spells and magical items.

In a number of cultures, for example, certain instruments were played by men only; others were played by women. If the opposite sex played, touched, or even looked at one of these instruments, all its magical power would be drained away.

Sometimes, the instruments themselves were assigned a gender. In Africa, for example, drums that produced a deep sound were thought of as “male,” while higher-pitched drums were “female.” Among the Camayura Indians of Brazil, the *urua*, a form of double clarinet, had a longer “male” pipe and a shorter “female” pipe.

DMs can add flavor to a campaign setting by incorporating these ideas. Magical instruments might work only in the hands of specific character classes or races, with strict (and brutal) punishments for breaking the taboos surrounding a particular type of instrument.

While the *Player's Handbook* specifically prohibits bards from specializing in a school of magic, certain spells lend themselves to particular instruments or musical traditions. The bards who follow these traditions naturally tend to acquire those spells that best suit their lifestyles and beliefs. Let's look at a few examples.

### Percussion instruments

In West Africa, drum music requires a small orchestra of musicians. While the majority of them play supporting patterns on drums, iron bells, and shaker gourds, a

master drummer plays a more intricate rhythm. Drumming is nearly always accompanied by dance, and it is the master drummer who signals the changes in each dance.

In gaming terms, the supporting musicians are lower-level bards, while a higher-level bard acts as master drummer. Through their drums, the musicians cast such mind- and body-controlling spells as *suggestion*, *emotion*, *mass suggestion*, and *domination*. Dressed in colorful costumes, these bards perform at public celebrations and gatherings, where they are paid by wealthy patrons to use their spells to control the mood and actions of the crowd.

Alternatively, these drummer bards could be part of a secret society of thieves. Their drums reverberate through the night, using spells such as *charm person* and *hypnotism*, to lure victims who, after they are robbed of valuables, are unable to remember what has happened because of the *forget* spells cast on them.

Africa is the home of the "talking" drum, a small drum that is held under the arm and played with a curved stick. The drum is shaped like an hourglass and has strings that stretch along the body between its two heads. The head of the drum can be tightened by squeezing the strings, producing varying pitch.

Talking drums were used to send messages over distances. Chiefs and other important members of the tribe had drum names, particular combinations of notes on a drum, that were passed down through generations.

Messenger bards fill a specialized role for the rulers of a campaign world, sending messages over great distances by means of such spells as *whispering wind*. A pair of these bards can transmit signals secretly, via a message spell that sounds like a barely audible tapping on the drum head. These bards also can cast the spell *tongues*, enabling them to translate for their patrons, and can protect themselves by drumming up a *shout* spell.

Drums were used in China to send signals and relay orders on the battlefield. The Chinese also developed a drum language that was used in theater. Drawing

from this tradition, the DM can create an orchestra of bards who use various sizes of drums, cymbals, and bells to cast flashy special effects spells for a theatrical troupe. Spells that are particularly useful in enhancing a stage performance include *dancing lights*, *phantasmal force*, *glitterdust*, *levitate*, *mirror image*, *pyrotechnics*, *invisibility*, *wall of fog*, *alter self*, *darkness 15' radius*, and *fog cloud*.

## Stringed instruments

One of the earliest stringed instruments, the musical bow, was developed from the hunting bow. Often the same bow was used both for hunting and making music. The string was plucked with the fingers, tapped with a stick, or sawed with a second, smaller bow. Bending the bow changed the tension on the string and the pitch of the note. Placing one end of the bow in the mouth also changed the sound.

A tribe of hunters might produce bards who played this instrument. Proficient in animal lore, they entertain the tribe at night with hunting songs sung around a campfire to accompany dancers dressed in animal masks. If the hunting is poor, these bards can use the spells *conjure animals* or *locate creature* from the *Tome of Magic (ToM)* to find game.

Alternatively, a troop of archers can double as warrior-bards. When going into battle, they first pluck their bow strings and sing to cast a *shield* or *protection from normal missiles* spell. While firing seemingly empty bows, they sing a spell-song that provides them with magical arrows, such as *magic missile*, *flame arrow*, or *Melf's acid arrow*.

A variation of the warrior-bard could be based on the warriors of Southern Africa, who sang and beat on their wooden shields when going into battle. These shields were considered both musical instruments and practical warriors' tools. They are used to cast such spells as *protection from normal missiles*, *stoneskin*, *armor*, and *shield*.

The DM running a campaign with a classical flavor might want to make use of the lyre of ancient Greece. This instrument had a soundbox constructed of a tortoise shell, to which were attached two

curving antelope horns. Strings ran from the shell to a crossbar at the top of the two horns. The instrument was played by plucking these strings like a harp.

The lyre was said to have first been made by Hermes, messenger of the gods. Appropriate spells for bards using the lyre include *comprehend languages*, *message*, *magic mouth*, *whispering wind*, *tongues*, *dream*, *sending*, and *contact other plane*. In Africa, the music of the lyre was associated with healing rituals. Bards using it are able to cast the spell *reincarnation* as well as a number of protective spells.

The *kithara*, a version of the lyre with a square wooden soundbox, was the instrument preferred by professional musicians and the aristocracy. It was the instrument of Apollo, god of harmony. Bards using the kithara cast spells that produce harmonious results, including *friends*, *charm person*, and *remove curse*.

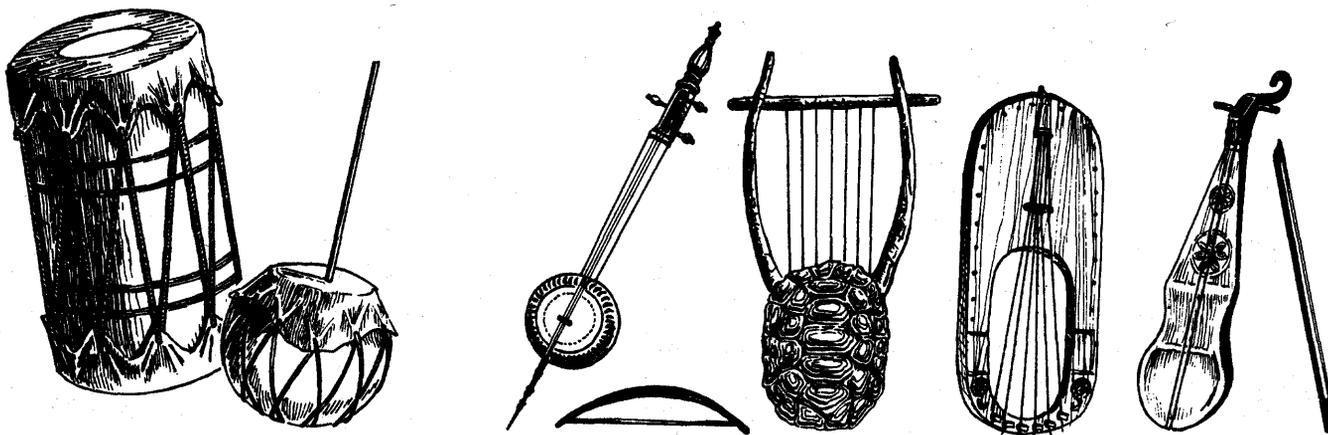
## Wind instruments

Still other musical instruments were designed to be used as weapons. Examples of Irish trumpets from the Bronze Age featured spikes on the bell.

On several Pacific islands, bamboo flutes are played by exhaling air into them through the nose rather than through the mouth. These nose flutes are played with one nostril, while the other nostril is squeezed shut with a finger.

Traditional belief has it that the breath from the nose has special powers. The DM can grant these bards the ability to cast such air- and breath-related spells as *fog cloud*, *gust of wind*, *water breathing*, *solid fog*, *death fog*, *wall of fog*, *lasting breath (ToM)*, *ride the wind (ToM)*, and *suffocate (ToM)*.

Another type of flute, the panpipe, was said by the ancient Greeks to have been invented by the god Pan after a nymph he was chasing was turned into a reed. The panpipe, made of a series of hollow tubes of different lengths, is the instrument of wandering shepherds who have become bards. Worshipers of the god of fields and flocks, they use the haunting melodies of the pipes to cast spells that protect their herds. These include such spells as *protection from evil*, *blink*, *haste*, *distance distortion*, and *blur*. They also use their music to



cast the spell *plant growth* and are adept at casting the spells *polymorph self* and *polymorph other*, especially in jest. Dressed in simple tunics and sandals, these bards follow their flocks as they make the circuit from winter to summer pastures.

The *tikitiri*, a form of double clarinet found in India, is traditionally associated with snake charming. Drawing from the Indian tradition, the DM can create a group of bards who live an ascetic life-style, dressing only in simple loincloths and turbans. They use their tikitiris to cast such spells as *sepia snake sigil*, *hypnotism*, *charm monster*, and *hold monster*. They also may have the ability to charm humans as well as snakes. Appropriate spells include *suggestion*, *emotion*, *mass suggestion*, *charm person*, and *domination*.

### Unusual instruments

History has provided a number of unusual musical instruments that the DM can incorporate as the primary instruments of particular types of bards. One of the more unusual instruments is known as the "bull roarer." It consists of a thin piece of bone or wood attached to a cord, and is played by twirling it around the head. The faster the bull roarer is twirled and the smaller the piece of wood, the higher the note sounded.

In tribal societies, bull roarers were ritual instruments whose voices were thought to be those of the ancestors, or the gods of thunder and wind. Bards who play the bull roarer often collect several of these instruments, each used in casting a different spell. They live on the fringes of their society, respected and feared by the general populace, who come to the bards when they wish to ask advice of the dead or call down ill weather on their enemies. These bards use such weather-controlling spells as *gust of wind*, *Melf's minute meteors*, *wind wall*, *control weather*, *lightning bolt*, *ice storm*, and *chain lightning*, and are also able to cast *detect undead*, *detect evil*, *know alignment*, *contact other plane*, and *legend lore*.

In Southeast Asia, gongs were believed to be capable of warding off storms and evil. A highly respected class of bards could be designed to travel through the countryside, hauling their gongs along in

wagons. The larger the gong (and the purer and more sustained the note it emits when struck), the greater the power of the bard's spell. These bards cast such spells as *control weather* and protection from *evil*. Their instruments consist of a single large gong, or rows of smaller gongs, hung from an upright wooden frame. Their instruments might be based on the *bon-nang* from Java, which takes the form of a series of bowl-shaped lidded gongs set up in pairs on a low wooden platform.

DMs using the ALQADIM® campaign world will want their bards to be outfitted appropriately. Fortunately, the Middle East has produced a variety of intriguing instruments. One is the *shawm*, a double-reeded instrument made of wood or metal. Similar to the modern oboe, the shawm produces a strident, buzzing sound of such volume that it is usually played outdoors. The Middle East also has a form of bagpipe that features two chanters (the pipe on which the melody is played) that end in wide animal horns. Other instruments include cymbals, tapered drums, zithers, and dulcimers. See the article, "Sounds of Wonder & Delight" in DRAGON® issue #190 for more AL-QADIM instruments.

For a campaign world with a more modern flavor (say, the 1800s), the DM can equip the bard with a concertina, a small, hexagonally shaped instrument played like an accordion. Another musical instrument suitable to such a campaign is the hurdy-gurdy. (Although it was originally developed in Medieval times, the mechanical nature of the hurdy-gurdy makes it suitable for this time period.) This mechanized violin is operated by rotating a crank at one end. It is played by means of a keyboard that runs down one side of the instrument. Depressing a key damps a string, preventing it from sounding.

Magical items for this style of campaign could be based on early mechanical instruments such as the music box or player piano. These magical items can cast multiple spells, depending on the tune played. (The DM can have a lot of fun ascribing magical spells or effects to popular song titles from the 1800s.)

In a music box, the tune is programmed by a pin-studded disk or cylinder. As the

disk rotates inside the box, the pins pluck metal tongues that produce the sound. In a player piano, the tune is encoded on a piano roll (a scroll with perforations in it that is wound around a wooden tube). The position of each perforation determines the pitch of the note to be sounded, while the length of the hole determines how long the note will sound. A bard who is familiar with magical music boxes or player pianos can determine the spells they contain by carefully observing the disk, cylinder, or piano roll inside them.

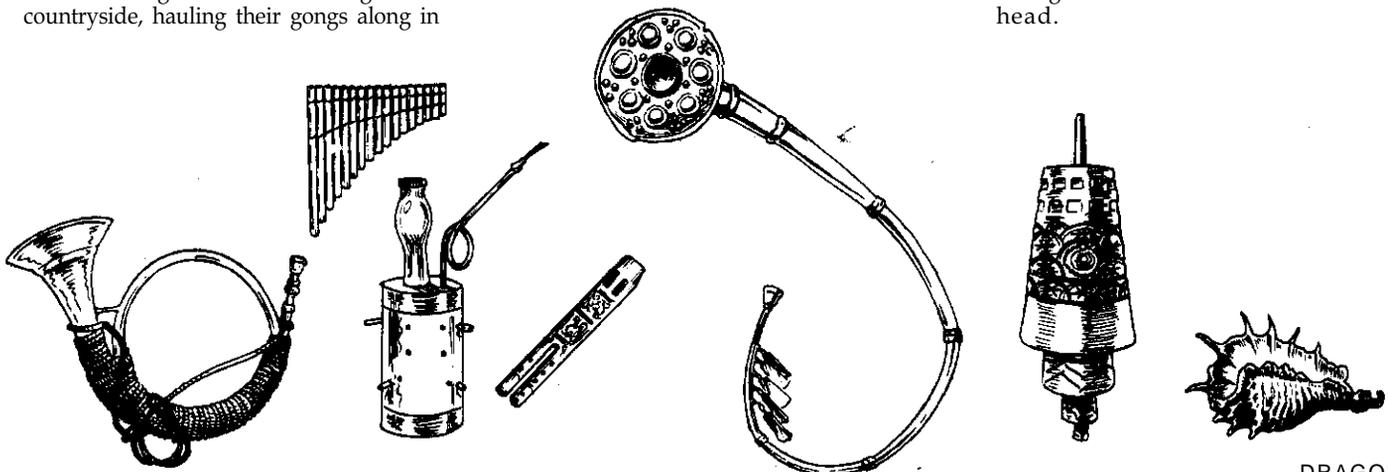
Another mechanical instrument, this one dating from the Roman period, was the *hydraulis*. This hand-pumped organ relied on water-filled chambers to maintain a steady supply of air to its pipes. It stood about 2' tall and was played in the home and at religious ceremonies. One of its more unusual uses was as an accompaniment to gladiatorial battles. Bards playing the hydraulis can specialize in such combat-oriented spells as *protection from normal missiles*, *strength*, *haste*, *slow*, *stoneskin*, *armor*, *fumble*, *enchanted weapon*, *shield*, and *fist of stone* (ToM).

Other bards have a more mystical approach to life and spell-casting. The *didgeridoo* is a long, hollow tube of wood that is played by Aboriginal people of Australia. It produces a low moaning noise. The Aboriginals who play this instrument believe in a dreamtime in which time has no meaning and important truths are revealed.

Bards based on this culture enter the dreamtime by decorating their bodies with ritual paint and feathers and playing the didgeridoo. They are proficient at casting such spells as *dream*, *detect magic*, *detect undead*, *detect evil*, *detect invisibility*, *ESP*, *know alignment*, *locate object*, *detect scrying*, *contact other plane*, *legend lore*, *true seeing*, *pattern weave* (ToM), *alternate reality* (ToM), *spirit armor* (ToM), *locate creature*, *past life* (ToM), and *wizard sight* (ToM).

Other cultures and time periods have contributed a number of unusual instruments that can be used by the DM to give flavor to PC and NPC bards alike.

For example, instead of a normal drum, bards could carry friction drums. These are played by rotating or sliding a stick through a hole in the middle of the drum head.



Bagpipes are an unusual enough instrument but need not be based on a Scottish culture; they were also developed in a number of other countries. Made from the skin of an animal, they feature a variety of different combinations of chanter and drone pipes, and are sometimes constructed from animal heads.

Instead of a trumpet, bards may be encumbered with a version of the *cornu*, a curving metal trumpet developed by the Romans. This large instrument curves down under the arm and then up over the shoulder of the person playing it, and has to be supported on the shoulder by a wooden crosspiece.

In Hawaii, trumpets were made from hollow bamboo tubes. Each trumpet sounded a slightly different note; they were used by hunters who needed to signal to one another over long distances. The Hawaiian islands were also the source of two other unique instruments. The *pu-ili* was a bamboo tube with one end cut into a fringe. It was played by beating the fringed end against the palm or other parts of the body, often by a dancer. The islands also produced the "shoe," a rectangular piece of wood that was played by placing it on the ground over a stick of wood and rocking it back and forth with the foot like a see-saw.

The DM looking for an alternative to a plucked string instrument could develop a bard who uses the African *sansa*, or thumb piano. The *sansa* consists of a small box or block of wood with a number of thin pieces of metal of varying lengths attached to its face. These are plucked with the thumbs to produce various tones.

Other musical instruments were designed as portable versions of larger, unwieldy instruments. The *bible regal* was a small organ that folded up like a book. The DM can locate or create similar examples of other miniaturized instruments.

Some instruments doubled as utilitarian objects. The Indian *jaltarang* comprised a series of identical porcelain bowls, each filled to a different depth with water. The bowls were arranged in a semicircle around the musician, who played them by tapping the bowls with bamboo sticks

tipped with felt. Easily portable, the *jaltarang* might not be recognized as a musical instrument, allowing the bard to pass unnoticed through an area hostile to magicians.

Still other instruments can be constructed on the spot, wherever a bard might wander. A sand drum is made by tunneling a U-shaped hole in the earth. This instrument is played by beating with the hands on the bridge of earth between the two holes.

Some instruments were designed with a double use in mind. A (large) flute, for example, can double as a walking stick and feature an attractive carved head. As well as being an instrument for a bard, this walking-stick flute can have the properties of a magical wand, staff, or rod.

### Magical instruments

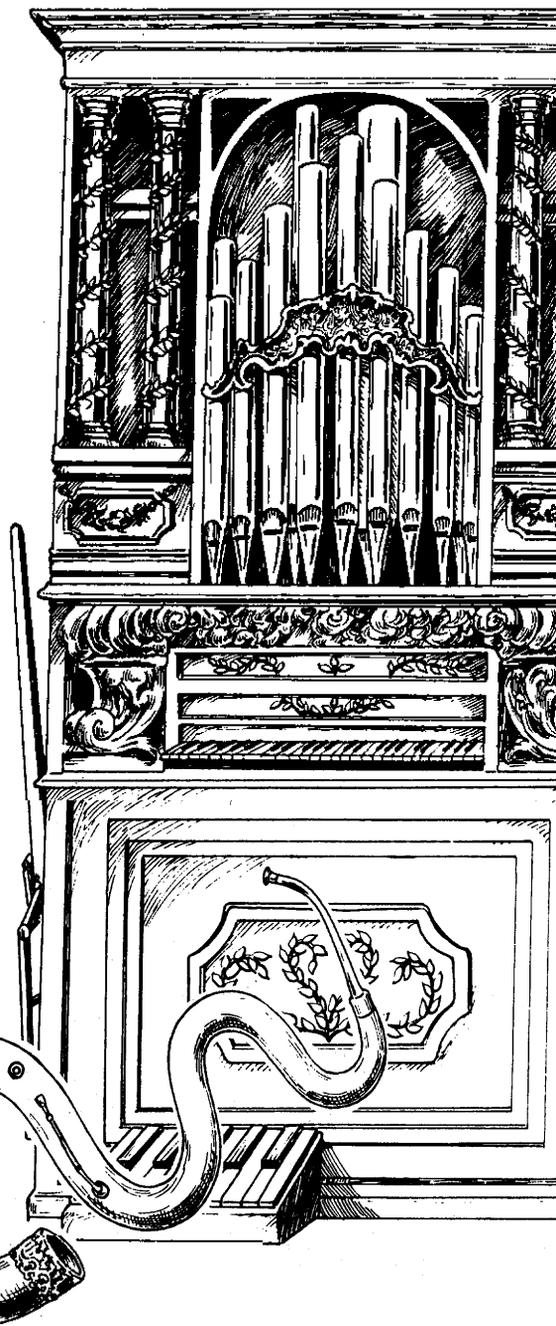
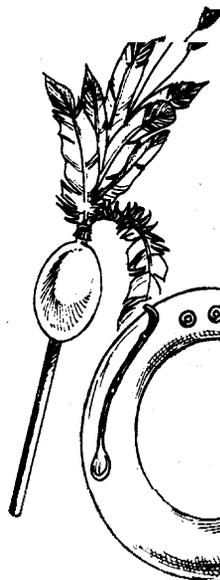
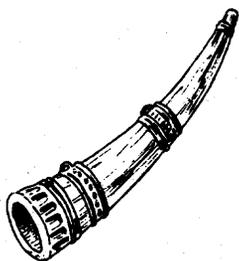
Finally, the DM might want to ascribe particular magical abilities to a musical instrument, based on the materials from which it was constructed. These instruments can be magical versions of "normal" instruments or of those listed in this article. Bards with an evil orientation might play a form of drum found in Tibet that is made from two human skulls, using it to cast necromantic spells.

The skin of the drum also has ritual significance. Skins of large or fierce animals, such as the elephant or jaguar, convey special powers to a drum.

Other instruments are carved or cast in symbolic shapes. The Celtic *carnyx trumpet*, for example, had a mouth that was shaped like an animal head, complete with a rattling metal tongue. In the Americas, Aztec and Incan cultures produced ceramic whistles in the form of animals, humans, and gods. In ancient Egypt, ivory or wooden clappers (sticks that were struck against each other) were carved in the shape of human hands. The DM can use the shapes of these instruments as the basis for inventing particular bardic traditions and beliefs.

### Conclusion

Using the instruments and musical traditions of other cultures and time periods, the DM can turn the bard into a truly unusual and intriguing character class. The ideas listed above can be adapted to a variety of campaign worlds, and even can be used side by side in the same campaign. After all, music ranges from simple, one-voiced chants to complex orchestral scores, and is played on or created by everything from handmade or improvised instruments to musical devices as complex and difficult to construct as a finely tooled miniature music box. The bards who use these instruments should be just as varied and colorful, ranging from silk-robed musicians who rumble through the countryside in wagons laden with heavy brass gongs to feather-decorated dreamers with their didgeridoos. After all, there's much more to being a bard than simply strumming a lute in a royal court.



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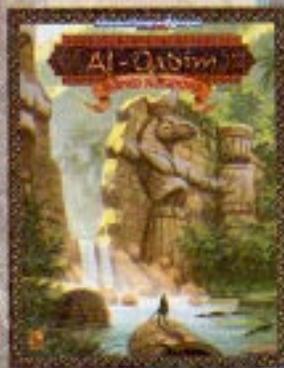
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# Dirty Rotten Scoundrels

Play a rogue PC with style-and live to talk about it

by Wolfgang Baur

Artwork by Renee Biertempfel

*Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold.*  
Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Players of fantasy role-playing games have role models for most classes or kits. The AD&D® game classes match the mythic archetypes of warrior, holy man, wizard, and rogue. The expectations and actions that players possess for the first three are pretty clear: fighters are violent grunts who do the swordwork, priests are pious believers who pray and provide guidance, wizards call on their mystic powers, and rogues—Well, what do rogues contribute to the group? Of the four archetypes, the rogue is the least defined in our myths and legends.

This article reveals the secrets of role-playing a rogue—without enraging your friends or losing characters. Role-playing scoundrels requires quick wits and a honeyed tongue, but the rewards are fast, swashbuckling play with few constraints. Nothing satisfies quite like out-thinking a dragon who could destroy the entire adventuring company, especially if the rogue can make off with the cream of the dragon's loot as well. ("Oh, sir dragon, that item's cursed. Allow me to take it away and restore your good luck.")

## Breeds of rogue

Rogues share a mindset as much as they share a set of skills. The central feature of most rogues is a willingness to ignore the law. They risk the outlaw life in exchange for freedom, riches, and fame.

Rogues are sleazy go-betweens and hooligans in the *Faerie, Queen, & Country* game for the AMAZING ENGINE™ system. They are sneaking, xenophobic githzerai in PLANESCAPE™ adventures, and the vistani in the RAVENLOFT® setting. Regardless of the rules being used, rogues resist categories. Possibilities for rogues vary from insufferably cute kender to snarling beasts like half-orcs and other humanoids detailed in the *Complete Book of Humanoids*.

Rogues aren't limited to fantasy settings. Think of gamblers like Lando Calrissian or smugglers like Han Solo from the *Star Wars* films and novels, Quark from the *Deep Space 9* TV series, or the scouts or smugglers in GDW's TRAVELLER\* game. Whatever the setting, scoundrels all share a carefree attitude, a smiling face, and a larcenous heart.

Rogues fall into one of two categories in

most legends, only one of which is fun for everyone in a role-playing group. The group I call "gangsters" are sneak-thieves and backstabbers, the businessmen of crime. They are cold-hearted assassins, mobsters, or professional thieves, motivated by unquenchable greed. For them, too much is not enough. These characters are fun for the player but a headache for everyone else. They are constantly going off on their own, hatching plots against their fellow adventurers, or scheming with seedy underworld elements. They aren't part of a team, and most adventuring groups are better off without them.

Modern times have given us plenty of examples of gangster thieves, those rogues who treat their calling as a business. In this article, I'll argue the superiority of the rogue in the grand tradition over some profit-minded mafioso. Why are gangsters inferior thieves? Let me count the ways.

Loners don't get far in group situations. They don't work or play well with others. Though there may be a certain kick in being the mysterious, silent type, it doesn't give you much room to maneuver as a role-player to influence other gamers. Big-hearted, generous, outgoing, freewheeling rogues who laugh at death are more likely to succeed than sulking psychotics who backstab their so-called friends. Why? Simply because loners are unlikely to get any support from their fellow party members. Unlikable, treacherous thieves deserve to be left to the mercies of the nearest monster, especially if they habitually scout ahead of the rest of the party.

The group I call "scoundrels" are merry vandals and ruffians, motivated by a desire for fame and freedom more than mere money. They are the gallant wastrels of any party, always glad for plunder to spend, willing to use stealth as well as steel, playing tricks on pompous burghers, and stealing hearts among the serving maids. Scoundrels are artists, folk heroes, tricksters, and vigilantes. D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers are perfect examples—wenching, drinking, and carousing their way across France. For all these reasons, scoundrel personalities are better choices for successful role-playing in a group.

In short, scoundrels have more fun than gangsters. The trouble is, when you play a character who is a cheat, your fellow players may get a little tense, and bad blood may run between party members and between players. What makes rogues so much fun, and so much trouble? Below is a list of suggested behaviors for rogues who are as much fun to play with as they are to play.

### **Damn the torpedoes**

As a scoundrel, it's your duty to swagger, take daring risks, and damn the consequences. Movie stars such as James Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause*, or Errol Flynn in *Robin Hood* are good models for scoundrels. Sure, you could play a cautious,

paranoid rogue who never takes chances and never gets caught, but fantasy adventure games are about heroes, not about playing it safe. (We'll talk about cheating death later.)

If your character doesn't take chances, you aren't helping your party. Push them a little. Get them into trouble; they'll get you out again. After all, it's easier to get forgiveness than permission.

### **Pay the piper**

Nothing kills a rogue's fun faster than facing a rack of blades leveled at his throat—especially if the blades belong to his friends. Unfortunately, rogue PCs annoy other characters just a tiny bit. Rogues get in other people's faces, they push the boundaries, they act like lone wolves instead of members of the pack. The rogue pays a price for his freedom.

Rabelais codified the scoundrel's motto long ago: "Do what thou wilt." Rogues make trouble but must be ready for the consequences. Take a shot at robbing the king, sneaking past Cerebus at the gates of Hades, or pulling a fast one on a demigod, but keep in mind that you're going to suffer some spectacular flops as well as some amazing victories. Revel in your failures and laugh them off; nobody likes a whiner. Rogues should be independent, but they don't have to make everyone else suffer for it.

This pushiness and fondness for mayhem are both the delight and the bane of all rogues. It's okay to annoy fellow players; sometimes it helps advance the plot (or at least spices up the game). Even getting the PCs in hot water can be fun, as long as it isn't done maliciously and as long as you know how to get back out.

Besides, what jewel thief can resist prying the enormous black opal from the eye of the statue of Cyric, what spelljamming privateer can resist boarding an elven Man-o-War just to prove it can be done? Rogues are constantly tempted to spit in the face of Fate. As the scoundrel Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist everything except temptation." If roguish destiny calls, go for it. Even if the attempt fails, your character will go out in a blaze of glory, and anyone with him will be enshrined in legends. The other players will thank you for it later.

### **Lower your expectations**

Rogues occupy the moral low ground. This isn't always a bad thing. Paladins can be annoying, especially when they're right. A paladin does the right thing instead of the easy thing, so she makes other characters look sleazy by comparison. By contrast, an annoying thief is usually doing the wrong thing, like cutting a deal with a villain or stealing from someone the party would like to stay friendly with. Players don't expect much from a rogue, so she makes other characters look good.

Paladins are the worst sticklers for doing the right thing, but rangers and good-aligned priests can be just as bad, if

properly role-played. Rogues can't exactly get out from under the disapproval of others by saying that they're just acting the way they are supposed to. Thievery, scams, constant money-grubbing, and treachery are dishonorable by definition (See "The Master's Hand" in this issue for specific examples and techniques).

Unfortunately, nothing strains suspension of disbelief more than when the party forgives a rogue because, "He's one of the player characters." Everyone has seen a paladin turn a blind eye to the crimes of fellow party members (though a good DM won't let the paladin get away with it). This is fine for party harmony, but bad for the credibility of the game world. In the long run, the whole campaign suffers; after all, rogues don't get away with much in front of an NPC paladin.

The better solution is not to force the other players into a situation where the heroes have no choice but to punish the rogue, even though the players don't want to. Give them an out. Lie big, and maybe they'll pretend to believe your character. For example, if your character is caught helping himself to an extra share of the treasure, the proper response is, "I was just saving this for you," or "This share is going to charity," not, "Oops." If the other players eventually make your character face the consequences, they are being better role-players.

### **Persuasion, not bloodshed**

Sure, your rogue character could steal a cherished magical item and make the players howl for his blood, but let's face it; a rogue is not a great fighter and doesn't win barroom brawls. The best way to avoid ugly face-offs is to convince the other PCs that they want to do what you wanted them to do all along. A rogue should respect his fellow party members, and use his wits, skills, and tricks on everyone else. Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser from Fritz Leiber's city of Lankmar couldn't be trusted, but they trusted each other and their patrons, Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. If you don't learn to help and respect the party (or at least amuse them), your rogue deserves what he gets.

### **Swear no oaths**

Unlike the Three Musketeers and group-oriented gangsters, most scoundrels are freebooters. They have no obligations to church, state, or guild, no oaths to feudal lords or respected archmages.

If you don't make promises, no one can come to collect. Don't owe anything and no one can claim your time, your money, or your freedom. The most important oaths and promises to avoid are not oaths about money; the perpetual war between rogues and creditors is legendary. Sympathies are usually with the rogues, not the usurers and bankers. The oaths to avoid are oaths of loyalty, of good behavior, or of service.

A wise scoundrel values his freedom because he can live better by his wits than by depending on crutches like sworn oaths and settled life. For example, Ali Baba and Sindbad both made their fortunes through wits, trickery, and cunning-without owing fealty to any caliph, priesthood, army, or mage's guild.

## Be generous

Life is short and true friends are precious and few, so a smart rogue will grease a few palms and buy as many friends as he can afford. This applies to party members, too! If you are going to make trouble and need help getting out of it, you need to have friends who will come to your defense or rescue you. No one likes a miser.

Bribes are a useful tool for controlling others, and they needn't cost much; bribes can be favors, food, or cash. A kind DM might allow a rogue to bribe underlings with offers of food (for moronic monsters) and cash (for greedy ones). Don't wait until trouble arrives to start paying these bribes. Payments in advance give you an edge. If the captain of the watch is already on the take, he's less likely to arrest a rogue and risk exposure. Think of it as insurance.

## Don't rob your friends

The most important rule for cheating death: Don't steal from your own party. It seems obvious, but far too many rogues don't seem to see that there are better ways to get what they want than stealing it.

Beg, borrow, and plead to get magical items when the group divides the treasure; they are the ultimate equalizers to make weak rogues into significant players. Let's face it, fighters need only weapons and armor, and spell-casters will take the items only they can use. This leaves lots of potions, general-purpose wands, and miscellaneous items that rogues can use. Ask for them.

If all else fails, hope that you've sacrificed and been superficially pious enough with the god of thieves to get a break. (Staying on Hermes' good side is always a good idea.)

Don't cut deals with the enemy unless you think you can use your betrayal now to save the rest of the party later (they'll thank you afterward). Of course, even if the backbiting rascal can't save them, at least he'll be home safe. After all, someone has to live to tell the tale.

## Be forewarned

If you play a rogue, you are going to get into hot water sooner or later. By asking questions early, you'll be armed with vital knowledge when the hammer falls. Prepare now and escape the wrath of the injured parties later.

Escapes and contingency plans are vital to a long career as a rogue. Sure, you could just work on a whim, but it's harder to improvise brilliantly than it is to make

solid plans at the beginning. The best way to prepare for roguish deeds is to do a little research and planning.

Rogues survive by taking unconventional approaches, such as signing up with the bandits whom the rest of the party wants to fight. These flanking maneuvers may provide valuable information (tell the other players this when you are all making plans), but they can also keep a rogue alive.

Case the joint, or better yet, get your PC's priest or wizard friends to do it (*wizard eye* and *clairvoyance* spells are great for this). This way your rogue can go directly to take what he wants, without a lot of stumbling around. No point in wasting time looking for the crystal of Beth-shear if the dragon who owns it is a light sleeper.

Locals know the lay of the land better than any outsider, so ask some pointed questions before moving into unfamiliar territory. (Are those dogs you hear behind the wall dobermans or dachshunds?) This kind of verbal scouting gives the DM a chance to drop in rumors, important local lore, and hints for future adventures. A smart DM will be grateful for the assist. To be a clever trickster, you need to be well informed about your opponents and your options. Many rogues make an entire career out of scouting and reconnaissance.

## Misdirection saves lives

While you want to learn as much as possible about the enemy, the opposite does not apply. A rogue should never present himself as he really is; people might catch on to what a scoundrel she is. This is especially important after you've acquired a reputation. (If you don't want a reputation, why play a rogue?) The best way to avoid unwanted attention is to pretend to be someone or something else.

Disguises are an important kind of misdirection, and magical deceptions are especially powerful. ("These are not the droids you are looking for.") Make nice with the mages, psionists, and other "Force-users" in your group. They might come in handy later. Disguises and a stolen set of the proper clothes make it possible to sneak in or out of the best-guarded mints, citadels, and palaces.

Distractions can make a disguise easier to pass off; guards at the gate don't pay much attention to a traveler if there is a fire near the armory. In fact, distractions can make most tough jobs easier, though they aren't much use by themselves. Get someone else to create the diversion, if possible; the real action will be elsewhere.

A splashy entrance can impress a powerful lord who might otherwise ignore a scruffy-looking loudmouth. ("Who's scruffy-looking?") Throw money around, order a round of drinks for the house, wear extravagant colors and the clothes of a nobleman (literally!).

## Deny everything

A smart scoundrel lies his way out when he's in deep. This isn't a matter of morals, it's a matter of survival. The vital importance of stretching the truth cannot be overestimated.

Lies need not be made face to face. Propaganda wars are just as useful, sometimes more so for targets that are hard to reach any other way. If you can't run an opponent out of town, discredit him and exonerate yourself. Start phony rumors, pay a bard to stretch the truth on your behalf. If your opponents are already afraid of you, battles will be easier to win, and enemy morale will break sooner.

If lies fail, bluffs are the next line of defense. The basis of bluffing is sheer brash confidence and a poker face; a mildly plausible story always helps, too. Bluffs work best against stupid foes, but even an intelligent opponent can begin second-guessing himself if you bluff right. Unless your DM is very generous and allows ability checks for bluffs, you'll have to role-play them out. That shouldn't be a problem for a glib-tongued, poker-faced rogue.

One trick is to have a mage friend nearby who can back up your claims with illusion (a form of magical lie, if you will); your story and his magic reinforce each other, because you've paved the way for the enemy to believe the mage's phantasms and those phantasms keep your story from collapsing when challenged.

## Get good help

Rogues are products of their environment, and that's almost always an urban environment. As a player, you should exploit this. Follow up on your DM's hints about possible city adventures and create a list of targets for your character (the local mint, the goldsmith's guild, and the slave halls). You should operate on your home ground if you can. If your group of heroes tends to stay in the same area, prepare emergency supplies and hiding places to lie low. If your characters travel often, get to know each new city and the local black market as soon as possible. If you fence the party's plunder for more than they could get for it themselves, they'll be grateful. Plus, you can skim a little off the top.

Cultivate contacts that could provide useful information and warnings: not just sleazy scoundrels like yourself, but also apprentices from craft guilds, travelling merchants, and even watchmen. You might be able to convince a generous DM that a rogue may start the game with one contact per three points of Charisma in an AD&D game. The AMAZING ENGINE system uses Influence scores to define a PC's contacts. Use and abuse these contacts and make new ones through role-playing. Your DM may decide that your character is such a power-broker and rumor-monger that your contacts come to you looking for help. Your first instinct as

a rogue would be to tell them to look elsewhere, but fight that instinct and get your fellow adventurers to help the poor sods out. If your contacts are in your debt, it's harder for them to say "No" when you ask for that big favor (the gate to the treasury left open or a copy of the duke's personal seal). For scoundrels, as for politicians (Is there a difference?), patronage pays.

When a rogue grows powerful, he may wish to serve as a mentor for others. Young scoundrels sometimes need a guiding hand and instruction in the ways of the world, and a real scoundrel will provide one.

Why go to the trouble? Why associate with apprentices, sidekicks, and other characters who are burdens for a foot-loose rogue? Well, for the same reason that he puts up with haughty wizards, musclebound fighters, and nattering priests: they're helpful to have around. The best example is Fagan in *Oliver Twist*, a devious old coot who treated his young pupils as cannon fodder. Apprentices are ideal lookouts. They make good spies. (No one suspects the young.) They don't complain much, and they are expendable as scapegoats or lookouts. Certainly worth a little instruction and pocket money to keep around.

### Choose your moments carefully

A sense of timing is as important to a rogue as it is to a comedian. Bribes, backstabs, smuggling, break-ins, blackmail, seductions—all the core activities of a rogue—require good timing. Unfortunately, there are no easy ground rules on cultivating a sense of timing. However, one trick that often works in game play is simply waiting. When you are in a pressure situation, don't rush things; the DM will often provide a hint or a clue if you are unsure of a course of action and are patient.

### Anticipate "Murphy's Law"

Every rogue knows Murphy's Law: "Anything that can go wrong, will." Not every rogue draws the obvious conclusion, though: If you expect everything to go wrong, then you're mentally prepared to counterattack. Curling up and bemoaning your fate is a coward's way. (Besides, you sound pathetic doing it.) The better option is to wait for a break, then make the most of the opportunity.

The best break, of course, is for someone to rescue your character. This might seem shameful or embarrassing to some scoundrels (though scoundrels have no shame). Needing to be rescued is not such a bad thing. It gives other party members something to do. (They do so like to be useful.) Likewise, if a rogue needs to be helped out of a jam, it encourages other players to role-play. The lawful characters will say "Let him rot." Others will plead for mercy and intervention. Tell them society

made you do it. Their reaction can be quite touching.

Sometimes your rogue character will get a bad idea and not let go, trying to take the whole party down with her. This can easily be overdone, but it is a great role-playing opportunity for the others to try to dissuade her. Muscle-bound fighters will threaten and try to be physically intimidating; wizards will apply logic; priests will try faith, moral arguments, and persuasion. None of this necessarily affects what the rogue will do, but it does add to the role-playing experience.

### Goals

Most scoundrels don't plan much beyond the next hand of cards, the next cut purse, or the next successful smuggling run, but more than most other classes, a successful rogue needs a role-playing hook to define his character. This can be a simple gimmick like an accent or an eyepatch, or it can be a matter of a character's goals or history. Gimmicks are fun for defining a character. (What's your character like? Well, he's a wood elf with a limp.) but they aren't satisfying for the long run.

For other characters, this is often easier. Warriors want power and personal skill in battle, priests want more power for their god, and mages want access to mystic knowledge. They all have built-in goals: building a castle or cathedral, creating magical items, or ruling a fiefdom. Rogues don't share these goals, so all too often they fall into the trap of living for today and never setting long-term goals. Such characters quickly become boring and one-dimensional.

Like others, rogues want either fame or fortune (or both), but they want more of it. A fighter might be content to know his name is heralded in a few songs and sagas. A rogue wants notoriety throughout the land, even if it means being hunted on every street. A priest might be content with enough money to build a fine temple and provide for the congregation. A rogue wants more wealth than a great wyrm.

The easiest goal is wealth; a thief with a smart con and some powerful friends can do wonders. Of course, in a fantasy world, law enforcement has the aid of magic, but that's the risk. Smart DMs will try not to crush these ambitions and will give the player a fair chance to succeed. (After all, a true rogue will try and try again until he dies or the prize is his.) Knock over a few rich merchant shipments, and presto, you're rich. Then what?

Fame can be elusive. Sure, a bard can hang around with a bunch of chump fighters who don't ever think of more than chopping up the next dragon, but stealing the credit from them is almost too easy. After all, the bard is the one who writes the saga that everyone hears! But is this the fame a rogue wants?

Some rogues do get religion. When your PC steals for the glory of a thieving god, she's being pious! For rogues with an edge

of darkness, the ideal gods are tricksters and patrons of thievery: Hermes, Loki, or Shar of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting. Coyote from American-Indian legends is the perfect patron for rogues outside a city setting; many Coyote tales are collected in anthologies of American-Indian legends and can serve as sources of inspiration. Rogues' gods don't always have public temples, accessible priests, and good public relations, but they do have senses of humor, so their worshipers are often forgiven as long as their antics are entertaining. Gamblers and other thieves may want to consider a goddess of luck like Tymora or Beshaba. Your character should be generous in his sacrifices to the powers that be; it doesn't pay to annoy the gods.

### Masters of the art

A short list of inspirational reading and viewing is included below. The books are more or less concerned with medieval, renaissance, and fantasy settings, but the films are just for attitude. One way to become a better rogue role-player is to take notes from the masters. Then go out and have fun!

### Books

Asprin, Roger, ed.: *The Thieves' World* anthologies.

Dickens, Charles: *Oliver Twist*.

Dumas, Alexandre: *The Three Musketeers*.

Hoch, Edward: The "Nick Velvet" stories from *Ellery Queen* magazine.

Hornam, E.W.: The "Raffles" stories.

Leiber, Fritz: The "Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser" stories.

Salgado, Gamini: *The Elizabethan Underworld*. St. Martin's Press. New York, 1992.

Vance, Jack: *Cugel's Saga, The Dying Earth, The Eyes of the Overlord, and Rialto the Marvelous*.

Williams, Michael: *Weasel's Luck*.

Zipes, Jack, translator: *The Arabian Nights*.

### Films

Barry Linden

*The Color of Money*

*The Crimson Pirate*

*The Flame and the Arrow*

*It Takes a Thief*

*Ladyhawke*

*Robin Hood*

*Sneakers*

*The Star Wars* trilogy

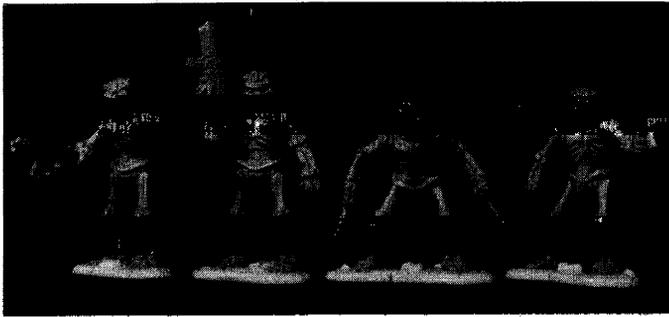
*The Sting*

*Thief*

*The Three Musketeers*

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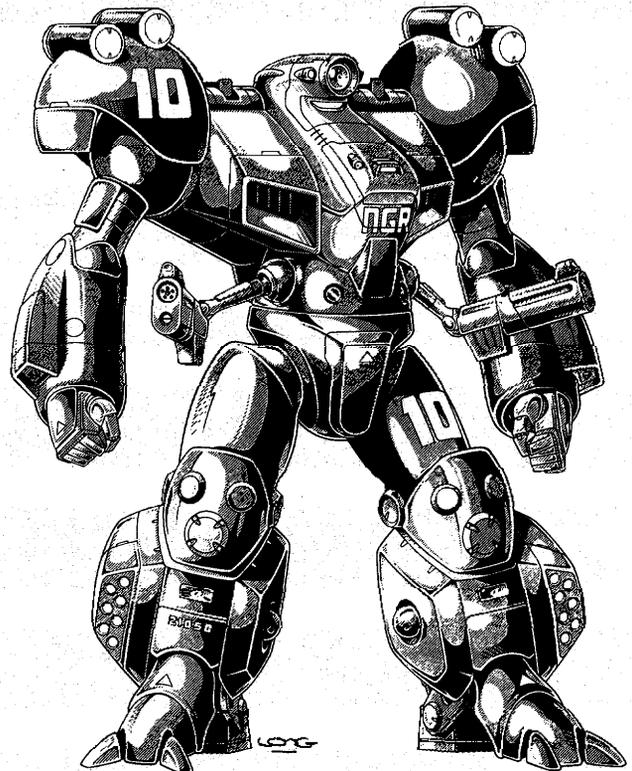
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# “The Legends Say . . .”

Defining and expanding the bard’s knowledge skill

by **Fraser Sherman**

Artwork by Scott Rosema

“It . . . it’s a set of bracers of defense,”  
*Linnea the bard said slowly.*

“Yeah? How do you know?” *Hroulf*  
*muttered.*

“My knowledge as a bard tells me.”

“But how do you know?”

“Well, I—” *Rachel, Linnea’s player, broke*  
*off and stared at her DM. “Well? How the*  
*heck does Linnea know?”*

The AD&D® 2nd Edition game does a good job of clarifying the a bard’s knowledge of legendary items: it’s the art of drawing on history or legend to identify an item and deduce some of its history, owners, and purposes. How does a bard *do it*, though? What sets a *dancing sword* apart from a *nine-lives stealer*? How can a loremaster distinguish a *ring of free action* from a *ring of feather falling*?

The following are examples of treasures—mostly magical, of course—highlighting the clues a bard could use

when applying her stock of lore, and the deductions about powers and history that she could draw from those clues. A single knowledge roll probably wouldn’t earn this much information (except, perhaps on a roll of 01), but the more history that is available, the more options the DM has for tales to tell her players.

*Inside a secret panel in a vast dungeon complex, the PCs find an ivory wand with a spiral pattern running its length. Next to it, a crystal sculpture, radiating alteration magic, shows two elven lovers embracing.*

The bard recognizes the spiral as a stylized white dragon’s tail, a popular motif on *wands of frost* in the last century. As further confirmation, the tip shows the wizard mark of the elemental mage, Alakkar the Silent, a master of ice magic.

Found here in the dungeon of Taibek the Fifth’s castle, it’s undoubtedly the wand his grandfather, Taibek the Third, used in his

single-handed defense of a breach in the wall during the Jeboar Insurrection. According to the ancient lays, the wand was “greatly spent, with but small power remaining” by the end of the battle, so there won’t be many charges in it.

Taibek the Third also collected elven crystal, particularly the works of Galorion Meoneth—and if this crystal is one of Meoneth’s, any elf would pay a fortune for it! There’s also an old rumor the artisan was trapped by a jealous rival and transformed into one of his own figurines.

*Under the rubble of an old cave-in, the PCs find a dwarven skeleton clutching a broad sword, with goblin bones on every side. The sword’s hilt is wrapped in troglodyte hide.*

The dwarven chanter has no doubts—this is the site of Duroth Steelfist’s Last Stand, when the warrior-priest brought down a cavern upon himself to stop a goblin horde from overwhelming his city. The sword in the skeleton’s hand must be Kath the Sacred, and returning the blade to Duroth’s kin would earn the party honor and respect beyond measure.

Of course, there are those legends about the sword’s powers—that it fought by itself, that it was especially crafted as a *sword of humanoid-slaying*, that none but a dwarf could ever wield it—do you suppose any of the legends could be true?

Perhaps the Dourstone clan would know; the blade bears the smithy-brand of Clangor Dourstone who worked one of the purest mithril veins ever discovered. What about the strange sheen to the blade? That could be the result of quenching it in a block of ice after forging, instead of in water. Such a ritual, so they say, is required to create *ice brands*. Maybe a warrior should test it out.

*Confronting an evil mage and his followers in an abandoned tower the party overwhelms them and claims the magic ring their foes fought so desperately to keep.*

Judging from the ancient sigils inside the ring, it must have been made two centuries ago, the herald says—around the time Sibao the Mad built this tower as his center of power. According to local legend, Sibao crafted a ring that would bind the wills of others to him, only to be slain by the mage Kadzorus while completing the enchantment. Could this be a *ring of human influence*?

As the herald slips it on to test it, he mentions another legend, that Sibao swore to rise from the grave rather than let another wear the ring—of course, there’s probably nothing to that part of the story.

*The sword’s pommel is red-lacquered leather with a single, flawless ruby at the center, and “Hunter” etched in a red enamel in the blade. How did it wind up in a pirate’s buried treasure hoard on this desert isle?*

Only one blade like this exists—Red Harvest, wielded by Lady Nysta of Azderac 75 years ago to slaughter the orc clan that slew her husband and child. It was said with that blade in hand, she could locate any orc wherever it lurked; in her final battle she found the clan’s central lair, raced in ahead of her warriors, and died amid a pile of 100 orc corpses.

A generation ago, Red Harvest fell into the hands of Penzarron, the legendary swashbuckler. When his ship was boarded by Black Wazeen the Corsair, Penzarron leapt aboard the pirate’s ship and held them off single-handedly until his crew could cut their ship free—even though that left him to die at Wazeen’s hands.

*A gold medallion with a lapis lazuli eye in the center and undecipherable hieroglyphs around the sides is found in the crypt of a deserted keep.*

This looks like the fabled Medallion of Truth, which thwarted elven treachery near the end of the Third Forest War. With the amulet around his neck, Prince Ariac the Sorrowful read in the elves’ minds how they planned to murder him and launch a final assault on the human lands; striking first, he killed the delegation to the last elf.

Later, when he returned home, the medallion revealed his brother’s forbidden affair with the Prince’s wife; weeping, he put them both to death and never wore the medallion again, vowing it was better to remain ignorant of the evil a human heart can hold.

### Truth or dare?

At this point, some DMs may be screaming “Whoa! How am I supposed to come up with this much information for every treasure hoard?”

Don’t. I hate being caught flat-footed as much as anyone, but developing this kind of detailed description for every noteworthy item would be a lot of work—and largely wasted unless the bard’s player is a truly phenomenal dice-roller.

The alternatives? Either wing it and make up something on the spot, or compile a list of backstories—wizard marks, sigils, symbols, names, etc.—that you can attach to any item the bard successfully identifies through a successful roll. Save the detailed descriptions for really important items or those that lead the adventure in a new direction.

A knowledge roll needn’t be the end of it, either. If the PCs get partial information (the name of an owner or maker) or con-



fusing information (two or more different histories) they may want to consult a distant library or ask a sage in order to learn more. If the legends hint that one magical item is only part of a greater treasure hoard, the PCs could be searching for weeks.

Legends also can lead the party completely astray; these myths and rumors aren't textbook-true facts, after all. Just because a bard makes his roll and learns a legend doesn't mean the legend has any truth to it. I'd not do that too often though.

A better move might be to give the bard the truth, then add a falsehood-or at least something cryptic. Take the crystal statue of Galorion Meoneth; perhaps the bard only rolls well enough to know the maker's name and the figure's worth, but the DM throws in the legend about the transformed sculptor—a false legend in this case. When the players try to transform the statue back, they find something quite unexpected.

The conflicting legends about the Sword of Kath work the same way; one of them may be true, but the bard can't be sure which without further testing (the better the roll, however, the more fact and the less fiction bards should learn).

A third alternative is to be very choosy about the legends the bard has heard. Everything he knows can be true, but it

can still be a little misleading.

Red Harvests backstory, for example, makes it seem like a fine weapon, maybe with some special anti-orc abilities; in fact it's a cursed blade fashioned by an evil war god. This *sword of wounding* can detect enemies (hence Nyra could find the orcs), and although unintelligent, it gains a point of ego for every foe slain. At the end of the battle, this ego fades away—unless the blade has gained enough to take control of the character.

In that case, the sword's bearer becomes increasingly easy to enrage, and invariably goes berserk in combat. Not only will the wielder never retreat, he'll follow his enemies to hell and back Nyra charged into the orc lair, even though it was clearly a suicidal act; likewise, Penzarron could have escaped to his own ship, but his mind was too clouded with bloodlust to consider it.

A fourth option is that everything the bard learned is accurate, but he still won't know the whole truth.

The legend of the Medallion of Truth is rigged in this way. Crafted by a priest of Eris, it functions normally when used casually (probing a friend's mind, say). When the wearer really needs to read someone's thoughts, though, it tunes into the target's subconscious (the id, actually) and projects those dark, buried thoughts to the Medallion's wearer.

The elves planned no treachery, but they

did harbor lingering resentment at the terms they accepted. Reading those resentful thoughts through the Medallion, Araic saw the elves as steeped in deceit. When he returned home and probed his brother's thoughts (having long noticed the man's crush on his sister-in-law) he took a simple, romantic wish as concrete proof of a torrid, adulterous affair.

If the bard digs for more information (or rolls extremely well) the DM might reward her with more history. Four or five stories about Red Harvest's wielders dying surrounded by their enemies should plant a few doubts. Then again, if the DM never planned for the PCs to find the blade, the blade's history can be slanted to play up the negative aspects ("Laughing insanely, Penzarron slew and slew, heedless of his love calling from the departing boat!"). There can be more than one version of a legend, after all.

*"Linnea saw the symbol of Berroth the abjurer on the bracers," the DM said, scanning his notes. "What kind of bracers would an abjurer make if not of defense?"*

*Linnea looked at Hroulf. "Satisfied?"*

*"Mmmph," Hroulf mumbled in to his beard. "All right. I suppose you do know what you're talking about."*

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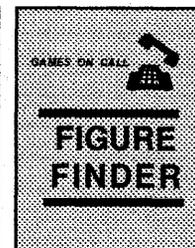
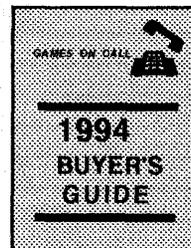
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# The Master's Hand



## Eavesdrop on a fantasy thief's lessons

by David "Zeb" Cook

Artwork by Jason R. Coleman

"Let me have a look at you, boy. You're new to the city, aren't you? I can tell. You've got that gasping look of a beached minnow to you. There's no shame in it, boy. Them that wasn't born here was all new once.

"So, tell me how your trade goes. What pockets have you dipped, what purses cut? None? Are you skilled in the black art, handy with a passkey? Not that either? Then you must be a lifter of parcels or quick with an angler's pole to fish out some prize through an open window. You're not smiling, boy, when I ask these questions. Tell an old master true: How went your thieving today?

"That poorly, eh? At that rate, you'll be dining with the dead for lack of food in your belly. That'll never do. Let me see how good you are. Try cutting my purse. I'll even turn my back to make it easy.

"Ho, there's a touch! I think I felt it, indeed. I've still got my purse, and the watch'd have you. Your fingers are good and light but there's more to thieving here than just quick fingers. If you want to be a great thief, you've got to learn the rules of the craft. Let's just suppose I might be a kindly old rogue who'd take you under my wing, and

teach you the tricks of the trade as it were. You're reminding me a bit of myself when I was young, boy.

"Now, the first rule of all thieving is a simple one, but a surprising number of our brothers forget it. If you're going to nip a purse or make off with a cloak, you've got to be where the money is. You want easy money, too. Big takes mean big danger. If you're going to go crawling around in some stinking dungeon looking for gold, you might as well be one of those over-muscled warriors. You're a thief, boy! It's the easy path and quick riches for you.

"Money's found in the cities, not out in the countryside, but then you figured that because you're here. Still, you can't wander just anywhere in the city and hope to get rich. You've got to know your gulls—where they roost and what they look like. You want the easy marks—the country gentleman or the traveler from afar. Folks like that usually have too much money and too little sense about how to hang onto it. The last place you want your hand to be caught is in the pocket of a sergeant of the city watch.

"Temples, courts, and fairs are all good choices. If you're going to work a temple, boy, make sure you pick a large, majestic one. Temples like that always have folks coming to make sizeable donations, and that means wealthy targets. No rich folks go to poor temples except to pretend they are poor. Look for a temple favored by the country folk, too. City-born are wary, but a country squire is an easy mark if you know the right tricks. Temples to gods of the field and farm are where you can find them.

"Country folk are a kindly lot, and you can play them to your tune, boy. Fainting's a good bit of trickery. There you stand in the chapel, gazing at the magnificence of the gods, when all at once you fall into a swoon. Sure enough, an honest man will rush to your aid, and in the getting up you can cut his purse before he knows it.

"The great law courts are another good place to spot your mark. Men of money

have business in the courts, and many a fattened country gentleman is obliged to come to the city to press his case. Then there's the solicitors and the like. They may be no more honest than you, but they get paid rich fees.

"What's that you ask? How's this going to help you? There's a lot a thief can do, even on his own. Let's say you're wanting lunch and don't have the coin for it. Get yourself over to the courts and learn the names of the judges and solicitors in session. Every day, lads from the taverns come carrying a bite to the lordships. Stand yourself near the gate and ask "Is that for Lord So-and-so?" When a lad finally says yes, claim to be his lordship's man and carry it inside, promising to return with payment. Once inside, scotch yourself out the side gate, meal and all. Of course, if it's cash you want, you can lay claim to the fare and deliver it yourself. For a meal that costs six coppers, charge a gold piece and get yourself away quick.

"Sneering are you at such small steals? No wonder you've got no luck. Ten easy jobs can net you as much as a single hard job—and you won't go hungry for trying, like you are now.

"Fairs are our homes, our meat and trade. The city may hold a fair for the weavers and tanners, but we know a fair's really meant for us. When others come to drink and play, it's time for us to go to work. Are you practicing to be a cutpurse, boy? If you are, then always work the fairs, where the crowd is your best friend. Mark the puppet shows and mummers; that's where you want to be. There your gulls stand like sheep, their eyes fixed on the play while your hands are at work. Mind you, there's those who spend all their money on dress and fill their purses with stones to rattle impressively. Take note of not only how a man dresses but also how he carries his purse, and how much coin he shows when he opens it.

"Now it don't matter where you're working. Just be sure, boy, that you look busy. I saw you at the High Street temple today.

Surprised? You looked like a lollygagger, a lout with no honest purpose being where he was. Look busy—be praying or waiting anxiously for an appointment, 'cause even a fool can spot an idler as a dishonest man.

"Come to the city with a friend, did you? Good, because it's better to work as a team than to work alone. Two thieves can do more than one and do it quicker, too. Take nipping a purse. Didn't have much luck doing it yourself, did you? But if you had a friend with you, then one can do the cutting while the other does the stall.

"What's a stall? Ho, you are a green one! Look, today me and my steadfast companion, Alesworthy, spotted our mark in the aisles of the Lady Temple. He was a fat burgher from the Outlands with a big purse. The problem was, he carried his purse close to him, so you couldn't slip a knife in to cut the strings without him noticing. We needed a diversion, something to distract his mind from the coins at his side, so just as our mark neared the collection box, Alesworthy came forward with his own purse out like he's going to leave an offering. A quick fumble and all Alesworthy's coins spilled to the floor. And what does our burgher do but stoop to help this good citizen ahead of him! While the burgher was occupied, I reached in and with a quick cut relieved him of his purse. So you see, Alesworthy was the stall and I was the cutter.

"The ladies make most excellent stalls, especially for those gulls who fancy themselves dashing gentlemen. Amy, a wench as quick with her fingers as she is with her wit, has worked with me often. Once we spot the mark, she'll come up and plant on him a generous kiss, claiming he's some long-absent lover. If that doesn't fluster him enough for me to cut his purse strings, she'll step back in mock embarrassment at what she's done, apologizing and fussing until I can claim the prize.

"You say you don't fancy yourself a cutpurse, my lad? Well, then you'll need partners all the more. Lifting goods from a shop is no job to try alone, for as soon as the shopkeeper notices the goods are gone, he'll find them on you. No, try this old trick I learned from Taris the Lifter. With a whole crew at his command, he goes into a shop, dressed like a gentleman, with clean doublet and no cloak or jacket. With him comes a "servant" in a shabby cloak. Show me this and show me that, he demands, all the time taking care to seem an honest man. Finally, Taris calls the clerk to fetch something from the back, say a bolt of cloth not on the shelves. While the clerk is gone, up go the choicest parcels beneath his fellow's cloak. Then it's quick to the door, where a confederate takes everything and gets himself away. Even if the clerk discovers the theft when he gets back, Taris and his "servant" stand as innocent as babes.

"You'll see another lesson in these tricks, son. You'll have more luck when you gain a man's trust. Get him to believe you're

honest and he'll drop his guard, take your advice, and play into your hands. Learn how to read a man's dress, what station he is, whether he be of the city or country, and where in the country he hails from.

"There's a pair of rogues who work the Great Sanctuary by the waterfront, who steal a man's trust along with his purse. First they find their mark on the temple's steps—a country gentleman with his servant. When the master sends his servant on an errand, one of the pair follows along and strikes up a conversation with the lackey. 'Aren't you the servant of so-and-so,' he asks, pretending to forget the master's name.

"The servant, a country boy as innocent as his lord, says, 'Oh, you mean Sir Such-and-Such.'

'From Gristwater?' the rogue continues, only to be corrected by the boy. The thief keeps on until he learns all he can.

"What the first learns he passes on to his partner, who then greets the mark as an old acquaintance. The honest man, not wanting to be rude, imagines their friendship and greets the second thief as warmly. Once they are talking, the rogue has his mark where he wants him. He warns his country friend of the dangerous thieves in the area and generously shows him how to carry his purse and cloak more safely. Then, as they leave the temple, his partner acts the stall and the purse and cloak are gone in a twinkling. If his mark has jewels and rings, the rogue offers to show him a good tavern or gambling house where his fellows can rob the man with loaded dice and marked cards.

"A particularly fine trick I once saw came when a thief and his newfound 'old friend' were leaving the courts. Just as they reached the steps, a swordsman—the thief's partner—leapt in the way, accused the thief of some old feud, and lunged at him with a sword. The mark was trapped between the two as more of the gang rushed to the fight. While trying to pull the swordsman away, the thieves knocked the victim to the ground. When the whistles of the watch were heard, everyone scattered, leaving the honest man picked clean by a swarm of hands.

"You don't need to know a man's name to gain his trust, either. There's a fine trick you can work on bards and the like. Steal yourself a good set of gentleman's clothes but wear a cloak that looks finer than it is. Go up to the minstrels as they are singing for their meal. Drop a copper in their bowl as you praise their skills, then say you are looking to hire a pair of singers for an entertainment. Offer them a drink at as good an inn as you care to dine at while you discuss terms. Order lavishly, since you will not be paying for the meal, and enjoy the feast. Before the dinner's done, though, find a fault with how slow the wine's refilled. Leaving your cloak behind as if you are coming back, take the pitcher, and the goblets if they be good silver, to go find the serving maid. Need I

say boy, you'll never return and you may even take some of the plate with you. Let the minstrels pay the bill—if they can.

"Pretending you're part of the city watch is not a bad deal either. Hold on; it's not as daft as you think. First, get yourself an impressive-looking warrant from a good forger. Then, once you've befriended the mark, your partner comes as a sergeant of the watch with a warrant for the man's arrest. 'It's all a mistake,' you cry as you leap to defend his honor. If you can't clean the mark in the scuffle, then fall back and advise him to use his purse to solve the matter. A small bribe will be enough to encourage the 'sergeant' to forget the matter.

"Amy, the wench I told you of, used the watch trick to clean a man of not just his purse. After she let herself be persuaded to go upstairs with him, the "watch" came pounding at the door. Pretending to be a married lady, she rushed the fool into the wardrobe. While he was covering in the dark, she and her companions made off with his purse, sword, and armor. Not only that, they left him unable to pay for the room.

"You know, you look a little slow of fingers and wit, boy. Maybe it's not wise to rely on just your natural talents. It's a good thing there's tools that can give you an edge. Hold on—they don't have to be rare magical things or cursing expensive.

"You've seen the beggars around town with the cripple-canes? Anglers, we call them, because they're not lame and that's not a cane. It's a long rod, boy, all folded up to look like what it isn't. Those beggars wander the streets and alleys until they see a nice open window or some good clothes hung out to dry. Next thing you know, that staff is stretched out like a long rod for fishing. With a fine hook on the end and a little practice, a man can catch all sorts of 'fish' from an open window.

"Then there's a cloak with many pockets sewn on the inside, handy for quickly hiding the fruits of your labor. That way, your hands aren't full of stolen goods as you walk down the street.

"But here, take a look at my finger. There's the best of all tools a thief can have. See my nail, that little sharp edge to it? A hornblade, it's called. Just a little bit of sharpened horn glued to my nail. Careful! It'll cut you like a little knife, not enough to hurt you, but it'll sting. That's a cutpurse's tool—hidden, quick, and silent. When you're in a crowd and you can't show a knife to cut purse strings, this little hornblade does the job. It takes practice to keep from slicing up your hands and trousers, but once you learn it, it's as natural as your own hands. There's plenty of crafters who can fix you up with one.

"So there you have it, boy. Just a few of the tricks to help you along. Maybe you'll have some better luck now, and you won't be dining on air. Why am I telling you all this? Maybe I like you, lad. Or maybe I just want another full purse to pick."



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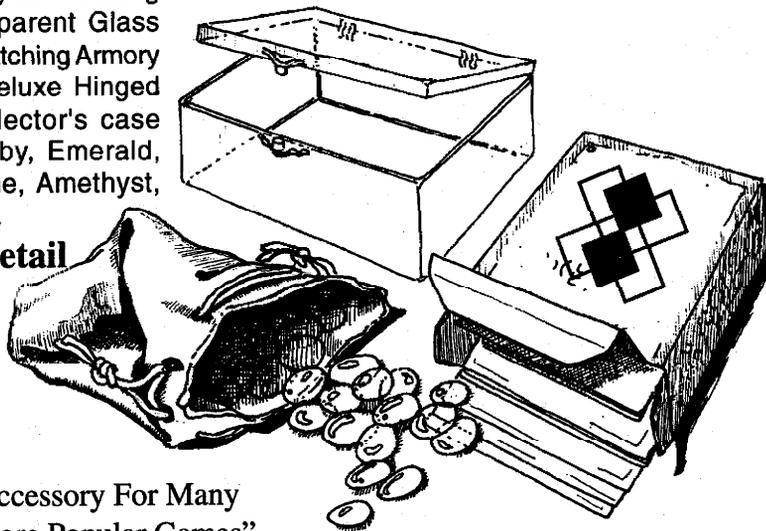
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# Attack of th

Add 15-mm miniatures to your fantasy armies

by Steve Winter

Photography by Charles Kohl

Almost all fantasy miniatures are produced in 25-mm scale. For anyone unfamiliar with that terminology, it means human figures are 25 mm (about 1" tall). Until a few years ago, it was almost impossible to find fantasy figures in any other scale. This was in direct contrast to historical figures, which were available in a broad range of scales: 50 mm, 40 mm, 30 mm, 25 mm, 20 mm, 15 mm, 10 mm, 6 mm, even 2 mm! This situation was fine for people like me, who like 25-mm figures and have plenty of terrain and other accessories in that scale. In my experience, 25mm figures are large enough to be interesting to paint, yet small enough to be affordable and playable in mass battles.

Still, the majority of historical-miniatures gamers have switched to 15mm figures, especially in those periods with really large armies: Napoleonics, American Civil War, and ancients. Fantasy figures, on the other hand, are seldom used for building large armies. Instead, they are used individually for role-playing or for small skirmish games, where the larger scale is desirable.

Now, that situation seems to be chang-

ing. Ral Partha and Grenadier, the two biggest U.S. manufacturers of fantasy miniatures, both have launched fantasy lines in 15-mm scale. Between those two and several smaller companies, the range of 15-mm fantasy figures has become very good.

## Why so small?

The smaller figures have advantages and disadvantages. The biggest drawback is that they just do not look as nice as 25-mm figures when set out on a gaming table. In general, 15-mm figures have less surface detail and hence less personality than comparable 25-mm figures.

On the other hand, they also cost about half as much as 25-mm figures. A typical 25-mm foot figure costs \$1 to \$1.50, and a mounted figure costs \$2 to \$3. The same 15-mm figures cost from \$.50 to \$1. That is a significant difference when buying 100 or more figures for an army.

Smaller figures also need less table space. Base widths and movement distances tend to run 25% to 50% lower for 15-mm figures. A battle that can be played on a 6' x 8' table in 25-mm scale can be

played on a 4' x 6' table in 15mm scale.

One misconception about 15mm figures is that they are easier to paint than 25-mm miniatures. They can be painted slightly faster, but the job is no easier. If anything, they are more difficult to paint well, because they require more care and concentration.

## What's available?

A lot of companies make 15-mm historical figures that are highly suitable for pseudo-historical fantasy gaming, from the very early Bronze Age right up through modern times. Most fantasy battles are still going to include a lot of humans. These companies are good places to start looking for a human army.

Essex, an English company, is probably the best known and most prolific of the historical-miniatures companies. Just a list of their ancient and medieval figures is seven pages long; it lists more than 600 figure packs, many containing multiple poses! The figures are well sculpted, too. Detail and proportion are excellent. They do tend to have short legs and barrel chests, but that is common with all 15mm

# Little People!



15mm troll, beholder, wizard, and mind-flayer figures coming from Ral Partha in 1994

figures; it keeps them from looking scrawny. Essex is the standard to which all other historical 15-mm figures are compared. If your figures look okay next to Essex figures, then they must be good.

Soldiers and Swords has a much smaller range than Essex. It only covers Western Europe in the 14th century, a period most notable for the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. It covers this period very nicely, however, with a broad range of mounted and dismounted knights, sergeants, men-at-arms, and peasants. They also produce a line of figures and vessels for 14th-century naval battles, which can be a lot of fun, if somewhat obscure. S&S figures are very high quality and excellent detail, are lead free, and are competitively priced.

Wargames Foundry is another English company. This one is closely associated with those irrepressible Perry twins, Alan and Michael, who are best known to role-playing gamers for their work with Games Workshop. Most of the Foundry's figures are 25-mm scale, but they do have a line of 15-mm figures for late 15th-century wars (Burgundy, Italian city-states, and the War

of the Roses). Considering the talent of the Perrys, you just can't go wrong with Wargames Foundry figures. Their prices are at the high end of reasonable, but the figures are worth every penny. (By the way, any 25mm collectors who like Games Workshop's figures, especially the Empire and Bretonnian lines, should do themselves a favor and get a Wargames Foundry catalog. It lists many similar figures by the same sculptors at much more palatable prices.)

Minifigs is a venerable company with a line almost as extensive as Essex's. Neither their detail nor their quality control are as good as those of Essex, but their prices are lower. With little detail, they are easy to paint in mass. If you want a presentable army at a very attractive price, Minifigs products is the way to go.

Stone Mountain is comparable to Minifigs in quality and price, but their line is primarily pre-dark ages (Biblical through Roman times).

Other historical-miniatures manufacturers (many of them European) can be found by looking through miniatures magazines such as *The Courier* or *Wargames Illus-*

*trated*. It is best to deal with a U.S. distributor, if possible. Always get a few sample figures before placing a big order, as most mail-order sellers don't take returns.

What about fantasy, you're asking. There has been an explosion, relatively speaking, in the number of companies producing 15mm fantasy figures in the last few years. (Considering that five years ago there were hardly any, even a small increase represents a tremendous step forward.)

Ral Partha, like Essex, is the standard against which all others must be judged. This is both because their figures are excellent and because Ral Partha is the biggest and best-known American manufacturer of fantasy figures.

As you would expect, their figures are tremendous. They have detail that rivals a good 25mm figure, nice animation, and real personality. The line of available figures is pretty extensive and still growing: dwarf infantry and crossbowmen; elf archers, foresters, pikemen, horse archers, and chariots; human knights, archers, swordsmen, lancers, and leaders; skeleton infantry, archers, and cavalry;

orc infantry and archers; goblin infantry and wolf-riders; bugbears, ogres, hobgoblins, baatezu and cornugons; and coming soon trolls, mind flayers, griffon and hip pogriff riders, wizards, and beholders. Especially notable are the Cormyr lancers, elf chariots, goblins, and hobgoblins, which are some of the best 15-mm figures I have ever seen.

Infantry packs contain 18 figures, usually in five poses (two soldiers, one leader, one officer, and one standard bearer). Cavalry (and larger monster) packs contain seven figures in three poses (soldier, leader, standard bearer). The variety of poses and plentiful banners are a really nice feature of this line.

The problems in this line are minor. First, the Cormyr knights are quite large. Their horses are the right size, but the knights themselves are so big they appear to be riding ponies. Second, some of the infantry figures, dwarves especially, have their shields behind them or to the side. I like to see a wall of shields in front of my troops, not behind them. The dwarves with their shields to the side are so wide that they're hard to fit on a base of the proper width.

Nitpicking aside, Ral Partha has produced a line of outstanding figures. They combine exceptional sculpting (courtesy of Chris Atkins and Dennis Summers), multiple poses, and a broad range. This is an excellent place to start your shopping.

Grenadier has also jumped into this market with its own 15-mm line. While they don't have quite the range of Ral Partha, they do offer some excellent figures. The elves in particular, sculpted by Julie Guthrie, are everything you expect

from Guthrie figures. They lose none of her characteristic delicacy or dignity in the down-sizing.

Grenadier's orcs and dwarves, on the other hand, are a bit lumpish. They also are quite large. The orcs are very powerful looking and can mix well with Ral Partha's orcs if you treat them as Uruk-hai or orogs or some other unusually massive tribe. The dwarves, however, stand almost a full head taller than Ral Partha's dwarves, making it very difficult to mix the two brands. The two lines have very different looks besides; Ral Partha's dwarves wear long mail coats, capes, and sallets, while Grenadier's wear leather jacks and kettle hats. The choice is largely a matter of taste.

Grenadier does make some interesting odd bits, like an enormous war mammoth and a nifty orc bolt-thrower. They also have a winged elf chariot; not as dramatic as Ral Partha's, but the two make an excellent pair.

Grenadier packs contain 10 infantry or six cavalry in a good assortment of poses. Overall, the Grenadier line of 15-mm fantasy has some very good offerings. It can stand on its own or fill the gaps in a multi-brand army.

Hard Corp is the real sleeper in this field. This small Texas company (Why do so many small game companies arise in Texas?) has some very nice figures to offer. Their goblins, in particular, are really small (as goblins should be), and truly nasty looking. Their elves are slightly smaller than most 15-mm human figures and have a good, sylvan look (as opposed to the very noble-looking elves from Ral Partha and Grenadier). They are dressed

in tunics, capes, leggings, and boots, without a helmet or mail shirt in sight.

Their armored trolls and hobgoblin infantry are notable for their personality. Log shields, banners strapped to their backs, ragged standards, and long hair make these figures stand out in the midst of an army.

Hard Corp packs contain 18 infantry in four poses or eight cavalry in two poses, and are very competitively priced.

Check out this company before buying your army. Hard Corp makes a strong showing, even in comparison to the big boys. They are distributed through Berkeley Games and Wargames West to stores on the West Coast and in the Southwest. If you live outside that area, you still can do business by mail. I expect you will be as pleasantly surprised as I was.

Simtac and Alternative Armies are both older lines, and their age shows. They tend to have little detail and poor proportions. Both of these lines carry some unusual items that aren't available elsewhere. Unfortunately, the figures themselves are hard to locate. Look for them at conventions or get a list through the mail. In either case, examine sample figures before ordering in quantity. This is not to state that these are poor figures; many of them are fine, but others have been surpassed by other, state-of-the-art figures. Until these lines are updated, they will be overshadowed by the exceptional quality of the newer figures from Ral Partha, Grenadier, and Hard Corp. Their main use at this point is to fill specialty gaps.

When building your army, don't make the mistake of limiting your selections to 15-mm figures. In a fantasy army, 25-mm

15-mm Cormyr lancers, elf pikemen and swordsmen by Ral Partha, Knights by Essex (Painting by Dave Hoppack)





2 15mm knights from Soldiers & Swords, dwarves from Ral Partha and Grenadier, a knight from S&S, and an elf from Grenadier

figures can be mixed in with very good results. Barbarians and Vikings make excellent giants; a Greek hoplite becomes a titan. Big things like elementals and genies are usually sculpted small anyway, and take on something more like their real proportions when placed alongside 15-mm figures. Golems and other magically animated creations also can be used as true monstrosities. Goblins and orcs become trolls and ogres, while imps and kobolds become orcs and goblins. (This trick works both ways. Looking for an army of well-armed and armored halflings to defend the shire against your 25-mm gnolls? Try 15-mm humans!)

### What do you do with them?

The best application for 15-mm figures is in massed armies, where their lower price

and smaller table requirements become real advantages. As an example, an elf army from Ral Partha containing 24 cavalry, 3 chariots, and 100 infantry costs about \$190 in 25-mm scale. The same army in 15 mm costs about \$82. (These prices are pre-Ralidium; both will be proportionally higher by now.)

Neither the BATTLESYSTEM® nor the WARHAMMER\* rules provide guidelines for playing with 15-mm figures. Fortunately, making the conversion is easy. Start by scaling down the bases 25% to 40%. How much you scale down is pretty much a matter of what you think looks good, but be consistent. Reduce all the movement rates, ranges, and other measurements by the same percentage. You could perform the math and then create new tables to replace the old ones, but there is an easier

way: Make your own rulers with the measurements proportionally reduced, and continue using all the old numbers. For example, something that used to move 12" will now move 12 spaces, with each space being only 5\8". Finally, things like area-of-effect templates also must be reduced. They can be redrawn or simply reduced on a photocopier.

However, there is something else going on within miniatures gaming that is really exciting. That is a pair of little games from Wargames Research Group (WRG) called *De Bellis Antiquitatis* (DBA) and *Hordes of the Things* (HOT). Both are essentially the same game, but DBA is purely historical and HOT is for fantastic armies. The rules to both games are only four pages long, a game can be played in less than an hour, the battlefield is 2' square, and a typical army has less than 50 figures. Besides the four pages of battle rules, the rulebooks contain troop descriptions, army lists, and campaign rules, and they still sell for under \$10. Best of all, they're a lot of fun.

If you've been thinking about trying miniatures gaming but shied away because of the expense and the time required to get started, pick up one of these two games. Your entire investment for two armies and the rules will be less than \$60; get a friend to buy the second army and it's down to \$20 or \$30. Fifty figures can be painted pretty easily in a few weeks' worth of evenings. If you don't like it, sell everything and you will make a profit on your painted army. There's nothing to lose.

Besides being fun in their own right, these games have exciting applications within an AD&D® or D&D® campaign.



The next time the goblin king goes on a rampage, fight the battles in front of the players and let them participate. Assign PCs to specific units, then base their rewards on how well the unit performs. High-level PCs may command a flank, or even the entire army. Characters who run their own duchies can have some command duties to fulfill.

The appearance and popularity of this new scale is evidence that fantasy-miniatures gaming is catching on at last. While the hobby was small, it could survive on only one scale. Enough people are getting involved now to create a demand

for diversity. That is clearly good news for fans, hobbyists, and manufacturers. The price is right; don't miss out!

The following is a list of addresses for the manufacturers mentioned in the article:

Essex Miniatures, Wargames Research Group; contact Wargames, Inc., Box 278, Triadelphia WV 26059.

Hard Corp Miniatures, P.O. Box 1234, Tomball TX 77377-1234.

Minifigs; send to Ral Partha (q.v.), c/o Mr. J. Hasselbrock, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc., 5938 Carthage Ct., Cincinnati OH 45212.

Simtac, Inc., 20 Attawan Rd., Niantic CT 06357.

Soldiers & Swords, 25 Fayette St., Binghamton NY 13901.

Stone Mountain, Wargames Foundry; contact Pendragon Miniatures, 1549 Marview Dr., Westlake OH 44145.



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15-mm goblin wolf-riders from HardCorp, Grenadier, and Ral Partha

15-mm goblins from Ral Partha and Hard Corp, orcs from Grenadier and Ral Partha, and an ogre from Ral Partha





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# Even WILDER



# MAGES

If your wild-mage PC isn't strange

by Joel E. Roosa & Andrew Crossett

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

Wild mages have a potential for creative play unsurpassed by any other class in the AD&D® game. Random spell surges and wild-magic spells need not be all that wild mages are known for. The unique role-playing possibilities of the wild mage can be dramatically increased by delving further into the nature of wild magic and the psyche of the wild mage.

Wild magic is a temperamental magic that requires great intelligence, imagination, and creativity to harness. Not surprisingly, wild mages are generally smarter and more artistic (but not always wiser) than other mages. They practice the Art with a capital "A." Wild magic spells may differ in more ways than just level variation—no two wild mages cast the same spell in precisely the same fashion.

The purpose of this article is to expand the options of the wild-mage subclass and to make it even more distinctive. The first section presents rules that enable the DM and the player of a wild-mage character to create special random effects: interesting but mostly innocuous effects that occur whenever the wild mage casts a spell, not just when a wild surge hits. The second section suggests a new way of looking at wild surges, making them a more integral part of the game, instead of just random side effects. The two sections may be used together, or independently.

## Tailoring spells

Using the options presented here, every spell a wild mage casts varies in some way from its standard spell. To determine the

actual differences, roll 1d6 for each spell the wild mage knows, and consult the following list:

### Table 1: Variation types (1d6)

1. Auditory variation
2. Visual variation
3. Olfactory variation
4. Tactile variation
5. Material component variation
6. Form variation

When the type of variation has been determined, roll 1d12 to determine the intensity of the change, consulting the list below:

### Table 2: Variation intensities (1d12)

- |       |                   |
|-------|-------------------|
| 1-3   | Mild intensity    |
| 4-6   | Typical intensity |
| 7-9   | Strong intensity  |
| 10-11 | Extreme intensity |
| 12    | Absurd result     |

To make things easier on everyone, don't reroll a variation every time the character casts the spell. Simply assume that the same variation occurs every time that spell is cast. At your option, the effect could change as a result of additional research and practice, a traumatic magical event (such as a powerful wild surge), or strong magic such as *limited wish*, *wish*, or certain artifacts.

The DM and player should determine the specific effects of the change together. Basic explanations of the changes are provided below, along with examples.

Auditory changes are differences in the sound a spell makes when it is cast or takes effect, or the addition of sound to those spells that otherwise have none. Most spells are silent once cast, except those that are intended to produce sound. Some spells presumably make incidental noise, such as a crackle (or even thunder) for a *lightning bolt*, or a roaring whoosh for a *fireball*.

A *mild* variation could include a slight "zap" sound for a *magic missile*, a soft, tinkling bell for sleep, or a slight hum accompanying a Tenser's *floating disc*.

For each higher level of intensity, just increase the volume: A *typical* sound effect would be equal to a normal human speaking voice; a *strong* effect would be equal to shouting; an *extreme* variation would have the approximate volume of a thunderclap. *Absurd* variations are highly unusual variations rather than a level of intensity. Examples might include a *burning hands* spell that barks, or an *identify* spell that burps. These changes are limitless (within the bounds of game viability), and their intensity can be determined by rolling on Table 2 above, using 1d10 instead of 1d12.

Visual variations are often the most obvious, since the actual appearance of the spell changes. The spell in question would be a mystery visually to anyone not already familiar with it, which could make defending against it difficult in some cases. Changes are harmless in themselves, and the nature of the spell is not changed. True seeing and similar magic would not

reveal the basic nature of the spell, but a character with the spellcraft proficiency could do so since the somatic component remains unchanged.

Mild changes could be simple color variations, such as green magic *missiles*, or a colored haze for a sleep spell.

Typical changes might entail a color variation plus another small effect, such as smoke from the fingertips; alternatively, the spell might produce multiple colors, such as a rainbow-colored *fireball*, or a showy burst of magic *missiles*, each a different color.

Strong changes affect the shape as well as the color of the spell effect, such as magic *missiles* that look like large four-sided dice, skulls, or bananas, all of which vanish after striking. Though they may appear to do damage differently, such as biting or squashing against the target, they still affect the target normally for all game purposes.

Extreme changes are much like strong ones, with the addition of incredibly flashy special effects. A simple *read magic* might seem to make its target paper explode into flames, along with a dazzling miniature fireworks display. The effect would not be strong enough to blind an opponent, but it could be frightening or confusing.

Absurd changes involve really bizarre modifications. For example, magic *missiles* might appear as live toads, books (complete with illustrations), furniture, farm animals, or practically anything. An additional intensity roll with 1d8 would give an indication of the size of the change. Using magic *missile* as the base, mild would be toad-sized, typical would be cat-sized, strong could be up to the size of a cow, and extreme would be the size of a small building. If the spell normally has larger effects than magic *missile*, adjust accordingly. Size can be forsaken to increase the bizarre aspect of the change. If human skulls were chosen as the visual variation of magic *missile*, they could be made to flame, clack their teeth, change color, or actually appear to bite for their damage.

These effects can give visual effects to spells that normally have none (such as divination or abjuration magic). This could make surreptitious spell-casting difficult at best-but then, if you want subtlety, wild magic is probably not your best choice.

Olfactory variations bring the wonderful world of smells to the wild mage's magical repertoire. Some spells, such as *find familiar* or *stinking cloud*, already have smells, and these might vary in nature, but usually not in intensity, since this would actually alter the spell's effectiveness. Often, the odor variation is related to the material component used, such as a rose scent for sleep or pea soup for a *wall of fog*. Be creative: Sand might evoke the smell of the ocean or of cactus. Spells with no material components could be given aromas at whim, or from inference. *Alter self* could change the smell of the subject's body, while *detect evil* might actually

cause a foul odor to emanate from an evil target. Such smells would linger no more than 1d3 rounds.

Mild changes are detectable no more than 5' from the origin (the caster, the target, or the path of the spell, at DM's option); typical changes could be smelled up to 20' away, strong changes up to 50', and extreme changes up to 120'. Certain animals and monsters with acute senses of smell could detect these smells at greater distances. Absurd changes are unrelated to the nature of the spell. *Darkness 15' radius* might smell like brandy, or a *flaming sphere* could smell like bubble gum. Reroll for intensity with 1d8 (perhaps adding additional smells).

Tactile variations can operate in two different ways. For person-affecting spells, the target will feel a sensation. Magic *missiles* may make the target feel damp or hot, in addition to the usual damage effect. *Taunt* could make the victim feel slimy. All area-effect spells affect only one target within the area.

For spells that create, alter, or otherwise affect an object, the object in question will be altered in a tactile manner. *Tenser's floating disc* might cause an itch when touched, or a web spell might feel like warm mud. For both varieties of change, the sensations last for one round.

Mild changes are extremely subtle, perhaps barely noticeable. Typical changes are quite noticeable, such as warmth or roughness. Strong upgrades the effect (warm becomes hot, rough becomes sharp). Extreme changes can actually cause pain or other strong sensations (but not damage). Since the pain could disrupt spell-casting or inflict combat penalties, the DM may wish to impose a balancing penalty for such a spell, such as decreased duration or range. Absurd changes are rerolled for intensity with 1d8 and usually create wildly inappropriate or strange effects, such as tickling, numbness, or crawling sensations.

Material component variations are alterations in the materials needed to cast a spell. Either the type of component or the amount needed could change. The new material usually is still appropriate to the spell effect.

A mild variation reduces the amount of material needed for casting, or possibly decreases the required value of the components slightly, if applicable. Typical changes alter the type of material needed, such as poppy seeds instead of rose petals for a sleep spell. Strong variations require more of the material, or, at the DM's option, a rarer material. Extreme changes might require double the usual amount, or perhaps a much rarer component, such as black lotus blossoms instead of rose petals. An absurd variation usually won't alter the amount needed, but might involve a radical or ridiculous change in the type of material, such as live turkeys for a *confusion* spell.

Consider any significant change in the

component's monetary value carefully. When a minimum gold piece value is given for components, it is usually intended as a means to prevent too-frequent casting of a powerful spell. Don't substitute a mothball for a 5,000 gp pearl unless you are prepared to have the character casting the spell in question on a daily basis. Keep game balance and integrity in mind and overrule any inappropriate variations.

Form variations can be the most profound alterations in the manifestation of a spell. Not only does the appearance of the spell vary, but in some cases so does the way the spell accomplishes its effect.

Mild changes barely alter the spell's area of effect or shape, such as an oval *fireball* or a sleep spell with a square area of effect. Typical changes create greater shape variations, such as stars or other geometric shapes. Strong changes could reproduce almost any irregular shape: a *lightning bolt* shaped like a person, or a sleep spell with an area of effect shaped like California. Extreme changes could create an area of effect with randomly placed holes in it that would act as safe areas, or even several small areas of effect that added together equal the normal area of effect. Absurd changes are virtually limitless and can affect the nature of the spell itself, though not its statistics. A *fireball* could become a stream of liquid fire that burns like napalm, or an *identify* spell could summon a tiny professor who gives the desired information in the form of a lecture.

Once the spell variations are rolled, the DM and the player record the changes on the character's spell list. Naturally, a separate detailed record of all changes is recommended. All spells in the list can be assigned a number to indicate the type of change (from 1 to 6, as per Table 1 above), and a letter to show the intensity (M for mild, T for typical, S for strong, E for extreme and A for absurd). Using this system, an extreme auditory change would be indicated by the abbreviation "1E." During play, describe the special effects every time the wild mage casts a spell; aside from the enhancement of role-playing, it will be necessary to decide what additional situations or complications (if any) will arise from the mage's display.

At the option of the DM and the player, two additional twists can be used to expand this system even further.

Two additional spells of each spell level the caster has access to trolled randomly from the DM's list of all available spells) may be modified by 1d3 additional changes. The spells may be ones the mage does not know, and in fact may never have access to. The DM should secretly note those spells on his copy of the wild-mage's character sheet, so that he can plug in the appropriate surprises if the character ever learns the modified spells.

Also, the wild-mage PC's player may choose any two spells she knows from

each level to be modified by a further 1d3 variations. These spells would probably become trademarks of that character, and the DM should give the player's opinion more weight when deciding on the specific effects. Also, the player may reroll any one change *and* one intensity roll for each of these trademark spells, if desired.

To illustrate how this system works when fully implemented, let's look at Barmalyn Star, a wild mage who knows eleven first-level spells. She rolls her changes for each and notes them as follows:

*Burning hands*: 2T, 4A, 2A.

*Cantrip*: 1 AT.

*Changes self*: 1 AS, 4E.

*Detect magic*: 4T.

*Affect normal fires*: 6M.

*Hornung's guess*: 2T.

*Magic missile*: 4T, 2T, 6A, 5S.

*Murdock's feathery flier*: 3S.

*Nahal's reckless dweomer*: 4A.

*Patternweave*: 5T.

*Read magic*: 6M.

Her two randomly altered first-level spells are *change self* (which she knows) and *gaze reflection* (which she doesn't). She has chosen *burning hands* and *magic missile* as her trademark spells. Since *magic missile* has no material component, she rerolls her result of 5 for that spell and gets 6 (a form change), while the intensity (Strong) is not rerolled unless she wants to use her optional reroll on it. Use rerolls to avoid similar changes on the same spell, or to correct contradictions or unsatisfying results.

The DM determines the exact modifications, keeping in mind the player's desired theme or the character's personality. Barmalyn Star resembles a lamia noble (perhaps as a result of an unfortunate accident with wild magic) and wants to have a motif involving snakes, nature, forests, and the color green. In play, these are:

*Burning hands*: Now is a green flame, and smoke rises from her fingers as she casts it. The flame sparks and jumps, has small, ghostly animal-like figures within it, and the target feels slimy for one round.

*Cantrip*: A lilting voice laughs whenever this spell is cast.

*Change self*: While casting this spell, a very loud waterfall seems to thunders nearby. Once cast, Barmalyn's body emanates extreme cold. She feels only chilly, but her body is icy cold to the touch. The chill can be felt up to six inches away from her skin, and the cold fades gradually.

*Detect magic*: Magical objects being scanned do not glow, but instead feel furry to the touch. The more powerful the magic, the plusher the fur. If the object is already furry, it feels like tree bark.

*Affect normal fires*: generates a light mist to extinguish or reduce fires, or a blast of hot air to increase them.

*Hornung's guess*: Small green sparks fly from Barmalyn's eyes and circle her body. The number of sparks is equal to the number of objects being counted, but fade away after one round. She does not have

to count the sparks to get her result.

*Magic missile*: Barmalyn Star's trademark attack spell. She throws four missiles with each casting at her level. The *visual* change makes the flight path of each a different-colored trail of light, the whole effect like a rainbow. The *absurd form* change makes the missiles into serpents, each the color of the band it trails behind it. The *strong form* change makes the serpents disappear in puffs of colored smoke as they hit. The *typical tactile* change leaves behind a burning sensation on the target for one round. This could be mistaken for poison by the target (the was struck by snakes, after all), with appropriately panicky results.

*Murdock's feathery flier*: Barmalyn smells like baked apples up to 50' away while the spell is in effect. She may attract insects and some herbivorous (or sweet-toothed) monsters as a result.

*Nahal's reckless dweomer*: Barmalyn feels a tickling sensation all over while casting the spell. Once it is cast, she feels very hungry. If the spell's effect is even close to the one she wanted, she is sated, but if not, she must eat soon or suffer a -2 penalty to abilities and combat stats.

*Patternweave*: Instead of a small lens, she places a drop of water in each eye.

*Read magic*: The words being read turn green for 1-6 rounds.

Remember, the rolled results are only guidelines and can be rerolled if they seem stupid or hard to work with. Though these new options take time to implement, the work only needs to be done once and occurs outside of gaming time, so it will not slow the pace of play.

## Alternative wild surges

The following is an optional system for determining the likelihood of wild surges, the unpredictable side-effects that sometimes occur when a wild mage casts a spell. It is intended for players and DMs who want wild-mage characters who are less predictable, more disruptive, and, in a word, wilder. These options can be used with or without the spell-customizing rules above. It all depends on how much originality or confusion you wish to generate (or can reasonably handle) and how wild you want your wild mages to be.

These rules supplement the wild surge rules presented in the *Tome of Magic*, they don't replace them. In general, the results on the table below simulate anomalies in the fabric of the magic, rather than just random spell effects and odd side-effects that are sometimes baneful, sometimes beneficial, and sometimes simply annoying or silly. All the results on this table are deliberately ambiguous—they may be good, bad, or irrelevant for the wild mage and his party. This depends on the circumstances and on the ingenuity shown by the character in turning the situation to his advantage. Some effects necessitate additional role-playing or decision-making.

This optional system is not for everyone.

Consider the needs of your campaign and the attitudes of your players before you decide to use it in your game. If the player or players in your campaign who run wild-mage characters want their mages to be wilder and customized and are not averse to the extra role-playing and decision-making involved, then give this system a whirl. Take into account that this system sometimes require quick judgments about unforeseen occurrences, and extra dice rolling. If you use wild mages only as NPCs, or if you or the players don't want to make your game more complex than it already is, then stick with the established rules for wild surges presented in *Tome of Magic*.

To determine wild surges using the new system, first determine whether a surge occurs, in the usual manner. If a surge does occur, roll 2d10 and refer to the table below. All spells take effect normally unless otherwise noted; the wild surge usually is an *additional* effect.

As with surge results in the official rules, sometimes an illogical effect comes up, usually when the spell's target is an inanimate object or a point in space. Interpret the wording of the result in as broad a manner as you like in order to produce an interesting (or humorous) result. In the case of area-effect spells, the target is the character, creature, or object closest to the center of the spell's effect. When the caster casts a spell on himself, he is both the caster and the target. This also may produce puzzling results, but be imaginative. As always, change or ignore any wild-surge result that would seriously compromise the integrity of the campaign, the plot, or the enjoyment of the game. The DM is strongly encouraged to devise her own tables like the one here, which include surge results that: a) are imaginative, b) do not drastically affect the course of the game, and c) require thought and resourcefulness on the part of the player to determine whether the result is ultimately a blessing or a curse for the party. The table given here is intended as a model: if it is used for too long without variation, the results will start to become familiar to the players—and that is exactly what you don't want to happen.

*Special notes*: Saving throws do not exempt either the target or the caster from the effects of a wild surge, but magic resistance will. In the case of protective spells such as *globe of invulnerability*, the wild surge affects the protected character *only* if the spell itself penetrated the protection. The spell *chaos shield* protects against any of the above effects, not just the ones listed on Table 2 in *Tome of Magic*. *Hornung's surge selector* allows a second roll on the table above; the player may choose the result he considers better under the circumstances. *Nahal's reckless dweomer* requires a roll on Table 2 in the *Tome of Magic*, not on the table here.

If you do not use the spell-customizing rules above, consider increasing the

### Table 3: Wild surges (2d10)

2. The caster gains the permanent ability to recognize that particular target whenever he sees it, regardless of invisibility, etherealness, disguise, *polymorphing*, or any other factor. If the target is a living being, it gains the same ability with regard to the caster (assuming it survives the spell effect).

3. The caster and everyone within a 30' radius of him shift back in time one round. All die rolls made in the round previous to the spell's casting must be rerolled (for better or worse). Characters may not take actions different from those they took originally, and neither the caster nor the affected characters will realize what has happened unless an outside observer can inform them, or unless they can see some obvious sign of the passage of time.

4. The spell is channeled through the caster's body. This can either drain the caster of 1-6 Strength and Constitution points or grant him an extra 1-6 Strength and Constitution points (50% chance of either). This can raise scores as high as 24 or may lower them below 1 (in which case coma, but not death, results until the scores are brought up to 1). Lost points are regained, and gained points are lost, at a rate of 1 Strength and Constitution point per hour.

5. The caster disincorporates from his body, which falls down, apparently dead. The caster must spend the next 1-6 rounds finding his way back into his body. If the body is destroyed (brought to 0 or fewer hit points) before the caster can re-enter it, he must search until he can find a soul-less body to inhabit.

6. The spell draws power from all other magic within 60' of the caster. Any other spells being cast within that area in the round the wild mage's spell takes effect fail automatically. Also, all magical items of less than artifact stature become non-functional for that round, and any in-place spell effects fail for that round, but resume normally in the following round.

7. The intended spell *plus* another randomly determined spell go off simultaneously, both at the intended target. The extra spell is always taken from the *lowest* spell level that the caster has available.

8. The caster gains *true seeing* for one round after casting the spell, but all information gained by it is totally forgotten at the beginning of the next round: he must therefore act on his new information (e.g., by informing his companions of what he sees) within one round or lose all of the knowledge he gained.

9. Roll on Table 2: Wild Surge Results on pp. 7-8 in *Tome of Magic*.

10-12. No discernible effect.

13. Roll on Table 2: Wild Surge Results on pp. 7-8 in *Tome of Magic*.

14. All normal animals within a one-mile radius are drawn to the caster's location, but are not under his command. If the animals are potentially hostile, the mage's party must make a reaction roll to determine how the animals react. Any other characters present must make a check separately.

15. All sensory components of the spell are removed: the spell is invisible, silent, and cannot be felt. The spell takes effect normally, however, although the caster may not realize this unless he can observe the effects of the spell (e.g., the target of a *fireball* charring and falling to the ground).

16. The caster loses the ability to understand any written or spoken communication that is not magical in nature. He can still speak and write normally, but cannot understand the spoken or written words of others. He can comprehend gestures, but not a formal sign language. This situation remains until the caster once again casts the same spell that triggered this wild surge. (He can still read his spell books as well as any scrolls or magical inscriptions.)

17. The spell "hiccups" and is cast twice in rapid succession (in the same

round), even if the caster did not have it memorized twice. Only one initiative roll is required, but two separate targeting rolls and saving throws are needed, if applicable.

18. A mystical bond develops between the caster and the target. They will become fascinated with each other as if mutually *charmed*. They will be entirely unable to attempt to harm one another, although they will not necessarily try to prevent others from doing so. The two will be able to communicate telepathically if the target has an Intelligence of at least 3. They will not be compelled to follow one another around, but will always be curious about where the other is and what he, she, or it is doing. This effect is *permanent* until either the caster or target dies or a full *wish* breaks the bond.

19. The spell taps energy from the Positive Material plane (for good-aligned mages), the Negative Material plane (for evil ones), or both (for those of neutral alignment). A good-aligned target hit by a positive-laced spell or an evil target hit by a negative-laced spell gains 1d6 temporary hit points immediately (even if already at maximum hit points). A good target struck by a negative-laced spell or an evil target hit by a positive-laced spell loses 1d6 hit points. If the caster is neutral, there is an equal chance that the target (regardless of alignment) will either take 1d2 hp damage or gain 1d2 points. Gained hit points are not permanent; lost hit points heal normally.

20. While casting the spell, the mage gets a new insight into its workings. He may permanently modify *this spell only* in one of the following ways each time he casts it in the future (player's choice): 1. Increase range by 25%; 2. Increase duration by 25%; 3. Reduce casting time by 1 (casting time of 1 round becomes 9; minimum casting time of 1 in any case); 4. All damage dice that turn up "1s" are counted as "2s." The caster can modify any given spell only once in this way during his lifetime.

frequency of wild surges. Under the core rules, each spell has a flat 5% chance per casting to trigger a wild surge. This can result in long periods when the wild mage is no more interesting than a normal mage, since his only variances will be in level variation and the occasional use of special wild-magic spells. To produce a truly unpredictable character, you might consider making a separate percentile roll for wild surges, assigning a base chance per level of the spell that a surge will occur. The base percentage can range anywhere from 2% to 5% per spell level, with the exact number being set by the DM depending on how much unpredictability and wildness he wants in his campaign. At the conservative 2% level, the change of a surge would range from 2%

for a first-level spell to 18% for a ninth-level spell. At 5% per level, the chances would range from 5% to 45%. To preserve the everyone's sanity, don't assign a base percentage higher than 5%. Add any additional modifications that you feel would add to the "realism" of the system, such as a heightened chance for a wild surge while casting wild-magic spells (such as those listed in the *Tome of Magic*) or assigning bonuses and penalties to account for any distractions the wizard might be facing, how hurried his casting is, and so forth. Think carefully before using such increased surge chances and the customizing rules presented above—the result could be a character who is simply too complicated to manage, is so flashy that he becomes completely unbelievable, or

absolutely upstages all the other members of his party with his perpetual special effects.

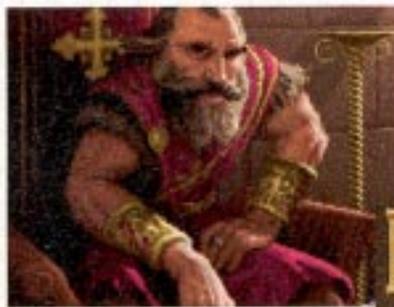
The best thing about these rules is that they can be dropped into the middle of a game, or removed from it, with no necessity for awkward explanations or rationalization. Since the characters have no idea what will happen when wild magic is used, any unaccountable changes in the rules can simply be put down to the vagaries of a chaotic and unpredictable force. So, don't be afraid to experiment freely with these rules, treating them as an enjoyable diversion rather than as a new set of oppressive rules to keep track of. Let your imagination run wild, and the wild mages of the world will thank you for it.

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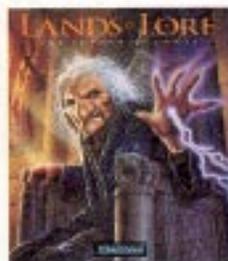
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# To defile or not to defile?

by L. Richard Baker III

Artwork by Tom Baxa

*"Sadira kept her hand open. One after the other, the cacti drooped, then browned and withered. . . Even then, she did not stop, until the soil itself turned black and lifeless."*

Troy Denning, *The Amber Enchantress*

On Athas, sorcery is a blight that spreads like a cancer across the wastes of the desert planet. On other worlds, wielders of magic draw their powers from an inexhaustible source of mystic energy, but Athasian wizards must draw their magical energy from the life that surrounds them. Each spell cast on Athas destroys a tiny amount of the planet's life energy. Over centuries, the reckless spells of generations of wizards have laid waste to the entire planet.

The greatest tragedy is that magic use need not be so destructive to the wizard's environment. Some mages, known as preservers, are responsible and avoid drawing too much of the fragile life-force from the world around them. They leave the plants that powered their spells alive, if weakened. In time, the depleted energy is restored by the normal processes of life. Unfortunately, most wizards are defilers who destroy their surroundings by summoning the energy required to cast a spell.

Why would a wizard contribute to the destruction that has already razed much of Athas when it is possible to use magic without destroying life? The answer is simple: power. Defiling spells are easier to cast than spells that do not create a radius of destruction. The preserver must draw energy from the life around him slowly and carefully, ready to stop at a moment's notice to prevent permanent damage from occurring. The defiler simply takes until there is no more to give, gaining more energy in a shorter time than a preserver can possibly muster.

## Magic on Athas

There are two steps to casting a spell on Athas. The wizard first gathers the energy required for the magic to operate, and second he performs the action that releases the energy. The latter is the spell as it is found in other campaign settings—somatic, verbal, and material components

that unlock the spell stored in the wizard's mind. On Athas this formula fizzles without a source of magical energy to power it.

Several sources of magical energy are known to be effective. The most common is found in the aura surrounding plant life of all types. Very powerful sorcerers, such as the Dragon, can tap the vital energy of animal life as well as the magical energy of vegetation. At least one sorceress, Sadira, is capable of drawing magical power directly from the sun. However, most magic-wielders must energize their spells through plant life, the most accessible of sources.

The difference between a preserver and a defiler lies in the way they gather spell energy. A preserver is careful not to draw too much energy, and leaves his source weakened but intact. In a matter of hours, the life energy of the plant has completely restored itself. The defiler ignores this fine point and gathers whatever power he can as swiftly as possible. Very strong plants, such as a great oak of the Forest Ridge, may survive a defiler's touch but most die instantly.

## Gathering spell energy

To gauge more accurately the care and effort required to summon spell energy, Athasian wizards must add a gathering time to the casting time of a spell. Defilers gather energy faster than preservers do, but still must take the time to absorb this energy. Refer to Table 1, below:

**Table 1: Gathering-time modifiers to initiative**

Spell level	Preserver modifier	Defiler modifier
1st-3rd	+1	-1
4th-6th	+3	0
7th-9th	+5	+1
10th	+10	+5

A preserver casting a *fireball* (casting time of 31 ends up with a final initiative modifier of 4 (3 + 1 gathering-time modifier), while a defiler can cast the same spell with an initiative modifier of 2 (3 - 1). A spell always has a minimum casting time of 1. For convenience, the player may want to note the new casting times on his spell cards or character sheet.

In addition to the modifier for spell level, a second modifier applies for the caster's surroundings. If a preserver is in the middle of a salt flat with not a plant in sight, it will take him quite some time to gather the energy needed for spell-casting. Add the terrain factors listed below to the spell's adjusted casting time to find the total initiative modifier for the spell.

**Table 2: Terrain modifiers to initiative**

Forests, Gardens	-2
Verdant belts, Mud flats	0
Scrub plains, Oases	+2
Stony barrens, Rocky badlands, Mountains	+4
Others (Boulder fields, Salt flats, Sandy wastes)	+8

Kerith, a preserver, is casting a *fireball* in the sandy wastes. As a 3rd-level preserver spell, it has a casting time of 4. He must add +8 for the terrain, for a total casting time of 12. The casting time is only an initiative modifier, so a spell with a normal casting time of one round or less can always be cast in one round.

These additional modifiers make life more difficult for a wizard in a DARK SUN® campaign. To be fair, the DM should make a point of applying these penalties to NPC wizards as well as the PC mages. All characters should be required to use weapon-speed factors and creature-size initiative modifiers if these spell modifiers are used, or wizards will be at a significant disadvantage.

## Casting spells

In the DARK SUN novels and short stories, defiling magic is no different from preserving magic. The same components and gestures are used to cast a spell, regardless of whether the wizard is a defiler or preserver. The difference lies in how the sorcerer gathers the magical energy needed to power the spell. This means



that a preserver can choose to defile in order to gather more energy for his spells. Refer to "The choice," below.

## Scrolls, spell books, and magical items

Since there is no difference between the motions of casting preserving magic versus defiling magic, there is no difference in the way the spells are recorded or studied. A defiler's *magic missile* uses the same formula as a preserver's *magic missile*. A PC preserver who rummages through an NPC defiler's spell book can freely learn and cast any spell she normally could.

Magical items do not need to gather spell energy; they are fully powered by their creation process. The item may be created by preserving or defiling means, but it will not normally tap into the life-forces of the plants in its vicinity when its powers are invoked. Magical items with charges (most rods, staves, and wands) can be recharged by any wizard, regardless of whether they were created by a defiler.

If the DM allows, a wizard may create a magical item that first must collect spell energy to function. Such an item will have double the usual number of charges. However, it can only be used by wizards, and the item is subject to the gathering-time and terrain initiative modifiers. An item of this type will defile or preserve as appropriate for its creator.

## The choice

Even the most selfless preserver occasionally will be faced with a situation that may call for a defiling spell. If he so desires, a preserver may ignore his training to grasp the power he needs quickly. *Any time the character wants to, the PC can declare that he is casting a spell as a defiler:*

There are several benefits to stepping over this line: the character may be able to cast a spell more than once, cast a spell for greater effect, and cast a spell with the decreased defiler casting times described above.

## Additional spells

By using defiling magic, a preserver may cast a spell that he has already casted, or he can cast one he still has memorized without losing it from memory. A wizard has access to a number of bonus defiler *spell levels* (not spells) equal to his current preserver level minus one. For example, a 5th-level preserver has four bonus spell levels. He may cast an extra 3rd-level spell, two extra 2nd-level spells, or any combination he chooses. However, each separate spell-casting does count as its own defiling incident. (See "Consequences," below.)

The bonus spell levels can be used only to cast spells that the wizard has memorized, or to cast spells that he had memorized and expended. The bonus spell levels only apply to one battery of memorized spells; they cannot be accessed again until the wizard has had a chance to replenish

his normal spell selection.

Kerith the Bold, a 5th-level elven preserver, uses his sole 3rd-level spell (a *fireball*) against a group of gith. Later the same day, Kerith's party is attacked by a rampager. Kerith chooses to defile in a desperate attempt to save the lives of his companions. He can gain up to four bonus spell levels by defiling, and uses three of them to recast the *fireball* he already expended. If he wanted to, he also could use an extra 1st-level spell in the same day by defiling.

These bonus spell levels approximate the difference between a preserver and defiler with the same experience-point total. Defilers tend to be about one level higher than preservers with an equivalent amount of experience, and can therefore memorize a few more spells. A wizard cannot use the bonus spell levels to cast a spell he does not have memorized or expended since he last memorized spells, so a 4th-level preserver can't have access to a *lightning bolt*.

## Increased spell effects

A wizard can gather more spell energy by defiling than he can with preserving techniques. If a preserver chooses to defile, he can cast any spell he currently has memorized as if he was one level higher than he actually is. The higher casting level applies to all aspects of a spell's performance-range, duration, area of effect, or damage-normally affected by the caster's level. With this effect, a 5th-level preserver could cast a 6-die *fireball* with the increased range of a 6th-level caster.

It is possible to combine this effect with the bonus spell levels described above at the cost of one bonus spell level. Kerith, as long as he is defiling anyway, decides to cast his extra *fireball* for greater effect and use up all four of his bonus spell levels with one 6-die *fireball*.

## Decreased casting time

The wizard automatically gets to make use of the better defiler initiative modifiers since he gathers the same amount of energy faster than he normally could. Refer to the gathering-time modifiers described above.

## Consequences

Although defilers are not altruistic characters, they are not necessarily evil. A number of defilers are of neutral alignment and simply defile for survival's sake. Defiling is not an evil act in and of itself; it depends to what use the wizard is putting his spells. However, it is possible to change from being a preserver to being a defiler by recklessly using defiling magic.

Each use of defiling magic moves the preserver closer and closer to a very fine line. There comes a point when the wizard can never be a preserver again. How often can a wizard defile and remain a preserver?

A preserver must make a Defiling Check after any defiling spell is cast by the mage. A Defiling Check is a special saving throw versus Death Magic to see if the wizard has the willpower and moral backbone to turn away from the easy path. However, the character begins with an easy saving throw that worsens with continued abuse. See the Defiling Check table below.

#### Defiling Check table

Incident	Saving throw
First	8
Second	10
Third	11
Fourth	13
Fifth	14
Sixth +	16

The character may include his magical-attack adjustment for his Wisdom score, if any, to the Defiling Check. In addition, the DM can assign a penalty or bonus depending on the character's use of defiling magic. Did the character resort to defiling only as a last-ditch attempt to prevent some terrible evil from occurring? Then he merits a +2 bonus to his Defiling Check. On the other hand, a character who defiled casually while other options were still open might automatically fail.

Once a character fails a Defiling Check, he must change class from preserver to defiler on the spot. Like it or not, the player has demonstrated that his character is willing to use whatever means are necessary to accomplish his goals. An alignment change may become necessary also, since defilers cannot be of good alignment.

When the character converts, he becomes a defiler of the same level, but at the lowest possible point of that level, thus losing experience points. The mage loses enough experience points to be at the lowest total possible for a defiler of that level. For example, if Kerith, the 5th-level preserver with 22,000 xp, decides to become a defiler, his experience-point total is reduced to 14,000 xp.

If the character wishes, he can voluntarily fail his Defiling Check and willingly embrace his dark fate. If a player refuses to deal with the consequences of his character's actions, the DM must be the final judge of when the character has stepped over the line for the final time. No matter what the player says his character believes in, actions speak louder than words.

One last thing: As the DM, you should not let your players know for certain where their characters stand. If a player is able to say to himself, "Well, there's a 55% chance I'll get away with it this time," then you're missing the point. Keep a secret count of the number of defiling incidents, and don't let the players know the exact modifiers you might apply to any Defiling Checks.

## Nonplayer characters

NPC preservers have the same options that PC preservers do. If hard-pressed, they may resort to defiling in order to save their own lives or to defend something they believe in. The DM must make the call whether an NPC feels forced to defile. Some preservers with strong morals may prefer to die rather than to become what they hate; other characters may not be as strong.

### Giving up defiling

There have been rare instances in which a defiler changed his ways and became a preserver. The wizard must be of 5th level or lower to change his ways successfully; higher-level characters have defiled too long to change. Former preservers who defiled and now want to find their way back get only one chance to redeem themselves by swearing off the use of defiling magic.

To give up defiling, the character must do three things. First, he must cast all future spells as a preserver. This means that he suffers the preserver initiative modifiers and must reduce all spell effects by one level. He also must memorize spells as though he were one level lower than his actual level, so a 5th-level defiler must give up access to his third-level spells. (He does get to retain his hit points, THACO, and saving throws.) The defiler must abide by these limits to power until he advances to the next level, from which he functions normally as a preserver.

Secondly, the wizard does not advance in level until he accumulates enough experience points to advance him a level if he had been a preserver. In other words, our 5th-level defiler in the previous example cannot advance in level until he gains enough experience points to become a 6th-level preserver.

Third, the character must demonstrate she is sincere in her desire to abandon her evil ways. The DM should require the wizard to make some great personal sacrifice or undertake a momentous quest to show her commitment. A wizard may be required to seek out a mentor and study beneath her for a long time, or perhaps must make a pilgrimage to replant each and every area she razed as a defiler. The DM should use her judgment to decide what is appropriate for that character.

### Conclusion

With these optional rules, preservers gain access to a lot of extra firepower they would not normally have. As the Dungeon Master, you should look for opportunities to make the players aware of what they could do if they were willing to step over the line. Give the players tough situations, and see whether their characters can make the hard decision or take the easy way out.

*"Though the sorceress believed she had been justified in saving herself then, the present issue was less clear. . . . If she resorted to defiler magic to save herself from eventual death, would she use it out of simple convenience the next time?"*

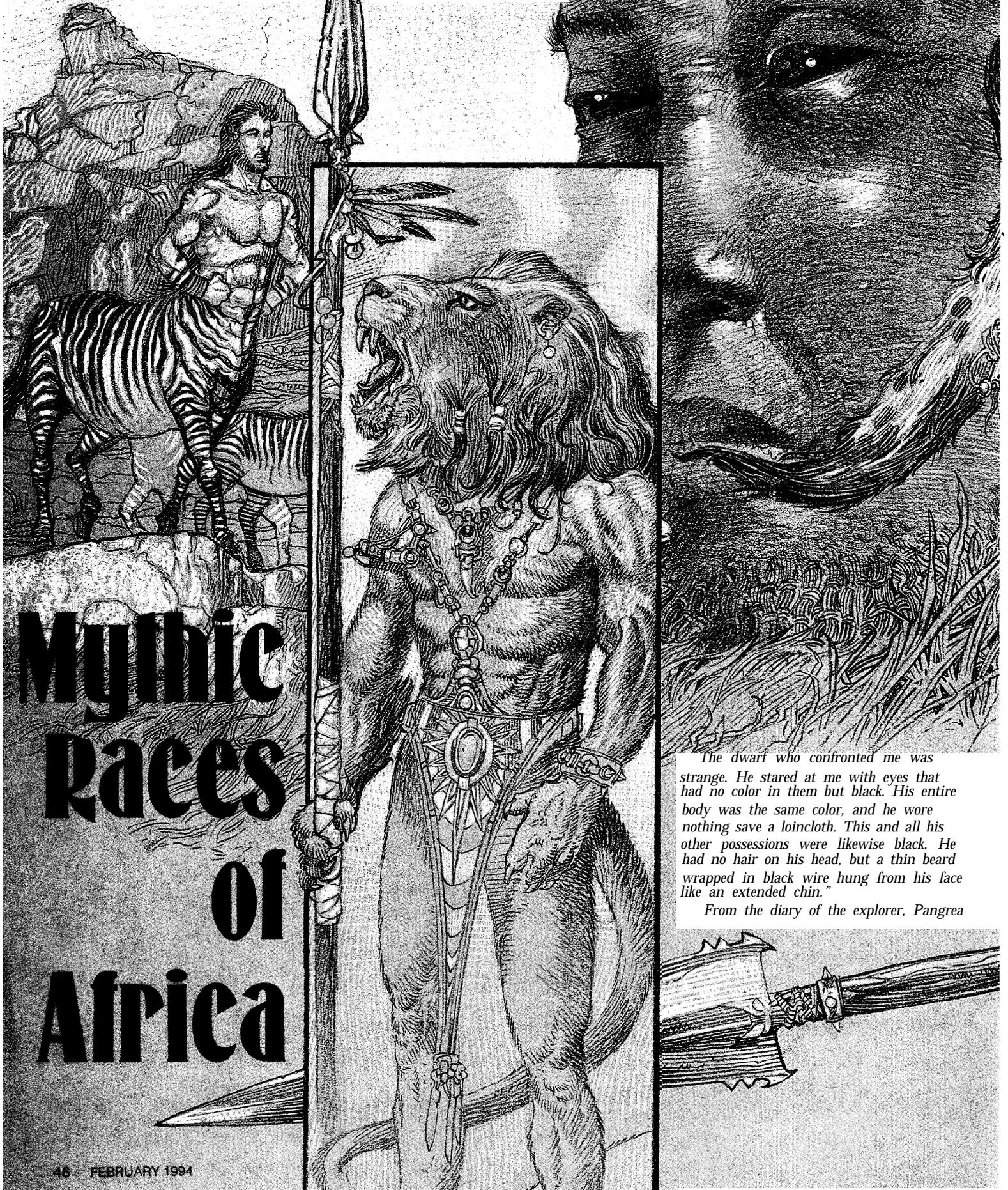
Troy Denning, *The Amber Enchantress*



Strange creatures to enliven any campaign

by Michael John Wybo II

Artwork by Mark Nelson



# Mythic Races of Africa

*The dwarf who confronted me was strange. He stared at me with eyes that had no color in them but black. His entire body was the same color, and he wore nothing save a loincloth. This and all his other possessions were likewise black. He had no hair on his head, but a thin beard wrapped in black wire hung from his face like an extended chin."*

*From the diary of the explorer, Pangrea*



There are many nonhuman races in the folklore and animist religions of Africa. There are men who are possessed by animal spirits at conception, humanoids



with the bodies of men and the heads of animals, dwarves made of obsidian, men who can change their skin color to match their background, and many more. These make up the wondrous and diverse cul-



ture of the Dark Continent.

Many of these races began as demigods and then were adopted as heroes and divine servants for later, more anthropomorphic pantheons. Regardless of their original or subsequent nature, these races, much like the Irish faerie folk, have survived as creatures who live just beyond the villagers' clearing; strange beings with customs and societies all their own.

## Animal-spirits

These beings are similar to the hengeyokai of Kara-Tur of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting. The African continent also plays host to these enigmatic shape-changers. The shamans call them *loa-legba*, those mastered by the spirits. These spirits are more commonly known as components of the Voodoo religion of the Caribbean islands, but Voodoo was developed by Africans, who escaped slavery there, from beliefs they brought with them from their homeland.

They tell of a god who made the animals and whose identity differs according to which witch doctor is telling the story. This god gave the beasts intelligence and speech.

The god left the earth after a time, some say because the animals had displeased him and some say because he was called back to heaven to be with his brother gods. After he left the animals' spirits were locked up inside their bodies, where they could neither speak nor think except in terms of hunting for game. These spirits were still aware, but couldn't affect the bodies they were trapped inside of. Although the reason for the nonsentient nature of animals has been explained by the actions or will of the later gods of Africa, the belief in their spirits was engendered by the much older animist religion that still pervades much of Africa. This religion proposes an animating life-force in all creatures and things. This force of spirit sometimes manifests itself by taking over shamans in order to grant them visions. This force also occasionally inhabits the bodies of unborn babies.

When the animals die, they either become animal spirits and are worshiped as gods, as mentioned above, seek out children in the bellies of human females, enter them, and become *loa-legba*.

Unlike their oriental cousins, *loa-legba* may speak with animals or with humans in any of their forms. They may be any class or kit allowed to humans, but they must earn 5% more experience points per level than humans to advance, as they rely more on their racial abilities and less on their class abilities. They must learn the languages of animals in a manner similar to learning human languages but always start with the language of the animal spirit who possesses them. (Subtract one nonweapon proficiency if those rules are used.) This possession is not hostile and a *loa-legba* is completely merged with his host so that there is no duality of consciousness.

Except as noted in this article, treat all *loa-legba* as if they were hengeyokai from the *Oriental Adventures* tome. If this tome is not available, then treat them as a form of lycanthrope that cannot pass on the disease, is not immune to magical weapons or especially vulnerable to silver, and is in complete control of his three forms. These three forms are: a purely human form, a humanoid animal form, and a purely animal form.

## Animal-men

Animal-men usually have the bodies of men and the heads and claws of animals. Sometimes, however, an animal-man will have all the characteristics of an animal, but in a humanoid shape. Unlike the animal-spirits, animal-men have only one form; they live apart from human communities in their own tribe; and they are more distinct from one another than the animal-spirits: Although they are associated with the Egyptian myths, these races are based on earlier, more primitive religions that were replaced by the more human gods as the Egyptians gained dominance over the tribes around them.

Unless otherwise noted, animal-men may be any class with no level limits (as the DM permits), but must earn 10% more experience points than normal to advance, as they rely on their racial abilities more than their class abilities. Certain kits described in prior African articles (warrior kits in DRAGON® issue #195 and mage kits in issue #200) may be inappropriate to animal-men, most notably those kits ascribed to a particular culture. The DM must use her discretion in this, and may substitute kits from the PHBR series to flesh out the choices available. Such kits include:

*Fighter:* Barbarian, Beast-rider, Outlaw, Savage, Wilderness warrior.

*Thief:* Adventurer, Assassin (in cities only), Bandit, Bounty hunter, Scout.

*Priest:* Barbarian, Outlaw, Prophet, Savage.

*Wizard:* Anagakok, Militant wizard, Mystic, Savage, Witch.

*Bard:* True, Jongleur, Meistersinger, Herald and Loremaster (in cities only).

Peasant and Amazon kits of any class are only appropriate to humans, animal-spirits, bat-people, and chameleon-men.

Note: To use their claws in combat, animal-men must pay a weapon proficiency slot for them. Claws do 1d3 damage each and half the normal off-handed weapon penalties apply when only claws are used to make two attacks per round.

## Ape-men

These are intelligent, talking gorillas. They have brown, orange, or black fur, brown eyes, and long arms. Ape-men are slow to anger and quick to forgive. All ape-men climb walls and trees with a base chance of 25%, or with +25% bonus if a thief. They also move by swinging from tree to tree at a 15 MV but on the ground only move at 12. Ape-men never wear armor. They start adventuring at around age 15 and live to be as old as 110. They stand about 72" tall and weigh an average of 300 lbs. They start at +1 to their initial Strength, Dexterity and Constitution, and a -1 penalty to their Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.

## Bird-men

There are two main types of bird-men, the ibis-man and the hawk-man. Although

these are the most common forms of bird-men, others have been reported. The differences are mostly cosmetic, however. Ibis-men have a long, curved beak that does 1d6 damage. They cannot fly as they lack wings (their arms are feathered, but not capable of lifting them), and have ability adjustments unlike other bird-men, as they are considered the wisest of the African bird-men. Ibis-men have a +1 bonus to their initial Wisdom and -1 penalty to their initial Constitution scores. They are associated heavily with the Egyptian god Thoth. They may be confused with messengers of that god in Northern African and Egyptian settings, and as such may receive treatment befitting such a station.

Hawk-men have wings growing from their backs and appear as humanoid hawks. They have two claws and a beak that each do 1d4 damage. When diving in attack, they may do double damage with their claws at the expense of their beak attack. They may only do this once every three rounds with no attacks the round prior to the dive, it is used to regain altitude. Hawk-men are +1 to their initial Strength and -1 to their initial Intelligence scores.

Those bird-men who have wings will never wear armor, but wingless bird-men may wear any type of armor allowed by culture and campaign. Bird-men tend to be friendly, helpful, and generous, but they can be elusive, mischievous, and sometimes deceitful. They are "flighty." Those bird-men who can fly do so as easily as they can walk, and they may carry up to half their maximum encumbrance in flight. They are maneuverability class D and have an 18 flight speed. They also must earn 5% more experience than flightless bird-men (total +15% above normal). All bird-men have a hollow bone structure and so take half damage from falls if a save versus petrification is successful.

All bird-men have a bonus of +1 bonus on attacks vs. saurial creatures, including lizards, nagas, snakes, chameleons, and crocodiles due to ancient racial enmity. Bird-men start adventuring at about age 15 and live to be as old as 110. They are about 72" tall and weigh 90 lbs.

## Cat-men

There are two distinct races of cat-people, the smaller cat-people known as the Felaks and the lion-men.

*Felaks:* There are as many subspecies of Felaks as there are of domestic cats. There are Siamese felaks, Calico felaks, Persian felaks, etc. They are spontaneous, independent, and indifferent toward others. In fact, they seem rather self-interested. Felaks have infravision out to a 60' range, they surprise others as elves do, and share that race's ability to detect secret and concealed doors. They have a +1 on attack rolls vs. canines, rodents, werewolves, and wererats due to ancient enmity with those races. They also have

the uncanny ability to land on their feet and so take half damage from falls if they make a successful Dexterity check. Felaks seldom wear armor. They begin adventuring at around 16 years of age and live to a maximum lifespan of 110. They average around 60" tall and 140 pounds. They have a -1 penalty to their initial Wisdom score and a +1 bonus to their initial Dexterity score. Felaks and all domestic cats were worshiped as holy by the ancient Egyptians and were treated with respect and awe by most northern tribes.

**Lion-men:** This race also is known as leonaks. They usually have a gruff, fierce demeanor that hides a warm, compassionate side rarely shown to outsiders. Leonaks seldom do anything today which can be put off until tomorrow. They have a sleepy, languorous demeanor that conceals a quick mind and quick reflexes. Leonaks surprise in a manner identical to elves. They may attack in a blinding burst of speed that allows them to modify their first round's initiative roll in combat with a +1 bonus. Leonaks seldom wear armor of any kind. They age and are of similar stature to felaks, but they gain an initial bonus of +1 to their initial Strength scores and -1 to their initial Intelligence. They are heavily associated with the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet, who often takes the form of a lioness-woman.

### Elephant-men

Elephant-men appear as humans with gray, wrinkled skin, flat, malletlike hands with small fingers and opposed thumb, and an elephant's trunk protruding from their faces. Their trunks may wield a

Small-sized weapon at a penalty of -6 to hit, modified by Dexterity and combat style. If used to strike without a weapon, the penalty drops to -4 and does damage as a club. The trunk also can strangle a man-sized or smaller being by rolling a called shot to hit. This does 1d4 strangling damage automatically in each round unless the victim escapes with a successful Strength check. The elephant-men's leathery skin provides AC 6 protection, but they may never wear any armor. Their flattened hands can be used as clubs. This structure also means that they have a lot of trouble holding small objects. They cannot be thieves and suffer a -2 to all attack rolls with any weapons. They may never use bows. Elephant-men have large ears that allow them to hear noises (as a thief) at a base chance of 25%. Because of a racial fear of rodents, they have a -4 attack penalty against these creatures. They receive a +2 bonus to their initial Strength, a +1 bonus to Intelligence, a -1 penalty to Dexterity, and a -2 to their initial Charisma. They start adventuring at about 100 years old and may live to as old as 750 years. They stand about 72" and weigh about 350 lbs. on the average. They may swim at a movement rate of 6.

### Mantis-men

The mantis-men are similar to their northern cousins the thri-kreen, but are called Kaggen in Africa. Kaggen are associated with the god Cagn, said to be the creator of the Kaggen, so much that the two terms are interchangeable among the Bushmen of the Kalahari in South Africa and nearby lands. The worship of the

Bushmen and their neighbors is as often directed toward "the Kaggen" in general as it is to their god Cagn in particular, and thus the Bushmen have a healthy respect and superstitious dread of this race.

Kaggen have a tough exoskeleton that provides them with a natural AC 5, but they never wear armor, rings, girdles, or cloaks. They are only at a -2 penalty on attack rolls due to *blindness* or darkness because of their motion-detecting antennae. Kaggen do not sleep and can operate well at night or in the day. They have a bite and four claws that can be used each round. Each claw does 1d4 damage and the bite does 1d4 + 1 damage. If using a weapon, a mantis-man may only bite in addition to its weapon attacks. Kaggen cannot speak human languages and no one but a Kaggen or a scorpion-man may learn to speak the Kaggen language. Kaggen are hunters who are constantly on the lookout for food. As humanoids and most animals fall into this category for Kaggen, the Kaggen are generally feared and avoided by other races. A Kaggen has a +1 bonus to his initial Dexterity and -2 penalty to his initial Charisma. They stand about 84" high and weigh about 180 pounds on the average. They take damage from weapons as if they were large-sized creatures and start adventuring at age 12. They may live as long as 70 years of age.

There are more stories about the Kaggen in African folk-tales than any other race. Kaggen are to the Africans what ogres are to other lands: boogie-men who come in the night and steal children to gobble up.

### Animal-spirit types

	Alignment	Damage	AC	MV	Fly	Modifiers
Bat	Any nongood	1-2	8*	1	24 (B)	+1 CON, -1 STR
Chameleon	Any	1*	7	9		+1 CHA, -1 INT
Cheetah	Any chaotic	1-2	5	14,45*		+1 DEX, -1 INT
Elephant	Any	2-16/2-12*	6	15		+1 INT, -1 DEX
Hawk	Any lawful	1-2*	6	1	33 (B)	+1 STR, -1 CON
Leopard	Any lawful	1-3	6	15		+1 DEX, -1 WIS
Lion	Any lawful	1-4	5/6*	12		+1 STR, -1 INT
Jackal	Any nongood	1-2	7	12		+1 CON, -1 INT
Mongoose	Any good	1-2*	6	15		+1 DEX, -1 WIS
Monkey	Any chaotic	1	8	9		+2 DEX, -2 WIS

#### Notes:

**Bat:** Under optimal flying conditions, a bat's armor class improves from AC 8 to AC 4.

**Chameleon:** These creatures surprise others with -4 penalty to opponent's roll and are 90% concealed as per a *cloak of elvenkind*. A chameleon may change skin color at will. (One cannot do this in its human form.) This creature is sacred to worshippers of the Yoruba god, Olorun of West Africa. (See "An African Genesis" in DRAGON® issue #191 for more details on Olorun.)

**Cheetah:** These great cats are renowned for their bursts of speed. They can sprint, at a movement rate of 45, for three rounds. They must rest for three full rounds before sprinting again.

**Elephant:** These creatures can attack five times in one round. Each tusk can stab for 2-16 points of damage; its trunk can constrict for 2-12 points; and each front foot can trample for 2-12 points. No single target can be the target of more than two of these attacks. Large-sized creatures cannot be constricted by the trunk attack.

**Hawk:** These creatures possess a diving charge that has a +2 attack bonus, and enables them to do double damage. This attack form may be used once every three rounds, but no attacks can be made the round previous to the dive as the bird is gaining the necessary altitude. These creatures are identified with the Egyptian gods Horus and Anhur.

**Mongoose:** These creatures have +4 attack bonus vs. snakes. On any successful bite, they clamp on, doing 1-2 + 1 damage per round until a Strength roll is made by the snake to escape. Mongooses are considered holy and are worshiped in a manner identical to that given to cats in Egypt and North Africa.

**Lion:** These creatures have AC 5 for their forequarters and AC 6 for their hindquarters.

## Scorpion-men

The scorpion-men are centaurs with the bodies of scorpions instead of horses. This race is called the Scoraks by most tribes, as their name in their own language is unpronounceable by humans. Scoraks are loners by nature and are suspicious and paranoid of others' intentions toward them. They surprise in a manner similar to elves, but their main special ability is their poison stinger. The stinger may be used in place of any normal melee attack, does 1d4 damage and necessitates a saving throw versus poison to avoid unconsciousness that lasts 1d4 hours. Scorpion-men may never wear armor, but their chitinous exoskeleton provides a natural AC 8. They start adventuring at about age 15 and may live to be as old as 110. They stand about 84" tall and weigh about 200 pounds, and are considered large-sized for the purposes of damage. They gain a +1 bonus to their initial Constitution and a -1 penalty to initial Charisma. They may move at a rate of 18.

## Snake-men

The snake-men of Africa are of two distinct races. The first is the African naga that has a snake-like head, scaly body, and huge serpentine tail where his legs should be. The second is the boa (no relation to the boa constrictor found in South America) which has a muscled, flexible torso

with arms, a long, thick, snake-like tail, slitted eyes, and a forked tongue.

*African naga:* The African naga is green in complexion and has slitted yellow eyes. African naga are arrogant in the extreme, but not necessarily evil. They may use their tail to attack in place of any normal melee attack. This does 1d4 damage on a successful hit and constricts the victim. Constriction has a 20% chance of pinning the victim's weapon arm and does 1d4 damage per round automatically until the victim escapes by making a Strength roll. The victim cannot do anything else on the round he attempts to escape.

Nagas may never wear armor but have a natural AC 7. Nagas are considered Large creatures for damage determination as they stand about 84" tall on the average and weigh about 300 pounds. Naga have a bonus to their saving throws versus poison as a dwarf and they receive a +1 bonus on attack rolls versus avian creatures due to racial enmity. Nagas start adventuring at about 20 years of age and may live to be as old as 200. They have a +1 bonus to their initial Strength and Constitution scores, but a -2 penalty to their initial Charisma. There are rare nagas with human faces. These nagas have no penalty to initially generated Charisma, but must pay an additional 10% to earned experience (+20% total).

*Boa:* The boa have the same tail attack,

saving bonus versus poison, and bonus on attack rolls against avians as do nagas, but they gain no armor class bonus and may wear any armor allowed by culture and campaign. They are less arrogant and more paranoid than their cousins above. They are Medium-sized for damage determination and average about 72' and 200 pounds in height and weight respectively. They age in the same manner as do nagas. They gain a bonus of +1 to their Intelligence and Dexterity scores and a -1 penalty to their Charisma and Wisdom scores. Boa only have to pay a 5% penalty to earned experience, however.

## Zebrataur

A zebrataur is a centaur that has a zebra's body rather than a horse's. The upper torso is a deep black human's and the lower half alternates black and white stripes. Zebrataurs are fierce and proud, but friendly to others. They gain a +1 bonus to Strength and Constitution and a -1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom scores. They calculate their weight allowances and chances to open doors as if they had a Strength one class higher than they possess. They may make two hoof attacks for 1d6 each in place of all normal melee attacks allowed. They are Large-sized for purposes of damage determination. They gain the saving throw bonuses allowed versus poison and spells that are allowed



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by Bob Murch

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to dwarves and gain hit-point bonuses for high Constitution scores as if they were fighters due to their large size. A zebra-taur stands about 84" tall and weighs about 400 pounds. They start adventuring at around the age of 15 and may live to be as old as 90. They have a movement rate of 24.

## Demihuman races

### Bat-men

These bat-people resemble normal humans, except for huge black wings of leathery texture that grow from their backs. These allow them to fly as easily as they walk, carry half their usual encumbrance in flight and move at an air speed of 18 with maneuverability class B. Because they may rely upon their flight abilities more than class abilities in many circumstances, they must gain an extra 5% in experience to advance a level. The bat-men live in their own tribes in high mountain caves or in the tropical jungle. They are otherwise like normal humans. They usually subsist on fruits, vegetables, and some insects. They may wear any armor permitted by class and campaign, but seldom do so, because it must be custom-made and will cost double the normal amount.

Magical armor, cloaks, robes, etc., will never fit a bat-person unless the item was specifically made for them, unless the dweomer of the item allows it to fit any wearer.

### Chameleon-men

Chameleon-men appear as normal humans, except that they can change their skin color at will. They may blend into their background for 90% concealment and a -6 penalty to enemy surprise rolls. They may change their skin color to match that of any other race, and they may even synthesize the appearance of clothes and tattoos by coloring different parts of their skin. In order to do this, however, they must never wear armor. Their thick skin provides them with a base AC 9, however. Since they often use their chameleon abilities more than their class abilities, they must earn an extra 5% of experience points to gain a level.

### African dwarf

African dwarves look more like golems made of obsidian than traditional dwarves. They have the same stature and lifespan as their flesh and blood cousins, but that is where the similarity ends. African dwarves have shiny black skin. They have no head or body hair, but sometimes have wiry, black beards that are greased so that they shine like the rest of their body. They twine these beards up in black wire so that they stick out like extended chins. Even their eyes have no whites in them, but are merely the same shiny black that covers the rest of them.

These unusual eyes enable them to see perfectly in both the brightest day and the darkest night. *Blindness, light* or *darkness* spells cast upon their eyes will not affect them.

These dwarves are associated with the Egyptian god Ptah, "the seeker of hidden ways," in Northern Africa, both for their resemblance to him and their hidden homes and underground tunnels. They are found under the jungles of the central Congo and the Sahara Desert but smaller tribes are known to exist all over (or rather under) Africa. They are sometimes called "Ptah's seekers."

African dwarves never wear armor and have none of the racial abilities of other dwarves, but their extremely hard skin gives them a natural AC 6. They gain a +1 to their Constitution score and a -1 to their Intelligence score. Because they tend to rely on their special racial abilities, they must earn 15% more experience than normal. African dwarves may be of any class, even mage (maximum level for mages is 12). African dwarves are very secretive and seldom speak even amongst themselves.

## Conclusion

These races can enliven and flesh out any African campaign setting with mythically appropriate races. For more races (and monsters) suitable to an African campaign, see "The Dark Continent" by David Howery in DRAGON issue #189. These races also can be used by imaginative DMs in any campaign setting that the DM deems them appropriate for.

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Artwork by Mark Doney

# 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) 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) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

**Important:** DRAGON® Magazine no longer publishes phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that 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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### B. S. CON '94, Feb. 12-13 NY

This convention will be held at Ketchum Hall on the Buffalo State College campus in Buffalo, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration: \$3/day preregistered; \$5/day at the door. There are session fees also. Write to: B. S. CON, Nuemann Hall #236, S.U.C.B., 1300 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo NY 14313.

### DUNDRACON XVIII, Feb. 18-21 CA

This convention will be held at the Marriott hotel in San Ramon, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a painting contest, computer games, a flea market, and dealers. Registration varies. Write to: DUNDRACON XVIII, 385 Palm Ave., Oakland CA 94610.

### GENGHIS CON XV, Feb 18-20 CO

This convention will be held at the Marriott Southeast in Denver, Colo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, auctions, and dealers. Registration: \$15. Write to: Denver Gamers' Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

### JAXCON '94, Feb. 18-20 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn at Baymeadows in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include door prizes, a painted-miniatures contest, a flea market, and dealers. Registration: \$22/weekend. Single-day rates vary. Write to: JAXCON, P.O. Box 4423, Dep't. M, Jacksonville FL 32201.

### WINTER WAR XXI, Feb. 18-20 IL

This convention will be held at the Chancellor hotel in Champaign, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include auctions, dealers, and open gaming. Registration: \$6/weekend or \$3/day. Send an SASE to: Donald McKinney 986 Pomona Dr., Champaign IL 61821.

### ARGACON '94, Feb. 19 MI

This convention will be held in the Adrian Tobias room on the Adrian College campus in Adrian, Mich. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a Euchre tournament, and contests. Dealers are welcome. Registration: \$5 at the door. Half the proceeds will go to the Epilepsy Foundation of America. Write to: ARGACON, Adrian College, Adrian MI 49221.

### BASHCON '94, Feb. 25-27 OH

This convention will be held at the University of Toledo's Student Union in Toledo, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include auctions, an art show, and dealers. Registration: \$3/weekend. Single-day rates vary. Dealers, game masters, and artists are welcome. Write to: UT-BASH, Student Activities Office, 2801 Bancroft St., Toledo OH 43606.

### EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN '94, Feb. 25-27 IL

This convention will be held in the Renaissance and Roman rooms of Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniatures and art contests, an auction, and guest speakers. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Send an SASE to: Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor Student Center, S.I.U., Carbondale IL 62901-4425.

### HURRICON '94, Feb. 25-27 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Resort in Ft. Walton, Fla. Guests include Piers Anthony, Timothy Zahn, and Michael Stackpole. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include readings, demos, a costume contest, and a charity auction. Registration: \$26 before Jan 31; \$30 thereafter. Write to: HURRICON, P.O. Box 4728, Ft. Walton FL 32549.

### RADCON 1B, Feb. 25-27 WA

This convention will be held at the Best Western Tower Inn in Richland, Wash. Guests include V. E. Mitchell, "Kev" Brockschmidt, Don Segna, and Glen Allison. Events include role-playing, board and miniatures games. Other activities include anime and SF movies, an art show, dealers, and gaming. Registration: \$15. Write to: RADCON 1B, 2527 W. Kennewick Ave., #162, Kennewick WA 99336.

- ◆ indicates an Australian convention.
- \* indicates a Canadian convention.
- indicates a European convention.

**TOTAL CONFUSION VIII, Feb. 25-27 MA**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Royal Plaza in Marlborough, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures contest. Registration: \$23/weekend or \$9/day preregistered; \$10/day at the door. Write to: TOTAL CONFUSION, P.O. Box 1463 Worcester MA 01607.

**PAINTING CONTEST/GAME DAY, Feb. 26 IN**

This convention will be held at Metalcraft Miniatures and More in Elwood, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a painting demo, a raffle, and war games. Registration: Free. Send a long SASE to: Leslie A. King, Metalcraft Miniatures, P.O. Box 6, 926 N. 9th St., Elwood IN 46036.

**PLATTECON ETA, March 4-6 WI**

This convention will be held at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Student Center. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include raffles, contests, and demos. Registration: \$6/weekend or \$5/day preregistered; \$9/weekend or \$6/day at the door. \$1 Spectator passes are available at the door. Write to: Platteville Gaming Assoc., Student Center, 1 University Plaza, Platteville WI 53818.

**STELLARCON XVIII, March 4-6 NC**

This convention will be held at the Radisson Hotel in High Point, N.C. Guest of honor is Mark Lenard. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' room, panels, demos, movies, and an art display. Registration: \$25 at the door; some group rates are available. Write to: STELLARCON, P.O. Box 396, Thomasville NC 27361-0396.

**CONCENTRIC '94, March 11-13 IL**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill. Guest of honor is Robin Wood. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, a game auction, and a dealers' room with demos. Registration: \$15 at the door. Write to: CONCENTRIC, 114 Euclid, P.O. Box 287, Park Ridge IL 60068.

**NORTHEAST WARS II, March 11-13 VT**

This convention will be held at the Radisson Hotel in Burlington, VT. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$18 preregistered; \$25 at the door. Write to: N.E. WARS II, 152 Church St., Burlington VT 05401.

**OWLCON XV, March 11-13 TX**

This convention will be held on the campus of Rice University in Houston, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include anime and open gaming. Registration: \$12/weekend before March 1; \$15/weekend at the door; single-day rates vary. Make checks payable to WARP. Write to: WARP, OWLCON XV, P.O. Box 1892, Houston TX 77251-1892.

**POINT CON I, March 12-13 WI**

This convention will be held at the University Center on the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus in Stevens Point, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a games swap and seminars. Send an SASE to: GASP, Box 41, University Activities Office, University Center UWSP, Stevens Point WI 54481.

**CHAOTICON '94, March 18-20 NY**

This convention will be held at Clarkson University in Potsdam, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5/day or \$10/weekend. Write to: William Sanders, Clarkson Univ., Box 6987, Potsdam NY 13699; or E-mail to: gauntlet@craft.comp.clarkson.edu.

**RUCON IV, March 19-20 PA**

This convention will be held at the Parsons Union Bldg., on the campus of Lock Haven University in Lock Haven, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include magical-item and monster design contests and battle chess. Registration: \$15/weekend; single-day rates vary. Send an SASE: RUCON IV, c/o Role-playing Underground, Parsons Union Bldg., Lock Haven Univ., Lock Haven PA 17745.

**DAY OF CON-FLICT, March 19 WI**

This convention will be held at the Bucyrus Erie Club in South Milwaukee. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' area and a silent auction. Registration: \$3 at the door. Write to: DAY OF CON-FLICT, 1250 N. 68th St. #206, Wauwatosa WI 53213-2896.

**MAGNUM OPUS CON IX, March 24-27 SC**

This convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Greenville, S.C. Guests include Timothy Zahn, Bruce Campbell, and Raymond Moody, Jr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, workshops, anime, a costume contest, and open gaming. Send an SASE with \$.52 postage to: MOC-9, P.O. Box 6585, Athens GA 30604. Please include your age.

**SIMCON XVI, March 24-27 NY**

This convention will be held at the University of Rochester's River campus in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' room. Registration: \$8 for students; \$10 for the public. Write to: SIMCON XVI, c/o URSGA, CPU Box 27726, River Station, Rochester NY 14627.

**ATOMICON '94, March 25-27 ID**

This convention will be held at the Idaho Falls Recreation Center in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$12 before March 12; \$17 at the door. Single-day rates will be available. Write to: Randy Pacetti, 2635 Laguna Dr., Idaho Falls ID 83404.

**COASTCON XVII, March 25-27 MS**

This convention will be held at the Miss. Gulf Coast Coliseum/Convention Center in Biloxi, Miss. Guests include Spider & Jeanne Robinson, George Alec Effinger, and Larry Elmore. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies, videos, an art show and auction, a costume contest, and a charity auction. Registration: \$25. Write to: COASTCON, P.O. Box 1423, Biloxi MS 39533.

**CONNCON '94, March 25-27 CT**

This convention will be held at the Danbury Hilton & Towers in Danbury, Conn. Guests include Jean Rabe and Sam Lewis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events. Write to: CONNCON, P.O. Box 444, Sherman CT 06812.

**MID-SOUTH CON 13, March 25-27 TN**

This SF convention will be held at the Best Western Airport hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Guests include Barbara Hambly, Larry Elmore, and Robin Curtis. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: MID-SOUTH CON, P.O. Box 22749, Memphis TN 38122.

**LITTLE WARS\* '94, March 31/April 2 IL**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$12/weekend or \$8/day plus event fees. Write to: Jeffery Hammerlund, 107 W. Chicago St., Algonquin IL 60102.

**CLARE-VOYANCE '94, April 8-10 CA**

This convention will be held on the campuses of Claremont Colleges in Claremont, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show. GMs are welcome. Registration: \$5, plus a \$2 fee per game. Write to: Games Central, Storyhouse Claremont McKenna College, Claremont CA 91711.

**ONEONTACON '94, April 8-10 NY**

This convention will be held at the Hunt Union on the SUNY campus in Oneonta, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, videos, door prizes, and a special speaker. Registration: \$9 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Discounts for students, GMs, and clubs are available. Send an SASE to: ONEONTACON '94, c/o Student Assoc., SUNY-Oneonta, Oneonta NY 13820; or E-mail to: daviswr144@snyoneva.o-oneonta.edu.cc.

**GRYPHCON '94, April 8-10 \***

This convention will be held at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an auction, and movies. Registration: \$14/weekend or \$8/day preregistered; \$16 and \$10 at the door. Write to: GRYPHCON, c/o University Centre Administration, Room #266, University Centre, Univ. of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, CANADA N1G 2W1.

**CON-TROLL '94, April 15-17 TX**

This SF&F convention will be held at the Clarion Inn in Houston, Tex. Guests include Margaret Weis, Alan Gutierrez, and Robert Neagle. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, panels, demos, gaming, and filking. Registration: \$30 before March 15. Write to: CON-TROLL Conventions, P.O. Box 740969-1025, Houston TX 77274.

**TECHNICON 11, April 15-17 VA**

This SF&F convention will be held at the Brown Center for Continuing Education in Blacksburg, Va. Guests include Ellen Guon, Holly Lisle, and Tom Monaghan. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, panels, filking, videos, anime, computer games, and dealers. Registration: \$22. Student discounts are available. Write to: TECHNICON 11, c/o VTSFFC, P.O. Box 256, Blacksburg VA 24063-0256.

**AMERICON '94, April 16-17** NJ  
 This convention will be held at the Clayton American Legion Hall on the Clayton/Franklinville border in New Jersey. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$11/day preregistered; 12/day at the door. Game fees average \$2. Dealers and GMs are welcome. Write to: AMERICON, c/o Carl Thunder, P.O. Box 125, Mullica Hill NJ 08012.

**HAVOC X, April 16-17** MA  
 This convention is also the Northeast BATTLETECH® Regional Tournament. It will be held at the Sheraton Tara hotel in Framingham Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include individual and team BATTLETECH® competitions. Write to: Brian Reddington-Wilde, 46 Highland St., Reading MA 01867.

**AMIGOCON 9, April 22-24** TX  
 This convention will be held at the Quality Inn-Airport in El Paso, Tex. Guests include Roger Zelazny and Dell Harris. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15 before April 15; \$18 at the door. Write to: AMIGOCON, P.O. Box 3177, El Paso TX 79923.

**NAME THAT CON 7, April 22-24** MO  
 This SF&F convention will be held at the Airport Hilton in St. Louis, Mo. Guests include Alan Steele, Aviva, and Mickey Zucker Reichert. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, videos, an art show, and dealer&Registration: \$18 before March 31; \$21 thereafter. Single-day rates will be available at the door. Write to: NAME THAT CON, P.O. Box 575, St. Charles MO 63302.

**POINTCON XVII, April 22-24** PA  
 This historical, SF, and gaming convention will be held at the U. S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, dealers, computer games, and an auction. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Write to: USMA Wargames Committee, ATTN: POINTCON, P.O. Box 3429, West Point NY 10997.

**MAGIC CARPET CON II, April 29-May 1** GA  
 This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Dalton, Ga. Guests include C. J. Cherryh and P. M. Griffin. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Send SASE to: MAGIC CARPET CON, P.O. Box 678, Rocky Face GA 30740.

**KETTERING GAME CON X**  
**April 30-May 1** OH  
 This convention will be held at the Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, computer games, and a game auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429.

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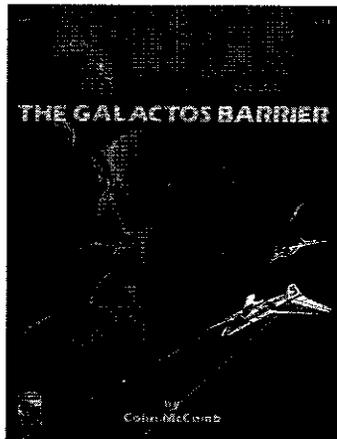
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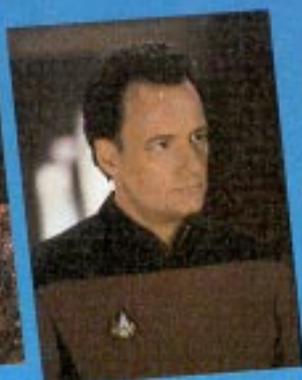
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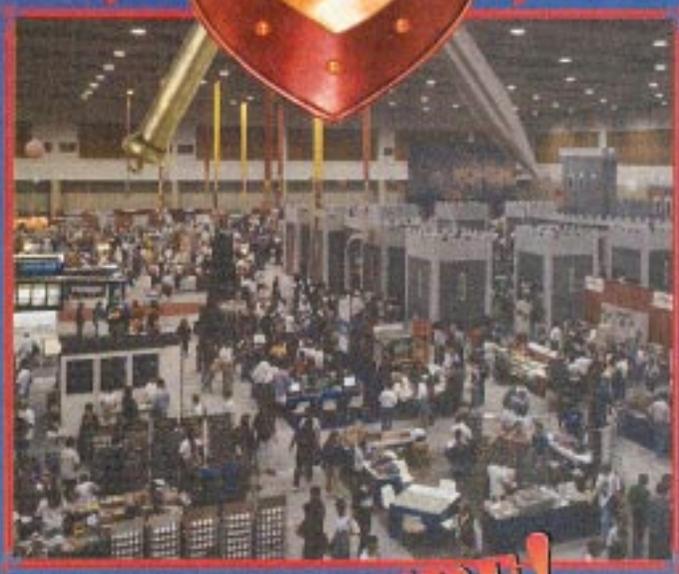
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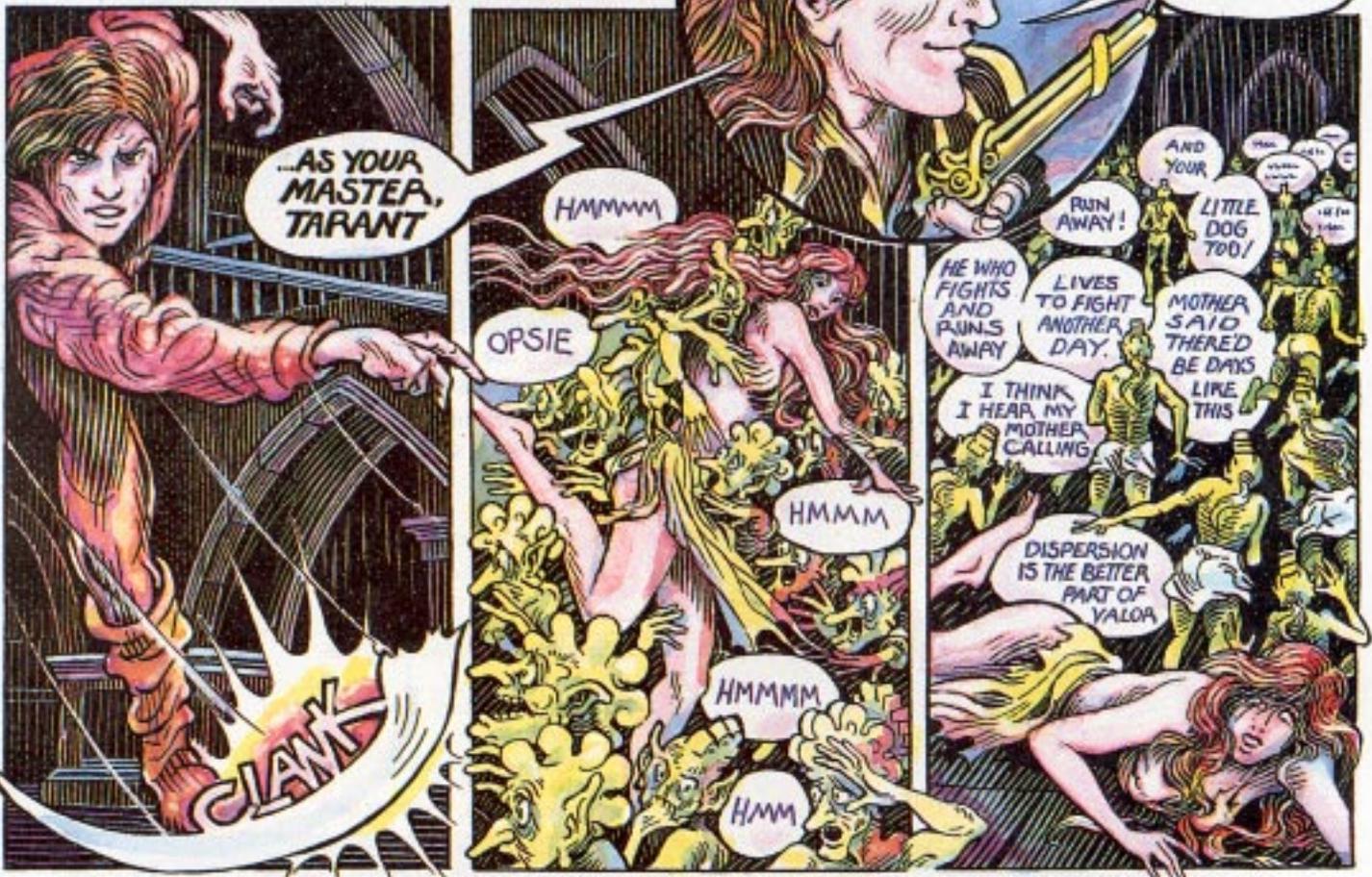
# Urboram

STORY  
JEFF GRUBB

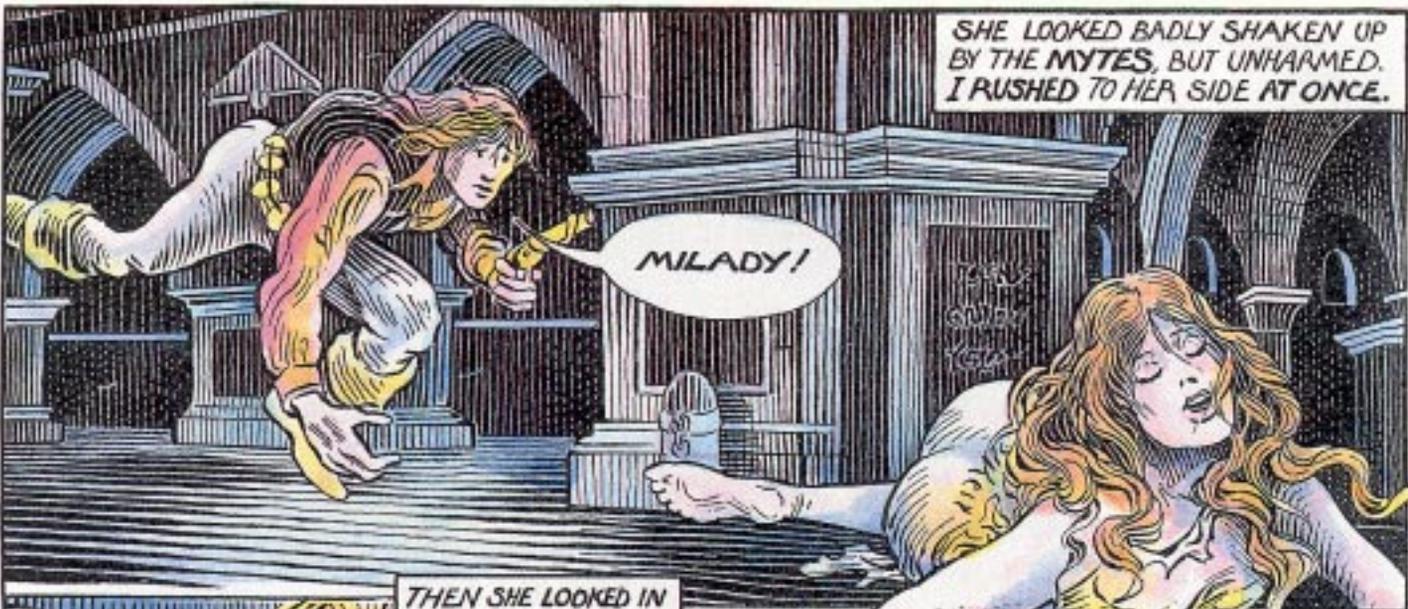
ART  
BOB LESSL  
COLOR  
CATHY LESSL

### THE STORY SO FAR:

JEN AND I HAD ESCAPED TARANT'S ATTACK BY FLEEING HER WORLD, BACK THROUGH THE GATE. HOWEVER, JEN IMMEDIATELY RAN AFLOU OF A PACK OF MYTES, NASTY LITTLE SCAVENGERS WHO TAKE ANYTHING THAT IS NOT NAILED DOWN. I HAD TO WIN HER FREE OF THEIR CLUTCHES, SO...

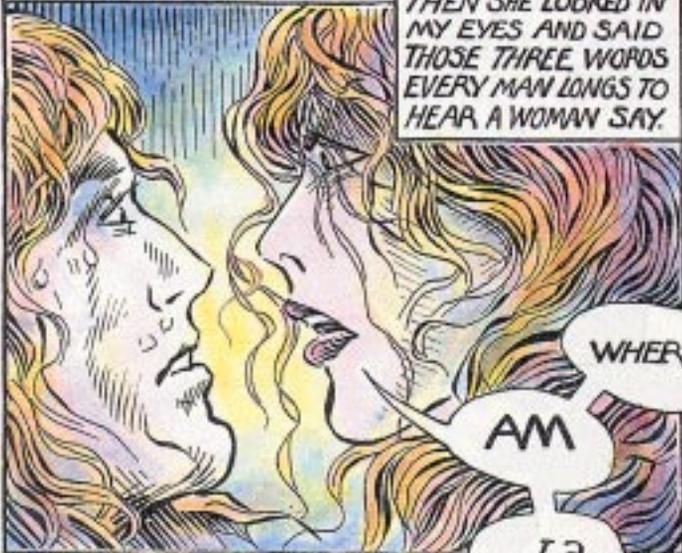


SHE LOOKED BADLY SHAKEN UP BY THE MYTES, BUT UNHARMED. I RUSHED TO HER SIDE AT ONCE.



MILADY!

THEN SHE LOOKED IN MY EYES AND SAID THOSE THREE WORDS EVERY MAN LONGS TO HEAR A WOMAN SAY.



WHERE

AM

I?

AND HERE I WAS AFRAID SHE'D PANIC

YOU ARE IN A GREAT DEAL OF DANGER, MILADY...

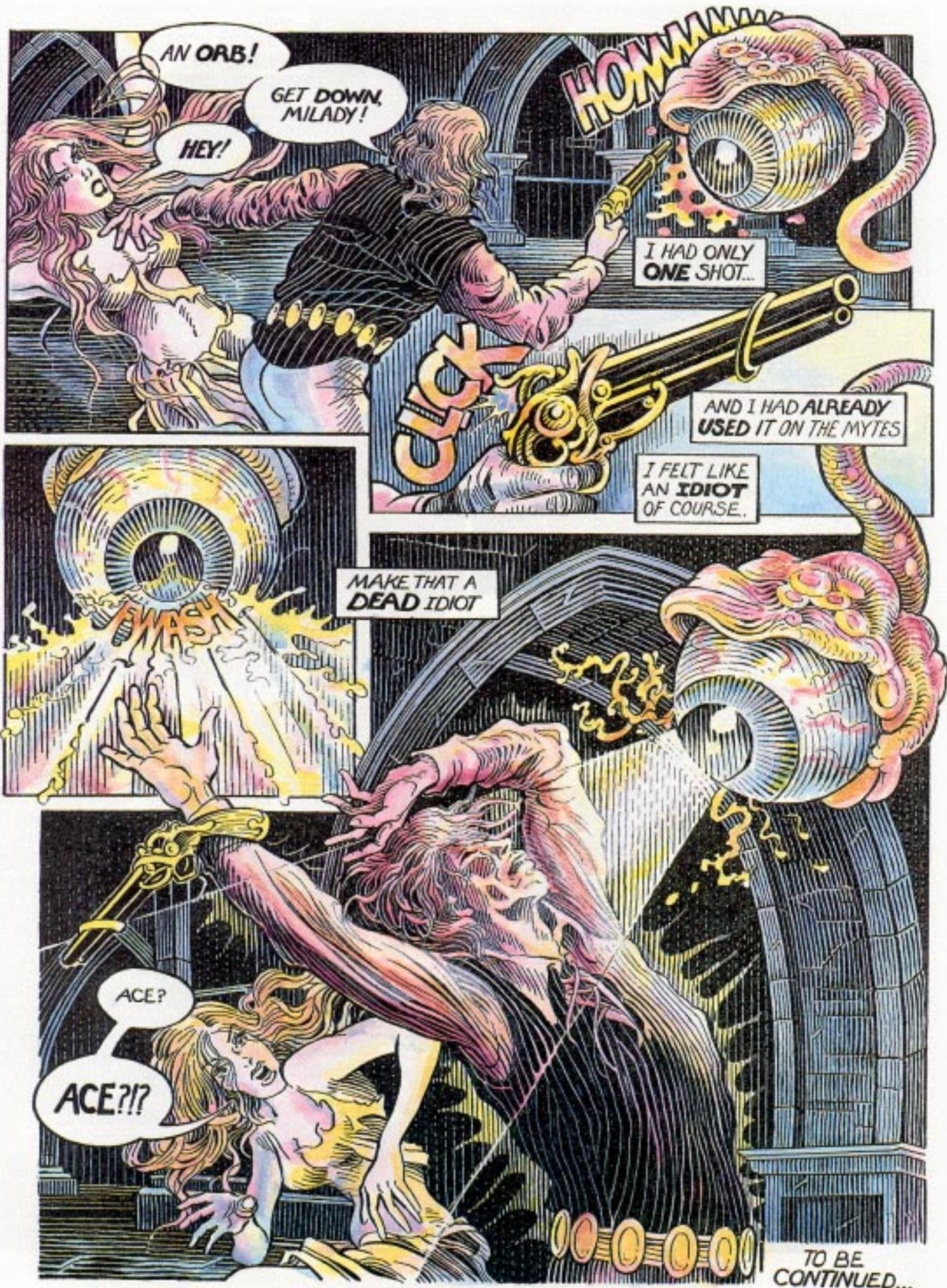
AND THOUGH THE LEGEND OF ACE BLOODRUNNER IS HAILED AS THROUGH-OUT THE MAZEWORKS FOR HIS BRAVERY, I STRONGLY RECOMMEND WE CLEAR THIS AREA IMMEDIATELY.

HONMMMMMM

...ALONG

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SOMETHING WORSE COMES...





AN ORB!

GET DOWN, MILADY!

HEY!

HOONNNNN

I HAD ONLY ONE SHOT...

AND I HAD ALREADY USED IT ON THE MYTES

I FELT LIKE AN IDIOT OF COURSE.

MAKE THAT A DEAD IDIOT

SMASH

ACE?

ACE?!?

TO BE CONTINUED...

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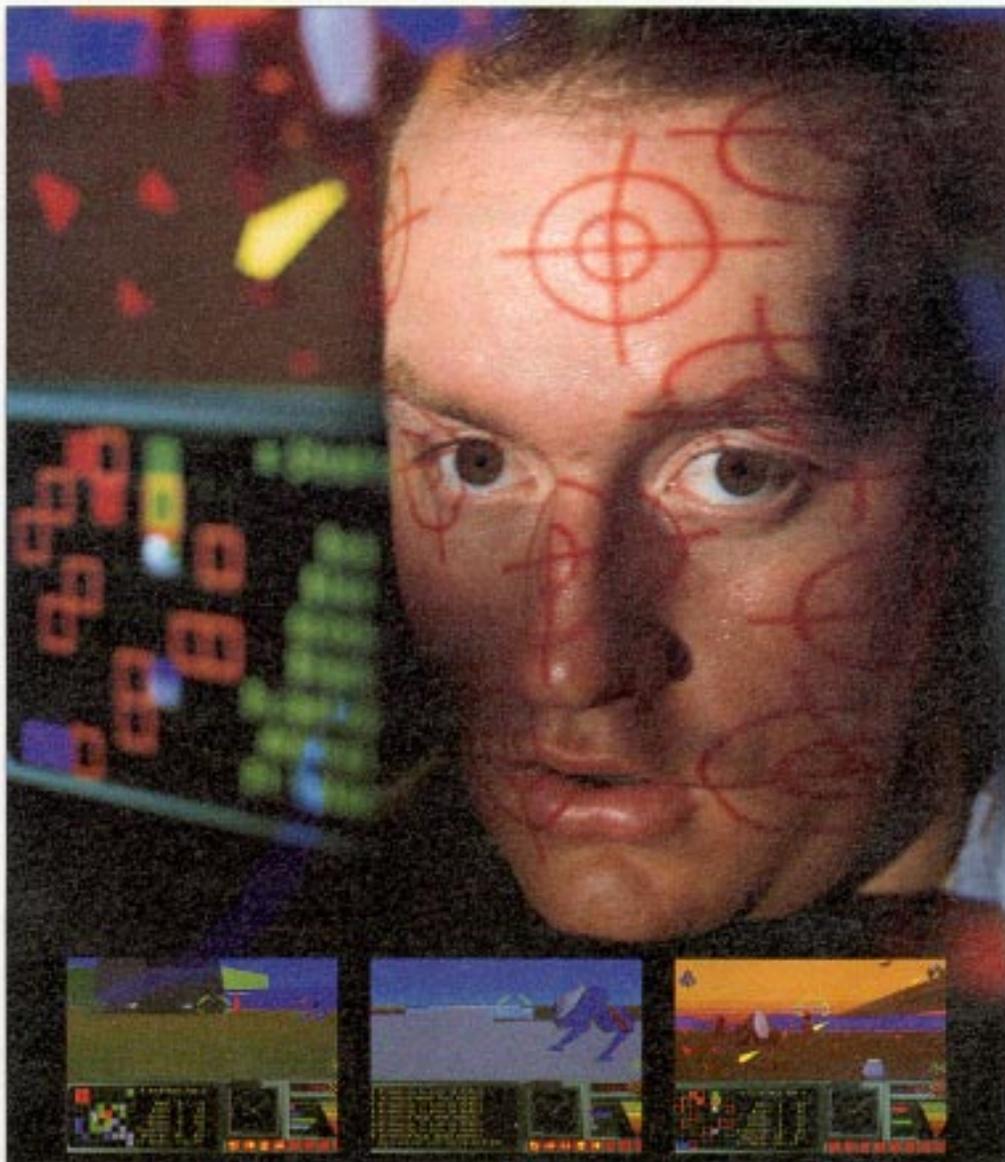
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 SIMUSTRONICS

## Stubborn computer programmers?

*"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."*

Matthew 7:5

As computers have gotten more complex, it is a truism that computer games have become much more involved to produce. Ten years ago, a single programmer, working alone, could produce a game that was competitive on a national scale. Today, a team consisting of multiple programmers, artists, and even game designers is necessary. Even with such a large team (well, perhaps partially *because* of the team's size), games can take a year or more to produce.

In general, this is a good thing. Computer game art now is done by professional artists and our music composed by professional musicians. A good playtesting team can catch most of a game's bugs *before* release (if the company's management lets them), so that you can have a little more assurance that the game will run without crashing. Some companies are, of course, better about this than others.

Now, an artist is an artist whether he works with computers or crayons, and the composers of game music are fine musicians. Even some of the game designers are relatively competent nowadays.

Surprisingly, the weakest link on the creative team usually is the programmers. Many programmers, once they've learned a certain way of doing things, become quite rigid in their thinking and refuse to learn a new way of programming. For instance, I know a fellow who only programs in assembly language. His coworkers and supervisor begged him to learn the "C" language so that his code could be debugged more easily. In the end, he actually lost his job rather than learn C. Why was he so stubborn? It's hard to say. Another programmer of my acquaintance was having serious problems with the game he was working on. Some other programmers advised him to use a certain mode (32-bit protected, for the specialists in the audience) that would solve his problems and create no new difficulties, but he was very resistant to the change and had to be browbeaten before he'd change. In the argument, he could present nothing in his defense, he just "didn't like" the new, simpler, mode.



# EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1993 by Sandy Petersen



Master of Orion (MicroProse)

### Computer games' ratings

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

I can hear you wondering why you should care about this. Well, it affects every game you buy. When you buy a game that won't run until you've performed some arcane manipulation of your machine's memory, you've been stung because a programmer did not bother to learn how to access a variety of memory. When a game begins loading on your hard drive, and when almost done, suddenly ends, saying you don't have enough room to load the game, you've been stung be-

cause the programmer didn't bother to have the game check your hard drive for size *before* trying to load the game. When a game crashes because you accidentally selected the wrong sound card on your starting options, you're stung. When you have to reboot your computer from a raw DOS disk before a game will play, you're stung. When a programmer is lazy or stubborn, he harms every single person who buys his game, no matter how excellent the game is in other ways.

On the other hand, we'd have no computer or video games at all if it weren't for these guys. Sigh.

## Reviews

### MASTER OF ORION

\*\*\*

IBM compatibles

MicroProse

Designer: Stephen Barcia

Producer: Jeff Johannigman

Software engineers: Stephen Barcia, Kenneth Burd, Marcia Barcia

Artists: Jeff Dee, Marcia Barcia, Frank Vivirito

*Master of Orion* is a science-fiction game of conquest, trade, and espionage. To play it, you'll need an IBM compatible with at least a 386-16MHz chip and two megabytes of RAM with at least 700 EMS free. The game takes up 14 megabytes of your hard drive, which seems like a lot, considering the simplicity of the game. The game is a bit unforgiving on set-up. If you have too little free memory (575k of your base RAM is needed), use XMS instead of EMS, or commit any of a number of other minor sins, *Orion* won't run, nor will it give you any hints on how to fix your problem. The screen just goes black and tells you were bad. You must figure out the solution on your own. Fortunately, it's not too difficult to get set-up properly if you know something about how your computer works. This is a prime example of what I was preaching about in the essay above. Since *Orion* is 386-only, there's no reason it couldn't have run in protected mode.

The game says a mouse is highly recommended, but I felt it had a pretty good keyboard interface. I used the keyboard for many actions, and only used my mouse on the main map.

This strategy game is in the tradition of many similar games: *Civilization*, *Empire*, and *Populous* all came to mind. You start with a single planet and primitive technology. Your goal is to become the ruler of the whole star cluster. As you progress, you conquer more and more worlds. Periodically, the species in the cluster meet to elect a ruler. When somebody (with luck, you) finally swings a two-thirds majority, he wins.

The game's art is excellent. The alien races are done by Jeff Dee, whose work in comic books and role-playing games should be well known to many readers. He co-authored the first playable super-hero game, FGU's *VILLAINS & VIGILANTES*\*



*Master of Orion* (MicroProse)

game. *Orion* is a cerebral game, short on action but long on intellect, so be warned if you like a lot of battles in your gaming.

You can't get around reading the manual to learn this game. If you just start playing, as I did, you'll turn to the manual soon enough anyway, so you may as well start the game out right.

You have to keep track of a lot of stuff in this game. For instance, the game allows you to spend money on research. In many games (*Civilization*, for instance), you'd just decrease your budget appropriately and wait for the scientific advances to come rolling in. In *Orion*, every single planet must have the percentage of money spent on research allocated separately. Then, once the total research budget is determined, you have to divvy up the money amongst six different categories. Of course, you also have to pick which device the scientists are working on in each category. When you've *finally* completed a device, it doesn't necessarily benefit you right away. For instance, if you've developed, say, "Death Spores," they're no good to you until you've got some ships that can carry them into combat. Some devices do help you right away, though.

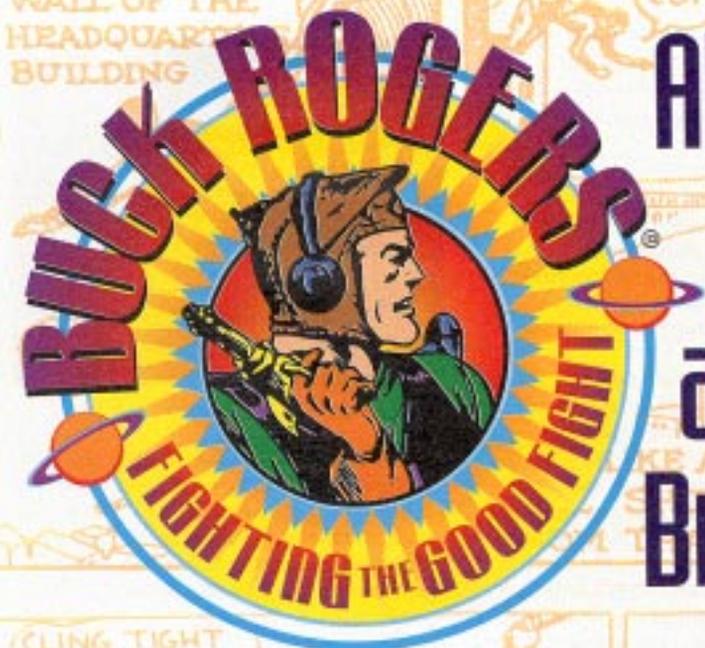
In *Orion*, you can be one of ten different alien species, each with its own advantages. (I tend to choose the goofiest-looking ones, but to each his own.) Unfortunately, the alien races have not been balanced with care. In fact, certain races are far more powerful than others. It's not always obvious which race has the advantage just by reading about them, either. For instance, the Sakkra's advantage is they breed incredibly quickly. The Silicoid's advantage is that they can live in any environment. Which is the better race?

You'd have to play the game to find out that the hapless Sakkra is exceedingly weak, and the Silicoid very powerful. Of course, if I ever manage to win as the Sakkra, I'll be quite proud of myself.

You only get to have six different types of ships. Since you'll need a wide range of ships, this can lead to some problems when it comes to developing new ones. As the game progresses, your technology advances, and you actually have to scrap old ships in order to build new ones. To use those keen Death Spores, you have to pick one of your older models, scrap *every single ship*, and start building a new type. When you've got a large investment in a certain ship, this can be harsh. This seems a little weird to me, but at least it kept me on my toes. I certainly didn't design new ship types lightly. If it was going to cost me one of my beloved older ships to create a new one, I figured I'd better need that new ship pretty darn bad.

Ship-to-ship combat is simple. Though you're able to control your vessels through the turn-by-turn two-dimensional combat, I fought most of my battles using the auto-combat button, and letting the ships do their own fighting. This option takes less time, but I didn't notice that I was able to do a lot better in combat. If you are losing, you'll probably want to step in and order your ships to retreat before they are destroyed, though.

The game interface, alas, is none too good. Many of the game's controls consist of multiple sliding scales. When you slide up one scale, another scale somewhere on the chart slides down. It's not always predictable which one will slide down. You have to do a lot of juggling to get all your scales to just the right level. Unfortunately,



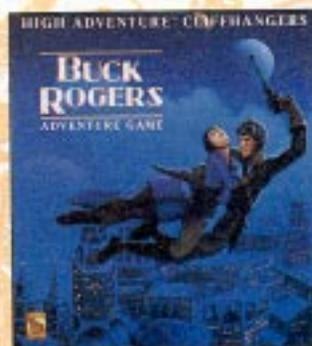
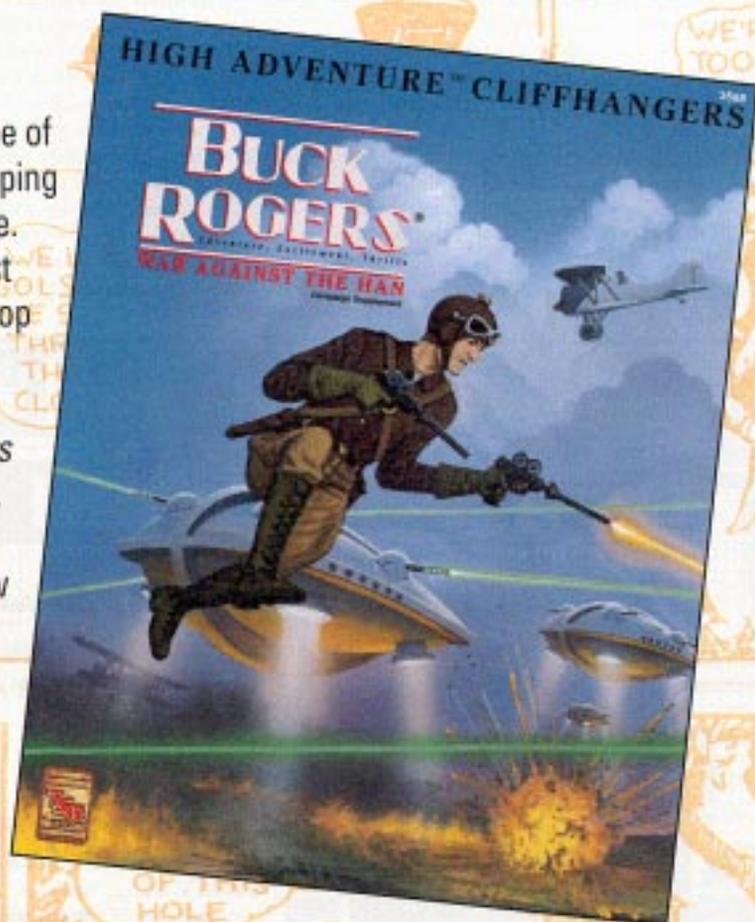
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you'll find yourself changing your scales on almost every world every few turns, in a futile attempt to be as cost-efficient as possible, or in a frantic panic to complete some task before something bad happens (such as finishing your planetary defense shield before the alien invasion fleet arrives). Thus, you spend a lot of time with this interface and though you get sort of used to it, you do a lot of extra clicking.

The game has a number of minor annoyances. You can't turn off the animation sequences, though you can click out of them. Still, you have to wait and stare at a black screen while the cursed things load, and when you furiously tap a key to avoid the imagery, you stare at another black screen while the game returns to its normal view. The game has a number of different ship designs that add nothing to play but are cool to look at. Unfortunately, the game randomly assigns one of the styles to you at the game's start. I wish I could pick my own. For some reason, I seemed to get the same triangular ships time and again (I'm sure it's just happenstance), but I would have liked to try some of the other styles.

I'd have rated this game four stars if it weren't for the interface and the little annoyances. The game is certainly insidious. When I started playing it, I decided I didn't like it. But then I kept playing it. And playing it. In fact, I still find myself

playing the game when I have other things to do. If you're willing to put up with a few minor problems (and, after all is said and done, they are minor), you may like this game a bunch.

### Game tips

1. When you start a game, if you don't have at least one reasonable world (maximum population at least 70) within colonyship range, dump the game and start a new one. There's no point in continuing. Trust me.

2. The current version of the game has a bug. If you offer tribute to an alien leader, the next time you ask for an audience, nothing will happen. The solution is to save your game, end the game, and then load it again. Supposedly you can upload a fix from MicroProse, and the next edition won't have the problem.

3. Colonies can take an extremely long time to develop. As soon as you've landed a colony ship, send out some transports from one of your overpopulated civilized worlds, so that the colony can start producing as soon as possible. The civilized world you've sent the people from will replace them at a speedy rate, and the colony gets off to a good start.

4. Get Nuclear Engines as soon as you can. This took a load off my mind, as it meant that my ships took only half as long to travel from place to place. This can be a



Master of Orion (MicroProse)

lifesaver, especially if you get this technology before the bad guys. It means you can concentrate your ships on a particular world to defend it against one attack, then send them to another world while the enemies are still plodding around out in space.

**SPACEWARD HO!** Solo version: \*\*  
Multiplayer version: \*\*\*  
IBM New World Computing  
Designers: Joe Williams and Peter Commons  
Computer graphics: Howard Vives

Spaceward Ho! is quite similar to Master of Orion. It requires 3.5 megabytes of hard-drive space and at least 384k of EMS

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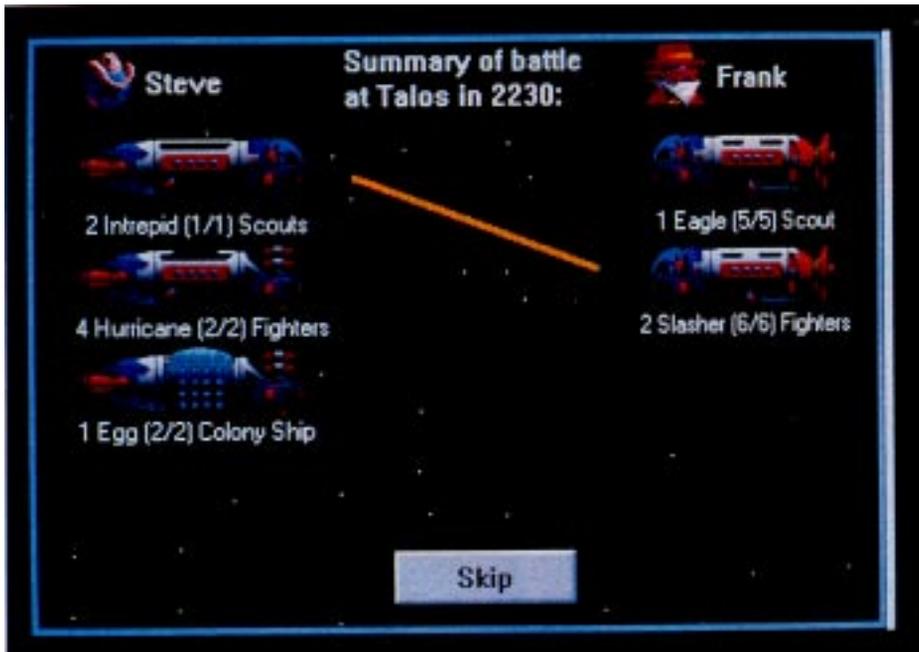
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Spaceward Ho! (New World Computing)

or XMS if you want 256-color graphics.

The game's main advantage over *Orion* is that *Ho!* is able to run under Windows or DOS. A mouse is absolutely essential. I repeat, do not try to play this game *sans* mouse or you'll be one unhappy camper.

As in *Master of Orion*, you begin with a single planet. There is a bizarre western theme threaded throughout *Ho!* and your planet wears a cowboy hat. Your computer opponents, which are given names such as "Laura" or "Bob" also wear hats. Some also have mustaches, while others wear handkerchiefs as masks. Their villainous nature is visible at first glance. Uninhabited planets go bare, with no hats to cover their planetary pates.

You have a lot fewer options to work with in *Ho!* than in *Orion*. Instead of an assortment of technologies ranging from Gatling lasers to planet-cracking bombs, you just get levels of Weapons Tech or Shield Tech. It's far less interesting in these respects.

The basic resources of *Ho!* consist of metal and money. Some planets never can make a profit, and all they're good for is mining their metals, then abandoning the worlds. When you've colonized a planet that can never be profitable, it wears an old-time prospector's hat.

The game tends to modify itself during play, which I thought was pretty clever.

For example, it'll tend to its ships after yours, remembering what you've called your ships for many weeks.

I could go on, but *Ho!* is basically like *Orion*, except with far fewer options. It has three advantages over *Orion*, and these are significant.

First, the manual is much easier to read, contains more humor, and explains what is going on much more clearly than the manual of *Orion*. Kudos to Richard Espy, the author.

Second, *Ho!* runs under Windows. If this is important to you, then *Ho!*'s your game.

Third and last, *Ho!* can support a multi-player game! You can log onto a network, with the first player to be the Game Administrator. (He decides when the turn ends, etc.). In a network game with many other players, some of the players are still computer opponents, and the game tries its best to conceal which players are computer-operated and which are humans. It's fantastically more fun to play a game in which other people are involved. (I guess I don't need to emphasize this point to readers of DRAGON® Magazine.) This is the game's strongest point, by far.

As a one-player game, *Ho!* must be rated poorly. There are games covering the same subject that are superior. But as a multiplayer experience, many of *Ho!*'s vices actually become virtues—the simple rules are good when there are a lot of players involved, for instance. The exceedingly fast combat is also beneficial.

In summary, if you've got access to a network, I recommend you try *Ho!* If you play your games solo, *Master of Orion* is your best bet.

#### BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

IBM \*\*  
 Designer and programmer: Tag Psynosis  
 Designer and producer: Mike Simpson  
 Graphics: Pete James

As a horror fan, I was looking forward to this game. I like vampires, and in the past, Psynosis has produced some fun games, almost always accompanied by excellent artwork.

Alas, *Dracula* is a rather pathetic 3-D player's eye-view game in which you are Jonathan Harker searching for Dracula's coffins and defeating his hideous undead minions. The game is seriously flawed by its slow speed and uninteresting play. The authors' idea of a good puzzle is to find the right key to open a door.

The interface is inadequate. You have a little hand clutching a gun or knife that you can aim at the bad guys. (Actually, your mouse cursor targets the enemy, but the little hand in the foreground does move back and forth.) The bad guys are pretty easy to kill, though they do get significantly tougher as the game progresses. When you kill an enemy, his soul ascends to heaven and a cheesy little musical chord plays.

To pick up objects, you must move until they are almost off-screen, then click the mouse cursor. This is not as easy as it sounds, and on occasion you'll fire your gun instead of picking up objects. Your goal is to fill all Dracula's coffins and kill all the Draculas encountered (there's one at the end of each stage, in different forms).

The artwork is okay, what there is of it. Essentially, there's not much variety here. The starting forest only has trees, stone plinths, and impaled bodies. That's about it, besides a few monsters. Since that's all there is to work with, it's unforgivable that this game is so incredibly slow-moving. After playing games like *Shadowcaster* or *Lands of Lore*, I felt that there was no excuse for *Dracula*'s painfully slow play.

Unless the subject is incredibly fascinating to you, I advise you to try another game, like *Shadowcaster* or *Doom!* Life's too short.

#### BIOMENACE

IBM (EGA) \*\*  
 Apogee

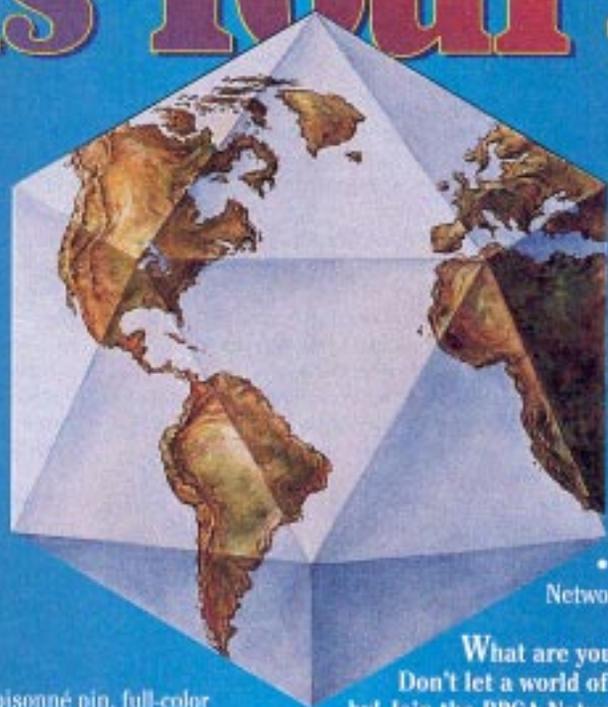
This is yet another in Apogee's series of EGA IBM run-and-jump games. You, the heavily armed hero, must trudge your way through wrecked buildings, forests, and giant anthills trying to kill all the cartoony monsters you encounter.

Scattered throughout the levels are bloodied corpses that make a peculiar contrast with the rather humorous-looking enemies you are required to fight. In detail it is little different from any other side-scrolling shoot-em-up game. Even the controls are the same as *Commander Keen*, *Monster Bash*, *Cosmo* and any number of other Apogee-produced products.

If you liked Apogee's other releases along these lines, you'll probably like *Biomenace*. As shareware, the first few episodes are free in any case, so you've little to lose by trying it out.



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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 takes a look at various optional rules for the AD&D® 2nd Edition game and considers a few miscellaneous reader queries.

**Which races from *The Complete Book of Humanoids* can become psionics? Which ones can have wild talents? What about the races in *The Complete Spacefarer's Handbook*?**

None of the races in the two books you mentioned are particularly inclined to become psionics. On the other hand, if the DM chooses to allow it, I see no reason why any of them *can't* be psionics. I suggest 7th level as the upper limit for advancement, just like elves and half-elves. Note that psionics must be lawful, and have several ability score requirements. These are detailed on page 8 of *The Complete Psionics Handbook* (CPH).

Any character can have a wild talent; just use the rules for wild talents, which start on page 19 of the CPH. Don't forget the nonhuman penalty (50% reduction in the adjusted chance to have a wild talent). All PCs on Athas have wild talents, so the nonhuman penalty is irrelevant for DARK SUN® campaigns.

**What, exactly, happens when the Dark Powers of Ravenloft form a new domain? Does the original land just disappear?**

According to the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set, the Athasian city of Kalidnay has become part of the Demiplane of Dread, but in *Merchant Houses of Amketch* the ruins of Kalidnay are still on Athas. Both products feature identical maps. What's going on here? Which is the real Kalidnay?

Exactly what happens when the Dark

Powers form a new domain is unrevealed. Kalidnay, however, illustrates the results. When the Dark Powers recognize one of their own, the Mists rise up and whisk the offender away to the Demiplane of Dread. The land, buildings, and large objects surrounding the offender are unaffected, but all the people nearby are drawn into the demiplane along with the offender. When the new domain forms, it is an exact replica of the area where the offender was when the mists arose.

Except for the fact that the people are gone, the original area is unaffected. What happens to unintelligent animals in the area is not clear. The new domain is fully populated with the appropriate normal animals, so either the animals are drawn into the demiplane or new animals form along with the domain. Likewise, important personal property, including magical items, treasure, and other items important to the transferred characters move to the demiplane, as do all items people are wearing or carrying. To an observer on the original plane, it appears that the mists have washed over the land like an ocean wave and carried away all the people. Some people might escape the mists, but they would have to leave the area quickly.

So, the "real" Kalidnay exists both on Athas, as a deserted ruin inhabited by squatters, and as an island of terror in the domains of Ravenloft.

**The *Dark Recesses* booklet from the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set says Athasian characters can be transported to the Dark Domains. Will the Dark Powers transport non-Athasians to Athas?**

The Dark Powers never transport anyone *out* of Ravenloft, but it is possible that a portal leading off the demiplane might lead to Athas. Any creature passing through such a portal will wind up on Athas even if it didn't originally come from Athas.

**After rolling up a saurial flyer rogue using *The Complete Book of Humanoids*, it came as a rude shock that none of the rogue kits are available to saurials. Is this an oversight?**

You seem to be confused by the requirements sections in the rogue kit descriptions (which start on page 83). Two kits, scavengers and tramps, are available to

"any humanoid," which includes all the saurials and every other race in the book. In this context, the term "any humanoid" is shorthand for "any race included in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*."

**In the DARK SUN setting, Strength scores can go as high as 24, but there is no mention of encumbrance or modified movement rates for strengths higher than 18 in the DARK SUN rules or the *Player's Handbook*. What gives?**

What gives, probably, is that you have an old edition of the *Players' Handbook*. The current PH lists ability scores from 1 to 25 for all six AD&D® game attributes.

**Is it possible for a psionic character to have two defense modes operating at once? The Mind Blank defense costs nothing to initiate and maintain, so it seems likely that this is possible. If two modes can be used at once, does it require a "six-finger" contact to attack the defender's mind?**

As my colleague Rich Baker has pointed out the way in which psionic defenses are structured and the round-by-round limits of power use makes using two defense modes at the same time impossible. A psionicist can initiate one power each round, plus one defense mode, and can maintain any number of powers provided that he has sufficient PSPs (see CPH, page 22). However, of the five defense modes (Mind Blank, Thought Shield, Mental Barrier, Tower of Iron Will, and Intellect Fortress) only mind blank can be maintained. The other four defense modes must be re-initiated each round (that is what the "na" under maintenance cost means). Mind Blank automatically switches off when another defense mode is initiated (see the power's description on page 88, 2nd and 5th paragraphs). Since a character can initiate only one defense each round, and no defense lasts more than a single round (except for Mind Blank with its automatic switch off) it's pretty difficult for a character to have two defense modes operating at once. If through some unusual twist of fate a character does have two defense modes operating at once, she gets the benefit of only the best one, and it still takes only three tangents to force a contact. *Haste* spells do not allow characters

to violate the one-power-one-defense limit. Also, the Split Personality science creates two separate personalities within the user's body. Each personality can operate a defense mode each round, but the character still is limited to one defense per personality.

**What spheres of spells do the halfling deities listed on page 65 of DMGR4 *The Complete Book of Gnomes and Halflings*, grant to their priests? Why isn't this information included in the book?**

Complete game information on the five halfling deities listed in the CGH is included in *Monster Mythology*. The CGH is a book about gnomes and halflings, not about deities. Deities and their relationships with their priests is a complex subject, which is beyond the scope of CGH. The information included on page 65 of that book is intended to give the reader information about how halflings see their deities, not to provide a game overview of the deities. If all the applicable game information for the deities associated with each demihuman race were included in each DMGR, there would be 11-14 pages of general material on deities and priests duplicated in each book.

**According to *The Complete Psionics Handbook* a clairvoyant**

**psionist gets a save vs. a detect scrying spell. If the first save fails, can the psionist try to affect the wizard again? How does the crystal ball detection radius for the spell work? Are crystal ball users immune from the spell if they are more than 120' away?**

A psionist or character using a scrying spell or device gets only one chance to avoid detection by making a save. If the save fails, the character who cast detect scrying knows who the scryer is and his general location. If the save succeeds, the caster knows only that he is being scryed. A successful save has no other effect on the detect scrying caster.

Detect scrying can reveal any scrying attempt directed at the caster by any means, at any range. The radius of detection applies to the use of scrying devices that are directed at targets other than the detect scrying caster.

**Are there any mechanics for using the invisibility factor described on page 8 of *The Complete Book of Gnomes and Halflings*?**

Other than the bonuses that gnome and halfling rogues gain for their hide-in-shadows abilities, there are no rules governing the invisibility factor. Instead, the DM should work the invisibility factor into the game (or not work it in, if she so

chooses). The important point is that "big folk" (humans, elves, half-elves, and even dwarves) tend not to notice gnomes and halflings in most circumstances. Obviously, a halfling dancing a jig and playing a kazoo is going to attract attention just about anywhere. But even a halfling or gnome fighter in plate armor isn't going to cause much of a stir in a crowded city street. Bystanders might remember the armored gnome or halfling, but they won't be sure exactly when she arrived or when she left. The invisibility factor is not a racial ability so much as a tool that the DM and players can use to add some spice to a campaign.

**Armor of command from the *Dungeon Master Guide* is described as a suit of full plate armor, which would give the wearer an armor class of 1 before adjustments for magic, dexterity, or shield. However, the item description says the armor functions as plate mail +1, which has a base armor class of only 3. How does the armor really work?**

It works exactly as the book says it does. It is, in fact, a complete suit of plate armor. The wearer is fully encased in flashy-looking metal. However, the armor looks better than it works, and it functions as magical plate-mail armor, not full-plate armor.

### Pantheon of the month

These are unofficial suggestions for using the optional spheres of priest spells from the *Tome of Magic* with the deities of the Greek pantheon in *Legends & Lore*:

**Gaea:** Major: Time; Minor: None.  
**Uranus:** Major: Chaos; Minor: None.  
**Cronus:** Cronus cannot grant spells.  
**Rhea:** Major: Time; Minor: None.  
**Zeus:** Major: Law; Minor: Wards.  
**Hera:** Major: Chaos; Minor: Wards.  
**Aphrodite:** Major: Time; Minor: Chaos.  
**Ares:** Major: Chaos, War; Minor: None.  
**Artemis:** Major: None; Minor: Time, Travelers.

**Athena:** Major: War; Minor: Numbers, Wards.

**Demeter:** Major: none; Minor: Time, Travelers.

**Dionysus:** Major: None; Minor: Chaos, Time.

**Hephaestus:** Major: None; Minor: Thought, Wards.

**Hermes:** Major: Travelers; Minor: Chaos, Time.

**Apollo:** Major: None; Minor: Thought, Time.

**Poseidon:** Major: None; Minor: Chaos, Time.

**Hades:** Major: None; Minor: Law, Time.

**Hecate:** Major: None; Minor: Thought, Time.

**Titans:** Major: None; Minor: One of the following, as appropriate: Thought, Time, or Wards!

**The Furies:** The Furies do not grant spells, as they have no worshippers.

Ω



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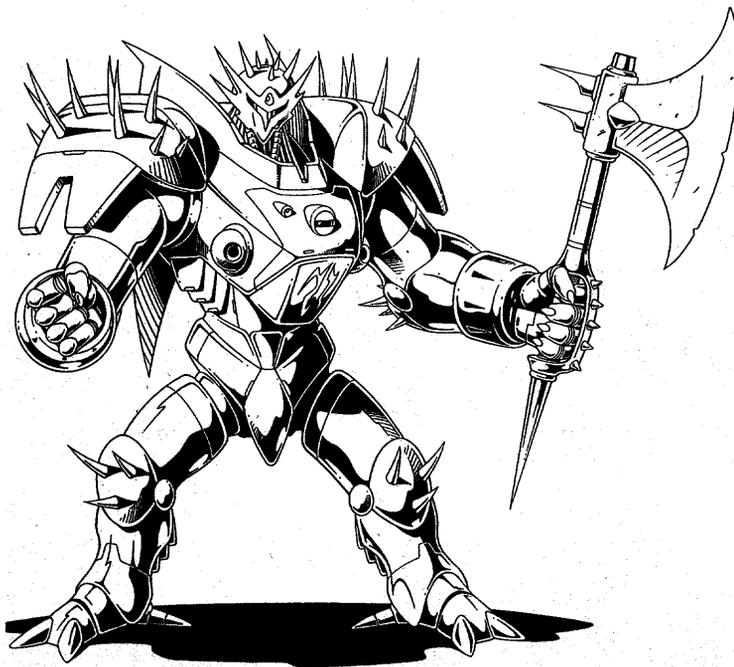
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JM



It was not a handsome cat. It was a tom, whose brown coat was speckled with black and gray. One of his ears was all but gone, leaving nothing but a tiny, fur-covered stump. His head was all brown except for a patch of black that encircled one eye and gave him the look of having just been in a fight. He had a fine tail, long and abundantly furred, but it twitched like a nervous snake when he walked.

He lay on a carpet in an open doorway, with his paws resting just short of the floor of the hall beyond. His whiskers twitched, and he sneezed. He blinked several times, then ran his green eyes over the hall for the fifteenth or sixteenth time. The walls were seven and a half feet apart. They were of stucco expertly lain over stone in intricate geometric progressions that hurt his eyes. Twenty feet down the hall stood a painted red wooden door reinforced by three iron bands. The top of the door was curved into a half-circle to fit the arch of the frame. Below the porcelain knob was a keyhole bordered by a steel plate. No cracks were visible between the door and its frame, no light shone through its keyhole.

The floor of the hall was of carefully shaped stone, and he stared at it for a long time. Finally he lifted a paw and held it over the stone, then seemed to think better of it and pulled back. He turned around and walked back into the room, nosing the open door closed behind him. The cat walked through splashes of sunlight to a bay window at the front of the house. In one graceful movement, he leapt up to the sill and dropped to the street below. No one noticed.

The window closed behind him, and the tom loped away, skirting the edge of Fountain Street. It was ten in the morning, and the streets of Blix were wide awake. He passed budding mages hurrying to classes at the University, knots of Silver Guardsmen escorting city officials between the Government Quarter and the Palace, merchants and sailors walking to and from the harbor. None of them gave him a second glance.

He made his way west and then south, underneath the city's feet, to Seamstress Street. The traffic here was sparse, and most of the windows in the tall, close-set buildings were covered. This quarter of the city kept a different sort of schedule. A faded young woman kissing a tall, hooded figure in a doorway spotted the tom. "Hi, Heward," she called to him, and smiled at his curt mewl of greeting.

An unremarkable door opened at the side of the street, and the cat stepped through it. He sat in the center of the room and licked at his paws as the drapes pulled themselves closed. As soon as the light had gone, a dim figure appeared in the room.

This person had brown eyes and short, amber-colored hair combed back from his pointed ears. Gray pantaloons and a dull blue tunic of good fabric gave little clue to his station in life. At his belt hung a collection of scabbards and pouches. The elf wore a ring on his left hand and a beautifully crafted silver amulet around his neck. He watched the cat for a moment and then sighed. "Take your time," he said in a low voice, and slumped into a cushioned brown chair in the corner.

# Thieves' Justice

by David J. Schwartz

*Illustrations by Jeff Menges*

"We've got time, Omar," the cat said between licks. "Relax for a minute." He finished his grooming and stepped toward the elf. "Toss me the bag," he said.

"Heward . . ."

"Just give me the bag. I'm hungry," the cat said. It was a statement of fact and nothing more. The elf dug at his belt and pulled out a sack that was larger than the pouch it had occupied. He wrinkled his nose and tossed the bag to the cat, who pawed at it until it fell open, then tore hungrily at the dead fish inside.

"I hate carrying your supper. The bag stinks," Omar told the cat.

Heward ignored him and pulled out the intestines of a fish. With one gulp he swallowed them. He licked his lips, his eyes closed in contentment.

"If you're finished, Heward, you can tell me what you found out. There are shields around the wizard's house, so I couldn't pick up any impressions after you stepped inside."

Heward picked at his teeth with his tongue. "Well, there isn't anything in the front room. A desk, a couple of chairs, a divan, some bad paintings. There's a bookshelf, but all the books are for show. The serious stuff has to be somewhere else."

"Where?"

"There's a door in the front room that opens into a hall with another door at the end."

"What's behind the second door?"

Heward stood and walked over to a large pillow at the corner of the room. "I don't know," he said as he lay down.

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't like the looks of that hallway," Heward answered in a sleepy voice. "There's a pit. Covers the entire floor."

"You're sure?" Omar looked thoughtful.

"Mmm-hmm," Heward purred.

"Why didn't you climb over to the door?" Heward was not an ordinary familiar. Omar had, over the years, improved the cat through magical means. He could speak, he could climb across walls and ceilings magically. He was nearly as intelligent as Omar himself.

There was a pause. "It's hard to explain," Heward said. He lifted his head. "There was something wrong with the walls. I had a bad feeling."

"A bad feeling." Omar came to his feet and scratched the back of his head rapidly.

The tom lowered his head again.

"About the ceiling too?"

"Mmm-hmm."

Omar paced. "You're not much help," he muttered.

"You said you needed some help, so I gave you some help. I'm not going to get myself killed." Heward lifted his head again and gave Omar an irritated look. "If you're going to pace, do it somewhere else," he said. "I'm trying to sleep."

"Oh, blazes." mar made a quick gesture, said something unintelligible, and in his place stood a red-bearded dwarf draped in rich scarlet and purple robes. "Please, enjoy your rest, my esteemed familiar," he said in a voice dripping with sarcasm, and pulled open the door.

"I will," the cat murmured.

It took Omar ten minutes to walk the twelve blocks to the Horny Toad. Any faster and someone would almost certainly have noticed how quickly the dwarfs short legs were managing to carry him. He shook his head. At one time he had walked the streets openly, when an honorable thief was considered a respected member of society. Since the Baron had been appointed governor, things were different in Blix. The Baron and his Silver Guard hunted thieves and seemed to have taken a special dislike to Omar's guild, the Shadow Hands. But now Omar had discovered a way to get rid of the Baron, and he was going to use it.

He slipped in the unpainted door of the Horny Toad, and his dwarf form waddled to the bar. "A bottle of your best Fennis Red," he said in a booming voice. Two or three of the occupants of the tavern's shadowy booths turned to look at him, but the gangly bartender set down the glass he was polishing without blinking. "Well then, sir," he said politely, "I'll have t' fetch that outta th' wine cellar. Would y' care to accompany me?"

"Certainly," the dwarf answered, and stepped behind the bar. He passed the glass-walled cage that held the tavern's namesake and reached in to touch the amphibian's ridged back as he moved to join the barkeep. He needed all the luck he could muster up. It was terribly important that what he was planning not go wrong.

The barkeep led him through a narrow door into what looked like nothing more than a narrow flight of musty, dark stairs. Omar closed the door behind them and nodded at the barkeep. "Thanks, Sonelius," he whispered, and stepped through the illusory wall to the left of the stairs. He paused to do a quick casting and then dispelled his disguise. Anyone who happened to be watching the bar a couple of minutes from now would see Sonelius step back out from behind the door with the dwarf, sell him a bottle of wine and send him on his way. No one would have any reason to be suspicious.

He moved quickly down the hall and into the sitting room. Another elf was there already. He was dressed in a garish combination of bright yellows and blues, each embroidered with several stitches of thick red thread at the cuffs. The owner of this ensemble leaned forward in his seat, tapping his feet impatiently as Omar appeared. He stood and ran a hand through his dark red hair. "It's about time," he said, his reed-thin voice on the verge of hysteria.

"I'm on time, Red," Omar said patiently, and took a chair. In the corner of the room stood a heavy cask, and he took a mug from the table and filled it. "Your trouble is," he said between swallows, "you're always early."

Red Bobbins ignored his guildmaster's baiting. He stood in one place and shuffled one foot back and forth beneath him. "I'm still against this plan," he said finally.

"I know you are. I'm sorry, but it has to be done."

"It's just revenge. It's stupid."

"It's revenge, yes. But it's also a warning to anyone who thinks the Shadow Hands have disappeared. They'll know we're responsible."

"That's what I'm worried about! This is a time to lay low, Omar, not to make more enemies."

"We're not making more enemies. We're eliminating an existing one." Omar watched Red carefully over the neck of his drink, and when he spoke, his voice was husky with emotion. "The Baron hired Marion Firewater to burn our guildhouse, and four of our members died in the blaze! I'm not going to let that go unanswered."

Red wouldn't look at him. "Yes, but you've only got the word of a rival guildmaster on that. The boss of the Hoods probably sent that information to get you killed."

Omar shook his head. "We've always managed to co-exist with the Hoods," he said. "I don't believe the Boss would do that. His business is hurting too."

Red looked down at the floor. "We should be taking out the man who ordered a fire mage to murder our friends, not going after the hired help."

Omar laughed, long and loud. Red looked sheepish. "Use your head," Omar admonished. "The Baron's too popular with the nobles and merchants. If we try to kill the Baron and fail, his Silver Guard will track us down."

Nothing was said for a few minutes. Then Red Bobbins spoke. "Maybe we could get the Red Stars to help?"

Omar smiled. The Red Stars were a loose alliance of mages who were dedicated, so they said, to intellectual freedom and the elimination of repression. By nature they were outspoken but disorganized, well-meaning but cautious. The only way Omar could hope to get their help was to prove that the Baron was working against their interests.

"If this goes well, we may well win them over," he told his right-hand man.

Red nodded. "So when do we go into action?"

"Tonight."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'll tell you."

The Baron had governed Blix for seven years now, ever since his defense of the city during the Conjuror's War had made him a hero. He kept his office through the use of threats, intimidation, and alliances with some of the most powerful mages in the city. He had brought his own unique brand of order, and the city's libertarian character had suffered as a result. Magic on the streets was outlawed, and the University was strictly regulated by the Baron's toadies. Despite all this, he was popular. It was safe on the streets of Blix now, his supporters pointed out. Magic wasn't allowed to run unchecked. Even Omar and his small group of spellfilchers hadn't been too unhappy with the Baron's work, at first.

One night last summer, however, everything changed. Omar remembered the night clearly, too clearly.

"Omar!" Red's voice sounded worried. "There's something wrong."

"What?"

"I sent Psagh out to fetch some dinner an hour ago. He's not back yet."

"So? He's just a boy, Red. He probably got sidetracked."

"I don't think so." Red's voice was cold with fear, and his eyes were wide. "I have a feeling that something's really wrong."

Omar stood, then froze. "What's that smell?" he asked.

An instant later there was fire everywhere, the walls, the ceiling, the stairs outside. Omar didn't waste breath with curses. "Go for the fire brigade!" he shouted to Red over the snap and crackle of the wood. "I'll evacuate the barracks!" He ran without thought to the second floor, where most of the guild members slept. They were already awake, rushing to grab all they could. "Leave it!" he shouted through the doorway. "Get out, now!" The wooden beams of the ceiling cracked and began to fall, scattering sparks and burning shards of wood over the beds and tables. Flames and smoke were everywhere. "Come on!" he shouted, and counted them off as he waved them past and down the stairs.

As Omar turned in the doorway to follow his people, a burning beam fell in front of him with a thud. "Go!" he shouted, although he could no longer see the others through the smoke. Omar turned and reentered the dormitory in order to get a running start and jump over the huge beam that blocked his way down. Before he could get as far as the doorway, the entire hallway ceiling collapsed, dropping the blazing roof into the stairwell, directly on top of the escaping thieves.

Trapped in the dormitory, Omar threw open a window and looked out. It was a long way down, but a drainpipe ran down the side of the building just out of reach to the right. With few options left, Omar leapt sideways from the window sill to the metal pipe, which blistered his gloveless hands. He wrapped his arms and legs around the drain and slid down, not daring to slow his descent by clutching the pipe too tightly.

He landed in an alley at the back of the house. Omar quickly ran forward through the narrow space between the guildhouse and the tavern next door, dodging falling debris, until he emerged in the street.

The fire brigade had arrived, but they wouldn't let Omar go back into the building. He wandered up and down in the street, looking for the guildmembers who had trusted him to protect them, and berated himself for not sending them all out the window. He knew that the boy Psagh had not been in the house, and Red Bobbins had gone for the fire brigade. Some of the other guild members were out on assignment. Was the burning of the guildhouse an isolated incident? How many of the Shadow Hands had survived?

Omar fiercely brushed away a tear, thinking of what Psagh had told him when the boy eventually turned up. Psagh had returned to the guildhouse with Red Bobbins' dinner but hadn't gone inside because he'd spotted a squad of Silver Guardsmen talking to a mage the boy couldn't identify. From this information, Omar knew that the Baron was behind the fire, but no one, not even the Red Stars, would help him without some proof. The Baron was too popular, and the word of a thief too suspect.

None of the guildmembers who had fled down the staircase ever emerged from the house. Omar scattered the surviving Hands through the city, hidden in plain sight. He sent some of them out of town on special assignments and got Sonelius a job in the Horny Toad. He himself went almost entirely underground, using Red Bobbins as

liaison with his scattered personnel.

Two days after the fire, Omar had been working in the bazaar, disguised as a horrid old human woman selling curio figures of fish and other marine creatures. He had been surprised when Stave Muldoon, the Hoods' number two man, found him.

"How's business, Omar?" Stave asked with a smug grin. His gravelly voice had a nasal tone to it that never failed to grate on Omar's nerves.

"How'd you find me?" Omar hissed in response.

Muldoon shrugged and picked up a wooden carving of a mermaid. "Where'd you find this junk?" he snorted. Heward stepped out from underneath the table and snarled at Muldoon.

"Heward collects them," Omar said in an undertone. "Don't break it."

"You're jokin'?" Muldoon laughed and looked at the cat. "You like this garbage?" The cat showed his teeth in response.

"Keep your voice down," Omar signaled with some hasty finger movements. "Lovely, aren't they, sir?" he said in a loud, cracked voice.

"You're overacting," Muldoon said with a pained look. "You're gonna put the real bazaar hags outta business."

"Well, sir, if you're interested, I have a few other pieces in the tent. If you'd like to see them . . ."

"Yeah, sure," Muldoon said. He stepped between the tables and followed Omar into the tent beyond. As the two of them disappeared into the tent, a grubby young girl stepped up to the table and reached for a glass dolphin. Before she could touch it, Heward jumped onto the table beside it and glared at her. He opened his mouth wide, and a loud roar escaped. The girl ran away with a whimper.

Heward lay down and went to sleep.

"What are you doing here?" Omar demanded of Muldoon, dropping the hag's voice.

"I'm not here by choice. The Boss sent me to tell you we know who burned your guildhouse."

Omar nodded. "I already know."

"Yeah, but we know who the Baron hired to do it."

Omar took off the gray wig that was most of his disguise. "Who?" he asked.

"Marion Firewater."

Omar closed his eyes, furrowed his brow in concentration. "Can't place the name."

"He graduated from the University three years ago. There was a scandal. He accused the Elemental Fire College of favoritism when he didn't graduate at the top of his class."

"Oh. *That* Firewater." Omar was intent now on Muldoon's words, but he managed not to show it.

"He's got a house on Fountain Street. The Baron somehow got him to sign a geased contract, so Firewater was compelled to do the job."

"The Baron actually signed the contract?" Omar asked incredulously.

"He would have had to sign it, to enforce the geas. The Baron must think he's completely safe, the arrogant bastard." Muldoon turned to go.

"Wait a minute. Is Firewater at home?"

Muldoon shook his head. "No. He's out of town. I think he was afraid he'd be found out. He left as soon as the job was done." He stood. "That's all I know. I gotta go."

"What about Firewater's house? Do you have the layout?"

Muldoon shook his head. "No. I'm sure it's none too safe, though. Might wanna be careful."

"Thanks," Omar snorted. He stood and pulled his wig back on. "What do the Hoods want for this information?"

"Nothing," Muldoon said. "Not yet. We'll get back to you." He grinned and left the tent.

Omar hadn't been able to relax since Muldoon's visit. He stood now and walked to the window, where the late afternoon sun filtered through the drapes. He pulled them open and saw a gang of lizard men on the street below. There were ten or twelve of them stumbling drunkenly away from the lakefront.

He shook his head. University students, all of them, enrolled in the Elemental Water College. He would never understand why the saurens consumed so much ale, knowing what it would do to them. They would wake up with dry throats and headaches and spend the entire morning soaking at Chen's Bathhouse, just so they would be well enough to go out drinking again that night.

He pulled the drapes closed again and called Heward through their mindlink. He received a hazy impression of dead fish and milk, and shook his head in disgust. *Wake up*, he told the cat.

The cat roused. *What?* he asked in irritation.

*Have you slept all day?*

*I don't remember. What do you want?*

*Meet me on the Fountain Street side of Dorlan Park an hour after midnight.*

*What's up?*

*Just be there.*

It was never dark on Fountain Street. Centuries before, around the time the University had first been incorporated, the faculty had presented the city with two hundred marble spheres enchanted with bright magical light. The spheres were set atop iron posts, which were mounted along Blix's most traveled street at sixty-foot intervals, on alternating sides of the street. At night the glow from Fountain Street could be seen almost anywhere in the city. The Silver Guard patrolled the street in four-man, one always within sight of another.

Omar didn't think he would have any trouble.

He stepped onto the street when the nearest patrol was fifty feet beyond him. He was invisible, so he wasn't worried about being spotted. But if he tried to open Marion Firewater's window, the Silver Guards would see the movement and investigate. Instead, he stood before the window, stared into the office and spoke a single word.

It took him a minute to recover. His disorientation was further compounded by a struggling mass inside the sack he held under his arm. He set the sack down and opened it.

"About time," Heward grumbled, stepping out and shaking himself. "I couldn't breathe in there."

"Sorry," Omar said. "It was the only way to get you inside." He stepped to the window and pulled the shades

closed. Omar's night vision revealed the dimensions of the room but none of the details.

He needed light. He pulled a gold coin from his pocket, and it shone with a bright light that illuminated the entire room. The walls were covered with well-done woodwork. A nice desk sat against one wall, a bookshelf against the opposite. There were lots of books, none of them worth anything. He wrinkled his nose at the paintings. Omar glanced at himself in the mirror beside the bookshelf. He would stay invisible for twenty-three hours more unless he got into a fight.

"I told you there was nothing here," Heward said. He yawned and looked to the door at the back of the room.

Omar ignored the cat and stepped to the door. He threw it open, and beyond lay the hall Heward had described. He squatted, and squinted at the floor. "You might be right," he said. There was a faint outline that could be the edges of a pit.

Heward stepped to his side and looked down. "It all feels wrong," he said, suddenly serious.

Omar studied the convoluted patterns that played across the walls. He thought the chaotic swirls might be magical writing, so he reached into a pouch at his belt and pulled out a crystal prism. The elf held the prism up to the pattern on one wall, said a few words, and wiggled the fingers on his left hand. Immediately the pattern began to shift, and after another moment he could read the words aloud.

"Take a step, take a fall. Instead move sideways down the hall."

"A clue?" Heward sounded dubious, and Omar silently agreed. Something didn't jibe here. Why help someone break in? It was more likely that Firewater wanted to give any potential thieves some bad advice.

"Take a step, take a fall," Heward said. "That's simple enough. There's a pit."

"Or Firewater wants us to think there is," Omar said. "Instead move sideways down the hall."

"Climb the walls?" Heward said. "I wouldn't advise it. Maybe they'll collapse on you."

Omar nodded. There must be something else. He carefully inspected the door behind him. It had no hinges, only small rods that fit into the door frame to allow the door to swing freely either way. On the lower rod he found a taut steel spring, a closing trigger. It might be linked to the pit in some way, but he couldn't imagine why.

"I'm hungry," Heward said. "Give me the bag."

"I didn't bring it," Omar said offhandedly.

"Thanks a lot."

Omar looked at the riddle on the walls again, then squinted at it with sudden suspicion. He pulled his knife from a sheath at his belt and stabbed it into the stucco, then tried to pry a piece of the plaster loose. The knife didn't move. He yanked it harder, and was about to put a hand to the wall to brace himself when he suddenly understood and let go of the knife.

"Glue?" Heward asked.

Omar shrugged. He made a few gestures with his long-fingered hands and spoke a short verse. The entire wall glowed, not just the magical writing "Probably a spell," he said, looking to the ceiling, which glowed similarly.

"Either way, I don't think we should touch the walls." This was much more subtle a trap than he would have expected from a fire mage. If he'd tried to climb past the pit that might be on the floor, he would have discovered he couldn't free his hands from the wall. He gave the knife one more yank and then stood back from the door. The thief who got himself stuck on that wall would still be hanging by his limbs when the owner of the house returned.

They were going to have to be more cautious.

So the rhyme was a trap in itself. Did that mean he should do what it advised against? *Take a step, take a fall.* Maybe, maybe not. If the floor should collapse beneath him, it would take just one word to cast a spell that would protect him from the fall.

"Well," he said to Heward, "standing here is just wasting time. Come on."

The cat stood reluctantly. "You'd better not get us killed," he said.

"I'm willing to risk it," Omar said. He glared at his familiar intently. "Are you with me?"

Heward coughed as if he had a hairball and then swallowed noisily. "I'm with you," he said softly. He jumped up into Omar's arms. "Let's go."

Omar nodded, then fixed his gaze on the red door across the hall and took a step.

Nothing happened. He took another step, and another. Heward was silent. Omar was sweating. He took a fourth step, glancing down as he did so. The floor looked solid. He looked back up at the door and walked on, more confident now.

On the sixth step he heard a door slam, then he started dropping and quickly left his stomach behind. His mouth was suddenly dry, and he had to lick his lips before he could speak. He was just speaking the first word of a spell when Heward shouted for him to stop. He cut off the casting and fell to the floor as their descent abruptly halted.

Heward had leaped out of his arms and was sitting at the side of the corridor. Omar looked at the cat questioningly. Heward shook his head.

"The door," he said slowly, the patch of black around his eye twitching rapidly. "I was watching the red door, and when we started falling, it stayed right in front of us." He licked a paw and ran it over his forehead.

Omar nodded. This was much more than a simple trap. The entire hallway except the walls had fallen with them. Firewater must have reasoned that anyone trying to rob him would have some sort of magical ability. The intruder would realize that the stucco patterns were magic writing and read the rhyme. If the walls didn't get the thief, he would risk the pit, trusting in magic to save him. As soon as the trap was triggered and the spell cast, the lightly descending mage would be crushed by the dropping ceiling. He shook his head.

"We're still in a hallway," he said with annoyance.

"Only we can't get outside now." Heward nodded, and Omar looked around.

The walls of the new hallway were whitewashed stone, and he inspected them closely. He spied a glint at the base of the wall, and bent to pick up his knife, the one he had driven into the glue up above. Its tip was gone.

He would definitely have to be more cautious.

Both doors had dropped with them, the open one slamming shut as he had expected. He stared at the red door and took a few steps toward it. Nothing happened, so he shone his light coin at the door and studied it.

After a moment, he found what he was looking for. He recognized the faint orange markings along the outer edges of the door as fire runes, and he stepped back quickly. A fire ward wouldn't be easy to remove, and the attempt might prove to be pointless. Omar walked back toward the first door.

It was as unremarkable on this side as it had been on the other. No writing anywhere. He knocked on it, and the wood gave a dull thud. There was no keyhole. He checked it again, more thoroughly this time, and stepped back to the center of the hall to think.

Heward yawned and lay down in the hall.

Omar frowned. There was something behind this door, he wasn't sure what. The only way to see behind it was to open it—or to take it out of his line of sight.

He dipped two fingers into one of his pouches and found what he sought, a shard of glass wrapped in a clump of gum arabic. It was time to use some magic of his own devising. He held the two substances in one hand and made a few quick gestures with the other. Then he placed both hands on the wooden door and licked his lips. "Vorishin . . . Sszoral . . . Tanrobar!" he invoked.

When he looked up, the door seemed to have disappeared. Luckily, Omar had merely made the door invisible, not removed it entirely. If he had opened the door, he would have drowned. He couldn't see the extent of the water-filled room, but he was sure it was enough to flood the passage. As he watched, a fish the size of his hand swam past the door. It turned to face the glow of his light coin, flicking its nervous eyes back and forth, flaring its large nostrils. A fleshy membrane in its mouth flicked open and then closed. He stared at the teeth revealed by its dramatic underbite. A piranha, and there were others besides.

"I wish I could whistle," Heward said in awe. "This Firewater is a very nasty guy." Omar nodded and walked across the hall to the red door.

Very carefully, he began disarming the fire trap. It was necessary to smear out enough of the runes—the right runes—to disable the spell. Rubbing out the wrong ones would trigger the trap. He took out a cloth, spat into it, and scraped it across the wood.

He carefully chose the correct words and rubbed them out. Heward slept, to Omar's amazement. After a long time, Omar took a deep breath and yanked open the red door.

He found himself looking at a brick wall. As he stared, the wall grew a mouth and smiled at him. "Not this way!" it shouted, and laughed. "Must be a dead end!" Omar slammed the door, but he could still hear muffled laughter through the wood.

Maybe they were in a dead end, maybe they had somehow missed something in the front room. "Heward, you checked this hall for secret doors, right?"

The cat was still blinking itself into wakefulness after being disturbed by the shouting mouth. "Hmm? Oh, yes.

Checked the ceiling, the walls, everything."

Omar nodded. Then he froze. "Heward," he said with a triumphant note in his voice, "These aren't the same walls!"

Heward cocked his head. "True."

"Check them, please."

The cat closed his eyes and walked slowly up the hall, then back. "Not the walls," he said with disappointment. "Wait—" He stopped in the center of the hall. "The floor," he said, and pointed a paw at a small wooden stud at the base of the wall.

Omar smiled. "We're almost there," he said. He thought of his friends, the guildmembers who had died in the blaze. *I'll get the bastard*, he told them. *I'll avenge you*.

He did a quick casting and picked up Heward. Then he took a deep breath. "Here we go," he said, and pressed the wooden stud.

The floor dropped out completely, and they drifted slowly down into the opening. He held out his light coin and shone it below him as they floated down. The floor was twenty feet below. At the end of a thirty-foot corridor, a seven-and-a-half-foot man-shaped creature stepped toward the slowly descending light. Omar gasped when he saw the creature. It was a horrid patchwork of flesh and bones stitched together with leather thread. A faint smell of upturned earth and rotted flesh came to his nostrils.

They weren't up to fighting this. Omar was getting tired—he wanted to get the incriminating contract and get out. "Go," he said, and Heward leapt from his arms. He shoved the light coin into a pouch as he landed and pulled a pinch of a fine, glittering substance from another pouch. The golem advanced woodenly on the only opponent visible, the tiny brown cat. Heward roared, which didn't faze the creature. Then he grew into a furious tiger ten times his original size. The golem still didn't slow. Omar started an incantation, trying not to let his fear for Heward confuse his casting.

The golem swung wildly at the cat, and Heward dodged aside and swatted at the golem with a foot-wide paw. Omar finished his incantation before the golem could recover and tossed the diamond dust over it, becoming visible as he did so.

The golem saw him and charged, raising its fists and then halted, its progress impeded by an invisible cage. Omar watched it struggle in its prison for a moment and then looked at Heward. The great tiger was already gone, and the brown cat gazed at the caged golem impassively, his tail twitching back and forth.

"It's stupider than Muldoon," Heward said. Omar nodded, and then stepped to the door at the end of the hall. Heward followed.

He spent fifteen minutes checking the door and found no traps. It was locked, but that was a simple matter. It took him three minutes with a pick to unlock it, and he shoved it open.

This was the mage's true office. A huge desk stood before him, its surface littered with books, papers and ink stains. Bookshelves stood to either side of the desk, stretching up fifteen feet and stacked with books of all sizes and colors. To his left were more shelves, to his right an arch opened into what looked to be an extensive labo-

ratory. Omar closed the door behind him so he wouldn't be distracted by the golem. Then he glanced around the room and stepped to the desk.

Heward walked into the laboratory. "Don't break anything," Omar called after him.

Omar sorted through the stacked papers and books, memorizing their location and placement so he could return each to its proper place. Some were journal entries, and he looked for any pages with dates around the time of the burning of the guildhouse, but all the entries were at least two months old. He set the books down and paged impatiently through them, turning over in his mind all the things he would do to Muldoon if he had been lied to. Then, inside the back cover of a book on the unique vegetation of the Blasted Lands, he found a folded piece of parchment and shook it open.

"Yes," he hissed into the dusty air. The contract explicitly described the location and appearance of the Shadow Hands' guildhouse, and required that the signee burn that same structure to the ground. Compensation was to be 500,000 gold pieces, awarded on presentation of the contract any time after the task's completion. There, in black ink at the bottom, were both the Baron's and Firewater's signatures. He smiled. "You should have collected when you had the chance," he said softly. Then he tucked the contract into a scroll case in his pocket and folded another parchment inside the back cover of the book. He carefully rearranged the desk as he had found it. Then he looked toward the arch that divided the office from the laboratory. *Perfect, he thought. Time to go to work.*

"Your friend has exactly five minutes to show up," said Torben Ness, looking out the window. The sky was lightening in the east. Soon the sun would be all the way up. "I shouldn't have given you this much time."

"Listen, Ness . . ." Red Bobbins began.

At that instant a figure in a gray hooded cloak stepped through the door, followed by a brown-and-gray-spotted cat. Red Bobbins froze, and Ness came to his feet.

The cat stepped past them and flopped onto a pillow in the corner.

The hooded figure faced Ness. "I'm going to show you my real face, because I want us to trust each other. You'll become one of three people outside the guild who can match my name to my face." He paused to let the mage consider the information. "I hope you'll take that as seriously as I do."

Ness nodded, and Omar threw back his hood. He managed a smile, and offered his hand. "Omar Saracent, guildmaster of the Shadow Hands."

Ness studied the face before taking the hand. "Torben Ness, president of the Red Stars."

Omar nodded. "I had my associate bring you from your house—not too rudely, I hope," he added, looking at Red Bobbins,—"so I could show you this." He produced a scroll tube and handed it to Ness, who pulled out the parchment within and began reading.

After a few lines the conjurer turned pale, and halfway through the contract his mouth fell open and stayed that way. When he had finished, he looked up at Omar and shook his head. "By Arachana," he whispered. "Such

contracts are strictly prohibited in our charter, and Firewater certainly had no guild approval for his offensive use of magic."

Omar smiled grimly. "The Baron used a spell against one of your brother wizards, and this is only one case of his corruption. I just happen to have proof this time."

Ness shook his head. "We'll have to take action against Firewater. This is a clear violation of our charter."

"Don't bother," Omar said. "When Firewater comes back into town, he'll be dealt with."

"What do you want from me?" Ness asked.

Omar smiled. "I want the Red Stars' support. My guild, by itself, can get nowhere against the Baron. With this proof, even your most skeptical members should be convinced, and with your help," he paused, savoring a lungful of air, "we can get rid of the tyrant once and for all."

*And maybe my friends can rest in peace.*

Ness looked like a trapped animal. "I—I'll have to discuss it with the other Red Stars."

"Yes or no?" Omar said.

"If you'll just give me a day or so—"

"This is proof, isn't it? You need a day to discuss whether to act on it? Yes or no?"

Ness looked at the wall with concentration and sighed. "Yes."

"Good." Omar smiled. "Red, please escort Master Ness back home. We'll be in touch," he said to the wizard.

"I'm sure," Torben said. "Try to make it during normal business hours next time," he yawned.

Red stepped to the door and pulled it open for the mage.

Ness made a face. "I can escort myself," he said disdainfully. He spoke a word and disappeared.

"Show-off," Red said, and slammed the door. "When do we deal with Firewater?"

Omar sat in the brown chair and smiled. "It's already been done. We just wait for him to collect his money."

"What do you mean?"

"I set up a spell arch."

"Oh." A spell arch was magic that Omar had created. Any normal doorway could be enchanted with it, and within the enchantment could be stored any spell, to be released by verbal command.

"But you won't be there to release the spell," Red Bobbins protested.

"Don't worry," Omar said. "I don't need to be."

It was just after noon when Marion Firewater unlocked the front door of his home and stepped in. Now that he was finally inside, he was able to relax. He had been terrified someone had found him out, that some surviving member of the Shadow Hands would be waiting for him.

He knew that he should never have signed the contract. He should have been suspicious from the moment he received the Baron's invitation. When the Baron had offered the contract, he hadn't been able to resist. The research he could do with 500,000 gold pieces—it was too much to pass up.

It was time to collect his payment. He walked to the door in the back of the room, threw it open, and stepped into the hall. He didn't notice the glint of steel dug into

the stucco. He stepped to the center of the hall and stood braced as the floor dropped. Then he pushed the wooden stud at the base of the wall and, with a word, fell lightly through the floor.

The golem had moved again. Flesh golems were the least reliable of them all, but he didn't have the resources to get anything better. Maybe now that would change. He caught the golem's eye as it approached him and pointed at the corner. "Back in the corner," he said. "Dimenos. Dimenos. Get back in the corner," he barked. The creature's dull red eyes glared at him for a moment before the golem meekly complied. He shook his head and stepped to the door, pulling his key out as he did so.

Seeing the office exactly as he had left it depressed him. He slammed the door behind him and contemplated the clutter on his desk. There was a lot of catching up to do.

He picked up the book, *The Ferns of the Blasted Lands*, and pulled open the back cover. He pulled out the parchment and read it again just to be sure the Baron wasn't swindling him. On the third rune realized it wasn't the same parchment.

The paper exploded in the wizard's face. He reeled with pain, then screamed and lurched into his desk. He didn't realize at first that he was being spoken to.

"Marion Firewater," the voice said. "You burned the Shadow Hands' guildhouse and killed many people." He looked at the door behind him, and saw a pair of gigantic lips smiling at him. The lips spoke again. "Keep your eyes on the arch between the office and the laboratory."

Through his tears of pain, Firewater stuttered the first words of a defensive spell, but it was too late. "Fireball," the mouth said, and a ball of flame filled the room, burning his papers, his books, the desk. He could hear the glass instruments in his laboratory exploding, and smelled burned hair and flesh for a moment. Then he could smell nothing at all.

The lunch crowd on Fountain Street turned as one at the sound of the explosion. Marion Firewater's home went up in blue flame with a dazzling blare of booms and crackles. Several mages rushed to the spot and worked to douse the flames, sending waterspouts and rain clouds over the building. As the fire began to subside, a shadow appeared in the smoke, one that sent the Baron into a rage when the Silver Guard reported it to him ten minutes later.

It was a great hand with fingers outstretched. As the people of Blix stared, it pointed its index finger across the city, directly at the distant towers of the palace. Ω



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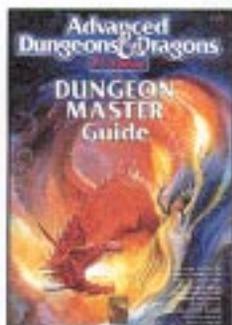
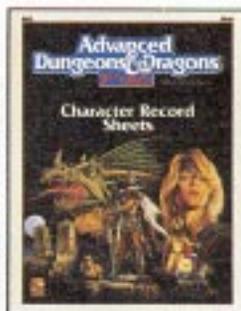
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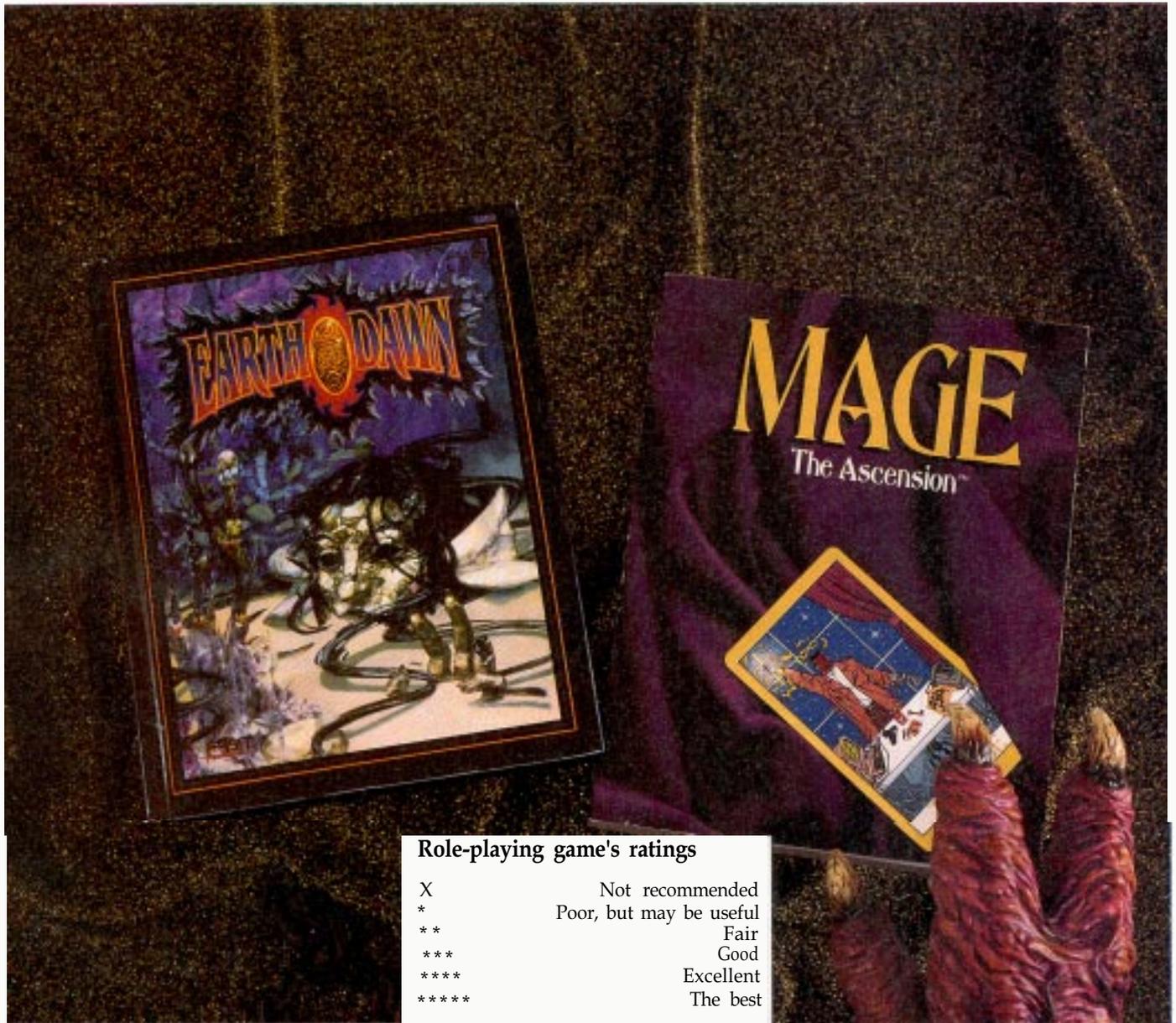


# Role-playing reviews

Will these fantasy games stand the test of time?

©1994 by Rick Swan

Photography by Charles Kohl



### Role-playing game's ratings

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

If I'd been writing this column a decade ago, I would have opened with a snide remark questioning the sanity of any publisher attempting to go head-to-head with the AD&D® game. I would have pointed out that just as Marvel and DC Comics have cornered the market in superheroes, so has TSR cornered the market in fantasy role-playing. A publisher who takes on a giant must be a sucker for punishment or have too much money piling up in the vault.

I'm older and wiser now—well, older—and time has shown me the error of my ways. Just as upstart comics companies like Valiant and Dark Horse have found a niche, so have alternative fantasy RPGs like White Wolfs ARS MAGICA\* game, Phage Press' AMBER\* game, and a half-dozen others. There may not be room for everybody, but there's room for some.

Almost any new fantasy RPG has a shot at elbowing its way into the market providing the publisher has a professional-quality package, commits enough resources to promote it, and supports it with supplements. A good hook, preferably one that can be summarized in one line of ad copy, doesn't hurt. ("Every character a spell-caster!" "Our dwarves are 10' tall!") It also pays to be different, but not too different. Successful RPGs tend to favor new twists on familiar concepts, not radical re-inventions; no one's going to get rich with a game about magic-wielding kitchen appliances.

A publisher who follows these guidelines has a fighting chance of finding an audience. As for keeping that audience, that's another matter.

### **MAGE: THE ASCENSION\* game** \*\*\*\*

312-page softcover book  
White Wolf Game Studio \$25

*Design:* Stewart Wieck with Chris Earley and Stephan Wieck

*Additional material:* Mark Rein-Hagen, Chris Hind, Sam Chupp, Christopher Earley, Robert Hatch, Kathleen Ryan, Travis Williams, Keith Winkler, Brian Campbell, Ken Cliffe, and Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

*Development:* Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg, Mark Rein-Hagen, Stephen Wieck, and Stewart Wieck

*Editing:* Robert Hatch, Ken Cliffe, and Kathleen Ryan

*Illustrations:* Michael William Kaluta, Richard Thomas, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Lawrence Allen Williams, Ken Meyer Jr., William O'Conner, John Cobb, Janet Aulisio, Darryl Elliot, Darryl Midgett, and Andrew Robinson

*Cover:* Richard Thomas and Chris McDonough

With the release of the MAGE: THE ASCENSION game, White Wolf affirms its status as the House of Gloom. As with the previous entries in the Storyteller line, the VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE\* game and the WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE\* game (reviewed in DRAGON® issues #175 and #192 respectively), MAGE pursues its grim agenda with singleminded tenacity. Misfit characters struggle to survive in an urban squalor. Garbage chokes the streets, gangs compete for victims, death lurks around every corner. Stewart Wieck, Mark Rein-Hagen, and the rest of the White Wolf crew must have worn out a thesaurus looking up synonyms for "dreary" and "desperate."

While some may find White Wolfs approach oppressive, even depressing, I say more power to them. Nearly every element of the Storyteller games—character backgrounds, setting descriptions, even the referee tips—oozes atmosphere. Sustaining an atmosphere, any atmosphere, throughout a 300-plus page rulebook requires a degree of artistry that eludes most designers. In my darkest moments, like at three in the morning with snow on the TV, the Storyteller perspective isn't all that different from my own bleak view of the world. If you know what I'm talking about, have I got some RPGs for you.

For those new to the Storyteller line, MAGE is a good place to start. Not only does it spotlight a more user-friendly archetype than VAMPIRE or WEREWOLF—most players will find it easier to slip into the skin of a spell-caster than a blood-drinker—it's better written and easier to follow. Stewart Wieck, editor of *White Wolf Magazine*, knows his way around a paragraph, and his prose sparkles. Occasionally, a narrative passage gets too purple for its own good. ("Self-involvement shone plainly on his face. His eyes gleamed with the fires of power lust.") But considering the mauling that the English language routinely receives in RPG products, I can live with Wieck's excesses.

While MAGE avoids the typos that plagued WEREWOLF, it shares its haphazard organization. We're told how to create adventures before the rules are explained. Chapter Seven refers to Soak rolls, a mechanic not fully addressed until Chapter Nine. Material about magical items is scattered through three chapters. If epigrams were onions, this book would stink so bad you couldn't stand to have it in the house. It seems like every other page begins with a quote, many of them puerile musings from third-rate rock stars. Here's one from Gerry Rafferty, introducing a section on die-rolls: "You used to think it was so easy/you used to say that it was so easy/ but you're tryin', you're tryin' now." Huh?

**Characters:** Put away your dice. Personal preference determines just about every aspect of a MAGE character. A player begins by deciding the overall concept of his character (Hermit or Explorer? Conformist or Caregiver?), then ranks the Physical, Mental, and Social Attributes into Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary categories. Seven dots are divided among the three categories; the more dots, the stronger the category. Each Attribute consists of various Talents (such as Alertness and Intuition), Skills (Etiquette, Firearms), and Knowledges (Cosmology, Medicine), collectively known as Abilities. The player receives 13 dots to spend on Primary abilities, nine on Secondary, and five on Tertiary. He also assigns ratings to Background Traits (Allies, Mentors), Spheres (categories of magic, analogous to the AD&D game's schools of magic), and Willpower. An extra 15 points' worth of dots can be spent wherever the player likes. While the process creates interesting, focused characters, it takes a long time. The text advises that an entire session should be set aside for character creation. It took my players a weekend to finish theirs.

**Mechanics:** MAGE uses the Storyteller system to resolve most actions. The referee decides which of a character's traits apply in a particular situation, typically an Attribute and an Ability. The player adds the number of dots in each trait, then tosses that number of 10-sided dice. For instance, if Bob the Magician wanted to know if Evil Elmo was following him, Bob might use his Perception Attribute and Alertness Talent. If Bob has three dots and two dots in these traits respectively, he rolls five dice. The referee assigns a Difficulty Level from 2 to 10; spotting Elmo might call for a Difficulty Level of 5. Every roll that equals or exceeds the Difficulty Level is a success. The more successes, the better the result. One success might mean that Bob catches a glimpse of Elmo, three success might mean he sees the switchblade in his hand. The system requires a lot of judgment calls from the referee, and the strict Difficulty ranks don't leave much room for fine-tuning. It generates satisfying results and, better yet, it's fast. Experienced gamers should have it down in an afternoon.

The combat system, all five (!) pages of it, uses similar rules. Opponents roll for initiative, the referee determines the relevant traits and sets Difficulty Levels, and the players roll for success. Damaged victims lose Health Levels, which can be recovered by rest and magic. The system works, though the results aren't particularly dramatic unless the referee has a

flair for vivid descriptions. If you're looking for detailed, drawn-out combat encounters, you're playing the wrong game.

**Magic:** To attempt magic, the player decides if the intended effect is Coincidental (an effect that looks like an accident, such as a gun misfiring) or Vulgar (an effect that can't be explained logically, such as a gun changing into a pigeon). The referee determines if the character has sufficient ratings in the applicable Spheres, then sets the Difficulty level of the effect roll (the rating of the highest Sphere plus 3, plus a Difficulty Modifier). The player rolls a number of dice equal to his mage's highest Sphere rating for a Vulgar effect, or a number of dice equal to his Arete rating (which quantifies the mage's insight) for a Coincidental effect. The referee announces the result after noting the number of successes and consulting the relevant charts to calculate damage, duration, and range. The roll also may be affected by a victim's Willpower (a measure of self-confidence) or Soak (a die-roll to deflect or absorb damage, which may be modified by Difficulty). Depending on the result of the roll, the mage may earn Paradox points (an indication of how much the mage has violated reality), or a Backlash (a physical or psychic penalty for botched effects).

Geez. All I wanted to do was toss a fireball at a bad guy.

MAGE's magic system is three parts brilliance, one part baloney. In most fantasy games, magic boils down to a set of glorified combat rules. In MAGE, magic is a rigorous ideology. It's a refreshing approach that demands more of players than memorizing rules (though it demands that, too).

MAGE defines wizards as spiritually evolved individuals capable of imposing their beliefs on the natural world. They belong to social units called Traditions, among them the Akashic Brotherhood (monastic martial artists), the Cult of Ecstasy (lovers of art and music), and the Dreamspeakers (an ancient order of spiritualists). Each Tradition espouses specific interpretations of the four phases of reality: Quintessence (the raw substance of the universe), Pattern (subdivisions of Quintessence), Spirit (the picture of reality revealed by Patterns), and Physical (the world as perceived by everyone). Spheres assign reality manipulation into various categories, including Life, Mind, and Time. Though any mage can draw on any Sphere, most Traditions favor one in particular; the Akashic Brotherhood favors the Sphere of the Mind, the Cult of Ecstasy favors the Sphere of Time.

It sounds complicated, and it is. It sounds like it takes a lot of work, and it does. Once mastered though, the system allows unprecedented freedom, enabling mages to access any type of effect they can dream up. Instead of drawing on an arsenal of spells, the mage simply describes the effect he'd like to achieve (say, turning himself and a companion invis-

ble). The referee decides which Spheres apply (Forces, for manipulating nature, and Life, for affecting living creatures). He notes the mage's strengths in those Spheres (the number of dots), determines the difficulty (more difficult than usual, since two people will be affected), then rolls the indicated number of dice and announces the result (a good roll means both characters disappear).

More significantly, the player participates every step of the way. He may spend Quintessence points or take an extra turn to decrease the Difficulty rating. He may use Willpower to attempt an exceptional action. The mage may position himself near a place of power called a Node to enhance his chances of success. His Tradition may require him to perform specific actions (members of the Order of Hermes may need to chant and clutch the Seal of Solomon when accessing the Life Sphere). He may draw on exotic effects called Rotes, such as flesh toys (the creation of new life forms) and *personal compression* (shrinking himself to microscopic size). I've never seen a magic system that so actively engages the imaginations of both the referee and the players. It's a revolutionary design, masterfully executed.

As for the baloney, Wieck often gets carried away on a wave of words, making straightforward concepts more convoluted than they need to be. Take, for instance, this description of Co-Locality Perception:

... the mage understands that all things exists at a single Correspondence Point. She thus realizes that she is already everywhere at once. The application of this knowledge allows her to shift position instantaneously to other locations. Note that to the mage's enlightened perceptions, she is not even moving (she, along with everything else, exists at the Correspondence Point); she is simply changing where she appears to be within the illusion of three-dimensional space. . . ." Sounds like plain old teleportation to me. Wieck's fondness for jargon can be confusing. He defines Arete as "how much universal truth a character understands," but I don't know what he's talking about—what's "universal truth"? The Ascension in the title refers to some nirvana-like state of self-actualization that all good mages should try to achieve, but I'm not sure I'd recognize it if I got there.

**Campaigning:** MAGE shares the same contemporary setting as WEREWOLF and VAMPIRE, but that's just for openers. When your spell-casters tire of a rotten-to-the-core New York or the blight of Great Britain, they can explore a spirit dimension called the Near Umbra, or visit a potpourri of alternate planes such as the Shard Realms and the Paradox Realms. Few of these locales, however, receive more than a superficial description. Despite the tantalizing hints about a world of magic and technology—we're told of Dial-a-Spell services and witches' familiars in computer hard-drives—there's not enough

raw material to launch a campaign. All but the most inventive referees will have to wait for the supplements.

**Evaluation:** The most innovative fantasy game since ARS MAGICA and White Wolfs strongest product to date, MAGE can be an extraordinary experience for players willing to tackle its intricacies. The referee in particular faces a formidable challenge. Not only does he have to keep the adventure on track, he also has to set Difficulty Ratings, determine Paradox Flaws, and assimilate dozens of oddball concepts. Casual players may be put off by the game's soberness, beginners may be discouraged by the complexity. Still, with its emphasis on storytelling and breakthrough approach to magic, I suspect this is the game a lot of people have been waiting for. If the White Wolfers remain true to their vision—I don't want to see a second edition with 50 pages of combat rules—MAGE should be around a long time.

### **EARTHDAWN game**

336-page hardcover book  
FASA Corporation \$30

*Design:* Greg Gorden

*Game concepts:* Jordan Weisman, Greg Gorden, Christopher Kubasik, Sam Lewis, Tom Dowd, Louis J. Prosperi, and L. Ross Babcock III

*Additional material:* Christopher Kubasik, Louis J. Prosperi, Tom Dowd, and Michael Mulvihill

*Development:* Louis J. Prosperi, Tom Dowd, and Michael Mulvihill

*Editing:* Donna Ippolito

*Illustrations:* Janet Aulisio, Rick Berry, Joel Biske, Les Dorschied, Dell Harris, Jeff Laubenstein, David Martin, Jim Nelson, Nick Smith, Tony Szczudlo, Susan Van Camp, Mike Nielsen, Steve Bryant, Tom Baxa, Earl Geier, Rick Harris, Larry MacDougall, Anita Nelson, Mark Nelson, Robert Nelson, and Karl Waller

*Cover:* Rick Berry

### **EARTHDAWN Gamemaster Pack**

64-page booklet, three-panel referee screen, one sheet of treasure cards, one-page errata sheet

FASA Corporation \$12

*Design:* Greg Gorden and Louis J. Prosperi

*Additional material:* Michael Mulvihill

*Development:* Louis J. Prosperi

*Editing:* Donna Ippolito

*Illustrations:* Paul Jaquays, Jeff Laubenstein, Joel Biske, and Robert Nelson

*Cover:* Courtney Studios

### **Mists of Betrayal**

104-page softcover book  
FASA Corporation \$8

*Design:* John Terra

*Additional material:* Rob Cruz and Diane Piron

*Development:* Louis J. Prosperi

*Editing:* Donna Ippolito

*Illustrations:* Tom Baxa, Joel Biske, Eliza-

beth Danforth, Tom Dow, Earl Geier, Jeff Laubenstein, Darrell Midgette, Mike Nielsen, Robert Nelson, and Tony Szczudlo

Cover: Joel Biske

Quick—name the game that fits this description: “The world . . . is one of legend. Its people and places are larger than life, the stuff of song and saga. Heroes fight the monsters of this and other worlds; their bold exploits light a beacon of hope for the future, as word of their deeds spreads far across the troubled, fearful land. [It] is a world of high adventure, high magic, and terrible danger.” Is it the AD&D game? Is it the ARS MAGICA game, Avalon Hill’s RUNEQUEST\*, or Flying Buffalo’s TUNNELS & TROLLS\* game?

It could be any of them, but it’s actually a description of the EARTHDAWN game, taken from the first chapter of the rulebook, and therein lies the problem. Despite workable rules and a clever setting, EARTHDAWN is more frosting than cake, with little of substance to distinguish it from the competition. Much of the game seems to parallel the AD&D system, including the archetypes (dwarves, dragons, and wizards), terminology (“circle” for “level”) (“legend points” for “experience points”), even its polyhedral dice (d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20). Maybe a better title would’ve been “DEJA VU.”

Undeniably, it’s a classy production, highlighted by striking illustrations and FASA’s usual state-of-the-art graphics. Greg Gorden, noted for his work on Mayfair’s DC HEROES\* game and West End Game’s TORC\* game, came up with a first-rate manuscript. Thanks to the clear writing and sensible organization (White Wolf, take note), it’s an easy read.

**Characters:** To build a character, the player first selects a Discipline (character class), such as Archer, Thief, Elemental, or Sky Rider. The choice of Discipline suggests a race; elves make good Archers, but elven Sky Riders are forbidden. Players with a taste for the exotic can be reptilian swash-bucklers known as t’skrang, or rock-like brutes called obsidimen. Traditionalists can stick with dwarves and humans.

Players determine values for six basic Attributes—Strength, Dexterity, Toughness, Perception, Willpower, and Charisma—by choice (spending 66 points on the Attribute Cost Table) or chance (rolling four six-sided dice for each and discarding the lowest roll). The character’s Attributes and Discipline determine his special abilities, called Talents. The Air Sailing Talent, for instance, is based on the Willpower Talent, Avoid Blow comes from Dexterity. There are over a hundred on the menu, some deadly (like Flame Arrow, which transforms normal arrows into shafts of fire), some goofy (Lizard Leap, which enables a character to jump straight up in the air). Characters also receive Armor Ratings, a few Skills (like Tracking,

Forgery, and Lock Picking), and Karma Points. It’s a painless system, but for those who don’t want to fuss with numbers, the book supplies a good selection of ready-to-play characters, such as the Dwarf Elemental and the T’skrang Swordmaster.

**Mechanics:** Here’s where things get messy. The heart of the resolution system involves dice rolls and Difficulty Levels, not unlike MAGE. EARTHDAWN mucks that up with the Step Number, a concept central to just about every mechanic in the game. Step Numbers generate Action Dice, which correspond to Attribute values. According to the Step/Action Dice Table, an Attribute of 19 equals a Step Number of 8 which in turn equals 2D6 in Action Dice. Talents and Skills also have Rank ratings that indicate the character’s level of expertise.

To resolve an action, the referee refers to the formula for the relevant Talent or Skill. For example, to use the Claw Shape Talent, add the Talent Rank to the Strength Step Number (from the Step/Action Dice Table), then add 3, which gives the number of Action Dice that are rolled against the Difficulty. Some Talent formulas require the player to spend Karma Points, others require a Damage-Point reduction. That’s a lot of work just to remember a passage from a book (using the Book Recall Talent) or dodge a punch (Avoid Blow). All the chart checking and formula fiddling is like driving a car with a bum clutch; you’ll get where you’re going, but you’re in for a jerky ride.

Combat also uses Difficulty Levels and Step Numbers. An attack succeeds if the relevant Talent or Skill roll is equal to or higher than the victim’s Defense Rating. A Damage Roll, typically based on the Step Numbers of the weapon and the attacker’s Strength, indicates the number of Damage Points lost. If the Damage exceeds the victim’s Wound Threshold, he may be knocked down. If it exceeds his Unconsciousness Rating, he collapses. If it exceeds his Death Rating, he dies. Sensible and concise optional rules allow for called shots, stun attacks, and shield blocks.

**Magic:** EARTHDAWN offers three different takes on magic, the most familiar being a list of spells from which qualified characters may pick and choose. The exhaustive list includes both the standard (*sleep, light*) and the unusual (*throne of air, silence metal*). To get a spell off the ground, the player makes a roll against the spell’s Difficulty, modified by the target’s Spell Defense value. Unfortunately, clunky attempts at realism result in ponderous complications like spell matrices and warping tests. (Don’t ask.) Consider this: “Magicians casting spells on themselves automatically lower their Spell Defense against their own spells to 2. . . . The magician’s Spell Defense against spells cast by other characters is *not* reduced, but a character casting a spell against a magician who has voluntarily lowered his Spell Defense adds +2 steps to his Spell-casting

Test step.” What are the odds of remembering *that* in the middle of a firefight?

The second type, blood magic, boosts magical effects by expending Damage Points; it’s an interesting option, though nothing out of the ordinary. The third type, thread magic, offers a startlingly original approach to the use and design of magical items. By weaving threads of magical energy, high-circle magicians gain access to increasingly higher Ranks of power tied to mystic objects. A magician must first acquire the Key Knowledge of a particular Rank, then research the specifics of the discovered information. Magical items tend to be one-of-a-kind treasures, and referees are encouraged to make them as off-beat as possible. In my campaign, a crystal sword might cure diseases; in yours, it might generate lightning bolts. A neat fusion of role-playing and mechanics, thread magic is easily the game’s best feature.

**Campaigning:** The rich history of EARTHDAWN centers on the Books of Harrow, a set of ancient volumes containing the secrets of supernatural aggressors called the Horrors. A translation of the First Book warns that the Horrors are on their way, and there’s little that civilization can do to stop them. Scholars, wizards, and warriors scramble to protect themselves by building underground villages, constructing citadels in hollow mountains, and making pacts with dragons. The Horrors arrive, turn the world upside down, then dare the PCs to put it all back together. An overview of Barsaive (EARTHDAWN’s primary setting), a chapter of game-mastering tips, and a set of intriguing monsters provide referees with enough material to get some introductory adventures off the ground.

**Supplements:** The *Gamemaster Pack*, the first EARTHDAWN supplement, wraps a three-panel referee’s screen around a sheet of treasure cards and booklet of miscellany. The screen does an adequate job of collecting key tables from the rulebook, but in itself isn’t worth the price of the package. The booklet contains optional combat rules, pregenerated characters, new treasures, and an essay about blood magic, none of it crucial. An errata sheet clarifies some muddled passages and corrects a few typos from the rulebook. As a public service, here’s the most important: On the Step/Action Dice Table (page 36), change the Action Dice value for Step 19 from  $d26 + d6$  to  $d20 + 2d6$ . You’re welcome.

The second supplement fares much better. A book-length adventure by the ever-reliable John Terra, *Mists of Betrayal* perfectly captures EARTHDAWN’s breezy fantasy. A quest for the secret of a magic amulet takes the party from Haven, a bustling village near the Forgotten City of Parlathin, to the Blood Wood, a creepy forest “where leaves whisper in a passing breeze: *Leave this place. Leave this place.*” Stocked with wizened wizards, glittering

treasures, and nasty monsters, *Mists* should make AD&D players feel right at home. Despite the sparse graphics (only one map) and a squishy climax, *Mists* is a fine effort.

**Evaluation:** Wall-to-wall innovation isn't necessary or even desirable for a new RPG. On the heels of FASA's imaginative SHADOWRUN\* game though, EARTHDAWN feels like a step back. The best stuff (the thread magic) doesn't make the so-so stuff (the knotty mechanics) any more palatable.

The more I played it however, the better it got. I liked the spells. I liked the background. I *loved* the t'skrang. *Mists of Betrayal* made me hungry for the next round of supplements. This game ain't RUNE-QUEST. It ain't even TUNNELS & TROLLS. But in a greasy pizza, let's-not-take-this-too-seriously kind of way, EARTHDAWN holds its own. Will it be around in five years? I wouldn't be surprised. Will I still be playing it? Now that *would* surprise me.

### Short & sweet

*Champions of Mystara*™, by Ann Dupuis and Bruce A. Heard. TSR, Inc., \$20. Fans mourning the loss of the "Princess Ark" chronicles from the pages of DRAGON® Magazine can console themselves with this lavish boxed set for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. With 224 pages of text, eight vehicle blueprints, and four poster

maps, *Champions of Mystara* includes everything you need to build a campaign around Prince Haldemar of Haaken and his amazing skyship. For those with no interest in the Prince, the Designer's Manual explains how to construct skyships from scratch and launch them into outer space. Sound like the AD&D game SPELLJAMMER® setting? It is, sort of. *Mystara* physics aren't nearly as cooperative, though. The void between worlds is as frigid as an arctic night, making freezing to death a real possibility. Negative gravity planes can cause vessels to capsize in mid-air. Passengers who don't wear *air masks* or cast *create atmosphere* spells risk suffocation. You thought piloting an Alpathian yacht would be easy?

PANDEMONIUM \* game, by Stephan Michael Sechi. M.I.B. Productions (available from Atlas Games), \$20. PANDEMONIUM features role-playing in the world of supermarket tabloids, where Liberace reigns as the king of Atlantis and a space alien is President Clinton's best friend. Players assume the roles of cab drivers and housewives to investigate all sorts of paranormal weirdness; imagine Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game crossed with *Mad Magazine*. The "E-Z" rules allow the referee to resolve any action with a d10 roll on the Fate Table; players boost their chances of success by

applying Attribute and Paranormal Talent bonuses. Loony premise aside, the system features some remarkably sophisticated concepts. A player who gets in touch with his Past Life—I was Jimi Hendrix—gains a host of new abilities. Attackers may Injure, Restrain, or attempt One-Shot Knock-Outs. Damaged characters have a choice of consulting physicians, psychiatrists, or holistic healers. An RPG inspired by the *National Enquirer* and the *Weekly World News*? Why not? If you can handle dragons and trolls, you ought to be able to handle Bigfoot and Elvis. (For information, write Atlas Games, P.O. Box 406, Northfield MN 55057.)

*Rick Swan has worked for TSR, Inc., West End Games, and Steve Jackson Games. He is also the author of The Complete Guide to Role-playing Games, published by St. Martin's Press. You can write to him at 2620 30th St., Des Moines IA 50310. Enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope if you'd like a response.*

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## Letters

*Continued from page 8*

Troubador Press is still in business, but the address in the album is: 385 Fremont St., San Francisco CA 94105. The album's ISBN number is: 0-89844-009-2. You can use the ISBN number to order the book through a bookstore (if it's still in print). I think the album's price was \$3.95. Good luck finding a copy!

Bob Flack  
Roanoke VA

Magazine be delivered in a timely fashion. It is great product. I reasonably wish to enjoy it before the majority of people who have not spent the time or the resources to receive a subscription.

Jonathan B. Lotzer  
Dallas TX

*The staff is always concerned that everyone receives DRAGON Magazine in a timely fashion. The truth is though, once an issue of the magazine goes to the printer, it is out of our control. The subscription copies are mailed directly from the printer, usually around the 26th of the month prior to the month of the issue. Assuming they mail the magazines on time, some of the responsibility may lie with the U.S. Postal Service. Keep in mind that the magazines are mailed using second-class postage, not first class. This means that second-class mail has a lower priority in the Post Office than first-class parcels. A first-class letter usually arrives in 3-5 days; a second-class parcel (depending on its destination) can take up to two weeks to be delivered. Make your concern known to your local Postmaster, she may be able to speed the process along.*

## To whom it concerns

Dear Dragon,

With all the new names on the magazine's masthead, how do I address my submission?

Tomas Gresch  
Carson City NV

*All submissions to DRAGON Magazine should bear the following address: DRAGON Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In addition, fiction submissions should be addressed to Barbara Young; art submissions should go to Larry Smith; subscription requests or problems should be to the attention of Janet Winters; advertising information can be had from Cindy Rick; and mail for particular departments of the magazine such as "Letters," "Sage Advice," "Convention Calendar" and so on should be labeled as such. Article submissions and all miscellaneous mail should be addressed to yours truly, Dale Donovan.*

Ω

## Magazine delays?

Dear Dragon,

My DRAGON Magazine is consistently delivered late each month. Albeit, shipping is difficult, however this is not an excuse. It reaches the local gaming stores before the same issue reaches my house.

While the [subscription] discount is nice, I can receive a discount of equal or greater value through the local gaming stores. My primary reason for subscribing is to receive information before my friends.

I am not asking you to cancel my subscription. However, I am demanding that my DRAGON

RAL PARTHA'S

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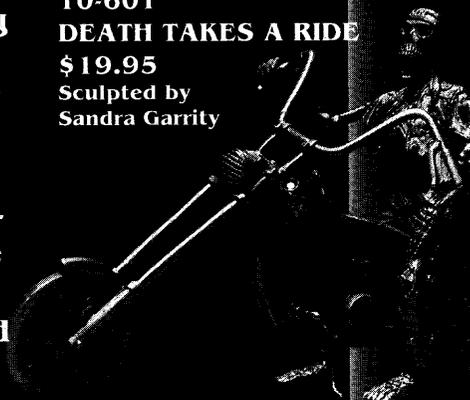
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# ELMINSTER'S notebook

## Mystery of the Plains

by Ed Greenwood

Artwork by Gary Williams

While in Mulhorand, in the now-desolate southeastern reaches that were once (long before ever I drew breath) the empire of Okoth<sup>1</sup>, I came upon a very curious sight.

A sword—as bright as if it had just been mirror-polished by a proud smith—stood upright in the midst of a mound of earth that was overgrown with a healthy tangle of plants and strewn with skulls. A few mummified hands reached vainly upward through the creepers, as if in supplication; a grisly sight.

I determined most of these remains were elven and human, but I noted an orc skull and that of a troll, too. There was obviously strong magic present; what else would keep the sword bright and free of rust (it had rained just the day before; the ground I was walking on was damp), and the corpses in this curious mix of bare bones, withered but whole limbs, and the stench of death?

Always wary when death and magic are found together, I cast seeking spells to divine the nature and extent of the magic—and found nothing. No magic at all. Not a hint of any dweomer, not even on the sword, though I did not touch it.

To be sure I hadn't miscast, I worked the spell again, with the same result. Yet my eyes did not lie! What befell here? It would have been reckless foolishness to have touched the blade (and yet, I've been guilty of worse), so I withdrew. I cast about with my full perception as well, to be sure that no mind-mastery was at work, and found naught in that search also.

I must visit Baylox, Master Mage of Shussel, when next I'm in those reaches of the Realms. He's the authority on Okothian magics—and I've heard of nothing in modern magic (not even artifacts) that can conceal all signs of magic from the repeated searching spells of an archmage!

I must consult with Most Holy Mystra on the ethics of researching such magics, and if it be deemed proper, this is a matter I must not neglect. Magecraft throughout Faerun is threatened if there is such strong magic that can conceal itself utterly.

Masking spells that can defy or delude the detections of minor spells, those of the fifth level or below, have long been known in the Realms, though they leave their own traces in turn. Places of power dedicated to a deity also often exhibit powers that thwart, twist, or utterly conceal auras,

spells, and even the residual dweomers of mighty castings; but places with such powerful magic of their own either radiate a strong magical aura (as a mythal<sup>2</sup> does) or are permeated with the alignment or "smell" (the personal magical presence) of the deity who has worked them.

In this case, 'tis most likely the blade is

magic-and the cleanest explanation for the masked magic is that I was gazing at an intelligent entity (perhaps such as those blade-like monsters known as xavers<sup>3</sup>) whose spell-like natural powers of magic were working the effects I observed. I've not seen such magic as the personal powers of any creature before—but then, there's a first meeting for all things in life.

I scratched out a hand-sized pit in the dirt near the sword, and in doing so came to know the place where the sword stands well enough that I can return thence by teleport without reference to the sword, the skulls, or any part of the leafy tangle about the blade (in case any of these move or are taken away by the time I return).

When tasks permit, I must return to investigate more fully. In the meantime, I've left a *watchward*<sup>4</sup> behind.

I've been "fetched" by lures before—traps placed by rival mages, priests of Bane, dragon cultists, Phaerimm, dragons and illithids looking for sport, and lichens, alhoon, and beholders looking for new victims to wrest magical knowledge from. Entrapping wizards seems a popular pastime in Faerun, come to think of it.

This sword seemed somehow different from the various traps I've known. Although one of the satisfactions of being a powerful mage is the ability to deal decisively and completely with any matter or curiosity that presents itself, one can waste several lifetimes chasing down side-trails if one allows every glittering item of interest that comes along to distract one from chosen purposes and tasks. Some of my foes—the Zhentarim, in particular—seem to delight in trying such distractions. Their dismay, when I ignore such misdirections and cleave through to their dark deeds and innermost councils, is most heartening. For the time being, this sword must remain an unexplored mystery; more pressing matters await.

No matter how many years I see, Faerun always holds forth new strangeness to

intrigue the eye. No doubt that's one reason I've not yet grown tired of life.

### Notes

1. Okoth was a sprawling realm of lizard men, yuan-ti, or nagas (the records are unclear) who kept humans as slaves. Its feuding territories ultimately destroyed each other in civil war, leaving little behind today but the name and a few buried ruins (such as the Vaults of Record, once a subcellar of a proud palace, and now a warren of chambers known only to wererats, snakes, and the bolder sort of sages). Some of the magic of Mulhorand and Unther is said to have been carried out of the shattered remnants of Okoth.

2. A mythal is a permanent magical force field that augments some magic, negates other magics, and turns still other magics wild. It also may have its own properties, operating automatically or triggered by conditions as a magic mouth spell is triggered. (Typical properties include healing of injured beings who remain within its confines for a certain duration, and various alterations to natural light, sound, temperature, moisture, and gravity.) Details, as well as the locations of some known mythals, appear in *The Ruins of Myth Drannor* boxed set.

3. This monster is detailed in *The Ruins of Myth Drannor* boxed set.

4. A spell that alerts Elminster if the area immediately around the blade is entered by any living creature; if any magic is used in that area or manifested by the sword; or if his own magic expires or is ended by the work of other magic. It is an improved version of the *watchward* spell detailed in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® *Adventures* sourcebook, differing from that spell only as follows: a *watchward* is a fifth-level wizard spell, whose "guarded area" is an unmoving spherical 60'-diameter area of effect located as the caster wills. (The caster must be within this area during casting.) The spell is discharged by the first disturbance of the area, and sends a silent alert to the caster anywhere on the same plane. This alert gives some hint of the nature of what triggered (e.g., which of the "categories" listed above caused the spell to discharge).

# MYSTERY OF THE PLAINS

WHILE WALKING IN THE FLATLANDS THAT WERE ONCE THE EMPIRE OF OKOTH, I CAME ACROSS THIS STRANGE SIGHT. THE SWORD SEEMED AS BRIGHT AND NEW AS IF IT WERE NEW-FORGED.

THE AIR WAS NOISOME WITH DEATH, BUT ODDLY, THERE WAS NOT A TRACE OF MAGIC ABOUT. WHAT STRUGGLE TRANSPIRED HERE?

DRAGON-SKIN WRAPPING?

SWORD DETAIL

MANU JEWELS AND GOLD ROPEWORK

CRAFTSMANSHIP OUTSTANDING!

AREA THICK WITH WEEDS AND LEAFY PLANTS - ALL QUITE HEALTHY.

CHECK SURVIVING RECORDS OF OKOTH.

CONSULT BAYLOX

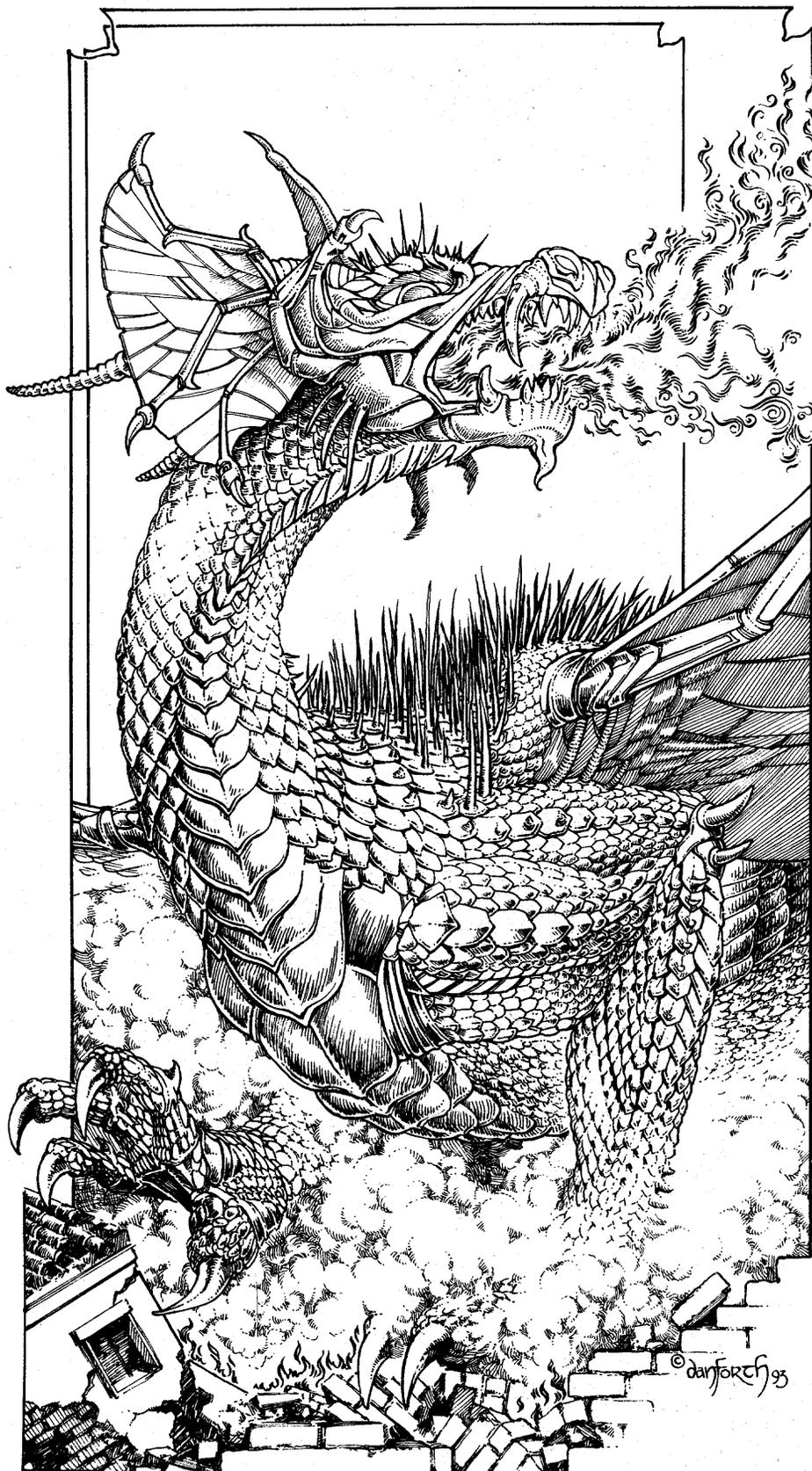
FIRST GLANCE: SKULLS SEEM TO BE A MIXTURE OF HUMAN AND ELVEN. ORC SKULLS ALSO NOTED. NON-SKELETAL LIMBS SEEM HUMAN. COULD NOT SEE WHAT THE SWORD WAS THRUST INTO. DID NOT ATTEMPT TO TOUCH IT OR APPROACH CLOSER THAN A FEW PACES.

ERW 6/83

# The Iron Dragon of Quaran for WotC's TALISLANTA\* game

©1994 by Stephan Michael Sechi

Artwork by Liz Danforth



Talislanta is an ancient land, dotted with the remnants of crumbling cities and dead civilizations. The secrets of untold ages lie buried among these ruins, lost and forgotten for centuries upon centuries. With the opening of the Lyceum Arcanum's secret archives, Talislantan scholars have just begun to unravel the mysteries of the distant past. One such mystery that has yet to be solved is the legend of the Iron Dragon of Quaran, a metallic monstrosity believed to exist during the Forgotten Age.

The Iron Dragon is said to have been constructed by the Quararians, a cabal of black magicians who once ruled a dark empire that extended across half the continent. Some believe the Quararians stole the secret of the dragon's manufacture from the Kasirans, a people renowned for their skill in the creation of elaborate magical mechanisms. Others claim that the Quararians acquired the technical information necessary through a diabolical pact with the shaitan Zahur, a rebel cast out by the hierarchy of Talislantan devils.

Designed to strike fear into the hearts of the Quararians' enemies, the Iron Dragon certainly must have done that. This terrible engine of destruction is said to have measured over 200' long, and it stood nearly 80' tall. Its black iron skeleton was cast from a great crested dragon's bones, which agents of the Quararians recovered from Dragon's Grave, the legendary burial place of dragonkind. Its armored exterior was fashioned from overlapping iron scales, the largest of which is said to have measured over 8' in diameter. Studded with rows of sharpened spikes, barbs, and razor-sharp blades, the Iron Dragon's armor was reputed to be impervious to all but the heaviest siege weapons.

Nine crystals of enchanted prismaticite, each weighing over 200 carats, served as the dragon's power source. Its "internal organs" consisted of an elaborate system of gears, copper tubing, and clockwork mechanisms used to pump cooling and lubricating fluids throughout the dragon's structure. A network of iron conduits extended upward from a giant bellows in the construct's "stomach," passing through the neck and terminating at the base of the iron dragon's metal-fanged jaws. This apparatus could be used to expel large quantities of liquid fire essence from the construct's mouth, in effect enabling the dragon to "breathe" flame.

According to some accounts, a crew of over forty engineers, metalworkers, and ancillary personnel was required to keep the Iron Dragon functioning at peak effi-

ciency. Stationed within the sweltering confines of the dragon's stomach, they kept the fire-bellows stoked, monitored pressure valves, and made certain that the construct's various mechanisms remained in good working order. The pilot and navigator resided in the head, guiding the dragon's movements by means of a complex array of control levers. Seated just below them, to either side of the dragon's nostrils, were the two artillerists who operated the fire-breathing apparatus.

Other versions of the legend state that the Iron Dragon was equipped with an automaton sensorium that enabled the metal leviathan to function without the need for pilot or crew. If this is true, the dragon must have possessed a rudimentary optical system that allowed it to distinguish friend from foe. The construct's automaton sensorium might have been capable of storing certain simple sets of commands, such as "search and destroy," "guard and protect," and so on. Scholars of the New Age are skeptical of such claims; while the magicians of the late Archaen period may well have possessed the ability to create sophisticated enchanted apparatuses of this sort, most scholars believe the Quararians lacked the skill and knowledge necessary to employ such arcanology.

The earliest known accounts of the Iron Dragon of Quaran indicate that the metal behemoth was first employed against the Xambrians, a peaceful people whom the black magicians regarded as an inferior species and had targeted for a systematic campaign of genocide. Accordingly, the Quararians sent an army of sorcerous hybrids to lay siege to the city of Xambria, accompanied by the Iron Dragon. A partial account of this incident, written by an unknown participant in the battle, was recently discovered in the Lyceum Arcanum's archives. It reads as follows:

"A great section of the wall collapsed, burying the city's defenders beneath tons of rubble and debris. The Iron Dragon continued on unabated, crushing everything in its path and exhaling great gouts of crimson flame from its armored head. A moment later the surrogate armies of the Quararians poured through the breach in the wall, mounted astride their fierce warbeasts. Rounding up the survivors, they marched the captives north across the plains, leaving the dragon to complete the destruction of the city."

The last recorded appearance of the Iron Dragon appeared in an obscure reference chronicling the fateful battle between the Quararians and their most hated rivals, the Numenians. Marching at the forefront of a vast Quaranian host, the Iron Dragon was purportedly engaged by Ikon, a giant metal golem that stood guard over the city of Numenia. Some say that in the ensuing conflict Ikon defeated the Iron Dragon by forcing it backward over the edge of a deep ravine. Others state that the great metal beast was swallowed up when the ground split asunder, ostensibly



because of the combined weight of the two gigantic adversaries.

Whatever the case, Ikon and the Numenian forces emerged victorious. The power of the Quararians was broken and their empire soon fell into ruin. The Iron Dragon of Quaran disappeared and has never been recovered.

### Campaign applications

Very little evidence of the Iron Dragon of Quaran's final resting place remains. There is no guarantee that this giant construct, or its rusted remains, will ever be located. Like so many other relics of the past, the dragon may have been destroyed by vandals, looted by tomb robbers, or simply lost to the ravages of time and the elements.

Aside from the fragments of text mentioned earlier, only three ancient references to the dragon are of unquestioned authenticity. The first is a fragment of parchment said to have been taken from the black magician Mordante's notes. This fragment suggests that the enchantress Melandre, Mordante's consort and an occult scholar in her own right, believed that the mystics known as the Wanderers of Ashann recovered not only the Eye of Ikon from the ruins of Numenia, but the

### Statistics

**Size:** 200' long, 80' high; estimated weight in excess of 90 tons.

**Attributes:** INT 0\*, PER -4\*, STR + 18, DEX - 18, SPD -3; all other attributes not applicable.

\*Only if equipped with an automaton sensorium; otherwise, negligible. See Special Abilities.

**Level:** 50

**Attacks/Damage:** Metallic bite: d20; Ramming: 10d20; Crush (underfoot): 3d20; Fiery "breath": 2d20 (see Special abilities).

**Special abilities:** Fire-breathing (range: 100'; internal reservoir contains sufficient supplies of fire essence for up to 12 uses), immune to fire-based attacks that cause less than 50 points of damage, half damage from those causing greater than 50 points of damage. If equipped with an automaton sensorium, the Iron Dragon can retain and follow simple sets of commands and distinguish and recognize certain types of visual stimuli.

**Armor:** Heavy iron scales deflect up to 20 points of damage per attack.

**Hit points:** 80 per appendage, including the legs, neck, and head. The torso area can withstand up to 100 points of damage, after which some form of malfunction occurs. Possibilities include the following:

-Fire-bellows damaged. Loss of fire-breathing capability until the bellows can be repaired.

-Fire essence reservoir damaged. Flames spread throughout the interior of the dragon, causing d20 damage per round until the reservoir can be repaired or is empty of fuel (total fuel capacity is 36 × d20 when reservoir is full).

-Drive system damaged. No movement possible until repairs can be made. Fire-breathing apparatus is unaffected.

-1d8 power crystals damaged. All systems are down until the malfunctioning crystals are replaced.

The GM can roll a d4 to determine the type of malfunction caused by damage to the Iron Dragon's torso, or may choose the type of malfunction as desired.

Iron Dragon's sensorium as well. While Mordante gave little credence to his wife's belief, modern scholars are less certain how to evaluate this claim.

The second commonly cited reference to the Iron Dragon of Quaran is found in a Xambrian tale of the legendary wizard hunter, Xarik. According to the story, the Iron Dragon leaped from an underground fissure and attacked Xarik as he crossed the Sad Plains on his way to Omen, the mountain of skulls. Due to the deterioration of some of the dragon's iron scales, Xarik was able to defeat the monstrous machine single-handed. The Xambrian then dismantled it and scattered its pieces throughout the Volcanic Hills, lest it rise again to attack his people.

Only the last of the three references claims the Iron Dragon may still be intact. In this account, taken from the diary of a known Quaranian reincarnator, the dragon was greatly damaged in the struggle with Ikon but managed to escape and return to Quaran, where its creators planned to repair it. Before they could finish doing so, however, the empire fell and the battered Iron Dragon was hidden in a great crypt far beneath the ruins of Quaran.

Despite the lack of solid evidence, the legend of the Iron Dragon has proved an irresistible lure to Talislantans of the New Age. A famous Yitek tomb-robber by the

name of Azzam spent the last twelve years of his life searching for the monster, frantically excavating various sites in the southernmost reaches of the Maruk Mountains. According to his heirs, Azzam believed that an earthquake caused by The Great Disaster buried the spot where the dragon fell after its battle with Ikon. After locating several other Numenian artifacts, Azzam felt he was getting close to the correct spot, but an unfortunate cave-in took his life before he was able to complete his search.

Should a group of adventurers find even a fragment of the Iron Dragon, they would immediately receive many lucrative offers for it. Should they find the entire mechanism intact, they would literally be able to name their price. To Sindaran collectors enamored of ancient artifacts, a unique relic of this sort would be worth hundreds of thousands of gold lumens. The scholarly mages of the Lyceum Arcanum in the crystal city of Cymril would embrace eagerly any opportunity to examine such a rare find. Yassan technomancers also would like to study the interior workings of this construct, and might well possess sufficient skill to repair or reassemble the dragon if it, or enough of its pieces, were found.

The Iron Dragon also might be put to more sinister uses, particularly by those inclined to warlike or destructive ends.

The Nihilists of Rajanistan, a morbid cult of assassins and necromancers who claim descent from the Quaranians, are said to covet this ancient relic above all others. With such an weapon in their possession, the Rajans would not hesitate to launch another invasion against their hated enemy, Carantheum. There can be little doubt that the Khadun of Rajanistan would pay almost any price to obtain the Iron Dragon, or that he and his subjects would resort to any form of treachery in order to achieve such an objective.

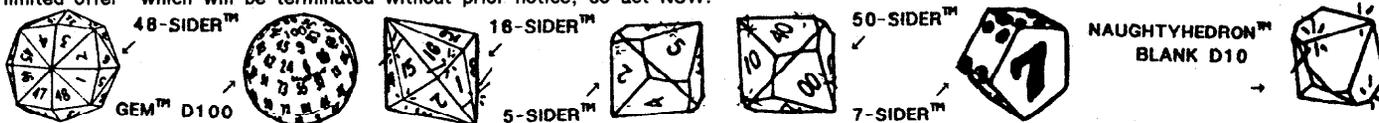
Of course, the discovery of this lost artifact also might have dangerous and unforeseen consequences. If the dragon was equipped with an automatic sensorium, the construct might suddenly come to life if disturbed or tampered with in any way. If the sensorium has suffered damage, the dragon could go on a destructive rampage, wreaking havoc on all in its path. Should the sensorium remain intact, it is possible that the construct could be reprogrammed with a new set of commands, making it all the more valuable to whoever discovers it.

Ω

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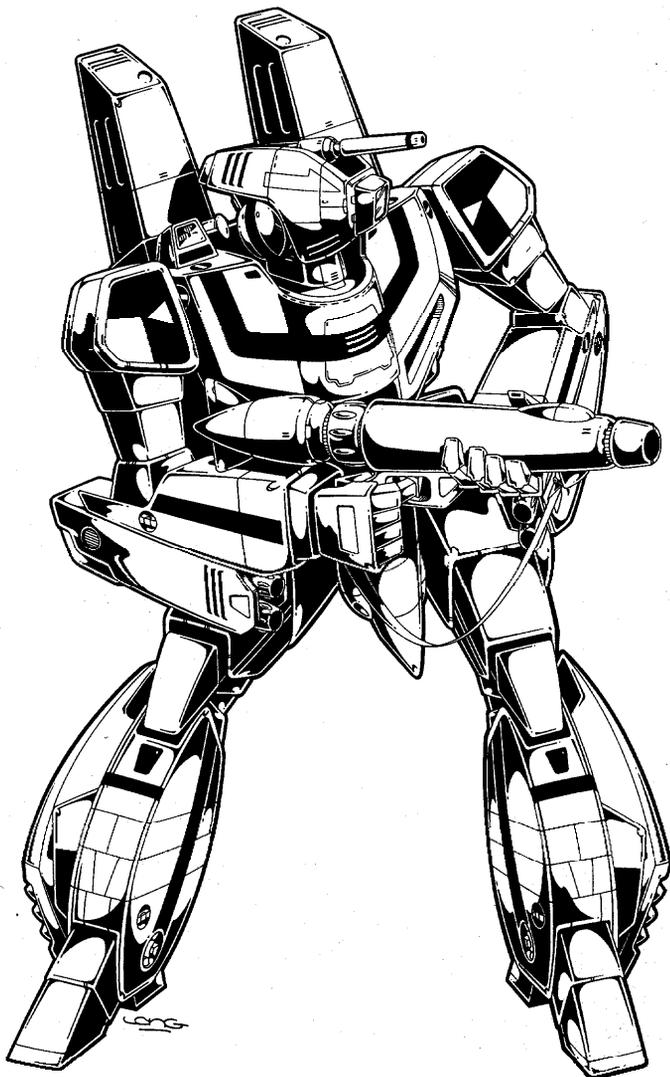
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### Robotech: Zentraedi Break-Out

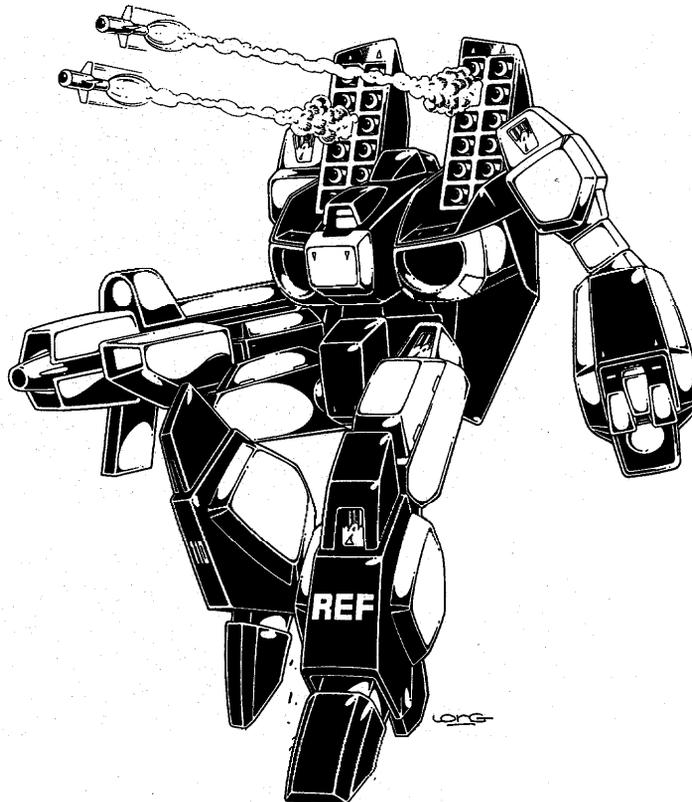
**Zentraedi Break-Out** is only the first of a series of new *Robotech RPG* adventure-sourcebooks. The first book is scheduled for an April release. It will feature new information on the Zentraedi Control Zone (in South America), new characters, betrayal and adventures!

#### Highlights Includes:

- Map and details of the city of Patagonia.
- Additional information about the Zentraedi Control Zone.
- Modified mecha and Zentraedi rogues.
- New squadrons and border patrols.
- Compatible with *Rifts* and all of Palladium's mega-damage games.
- Interior art by Ewell and Breaux.
- Written by D. Christian — Available April (really!).
- 64 pages — \$9.95 plus \$1.00 for postage and handling.

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# F o r u m

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments. We will print your complete address if you request it.

Our gaming group plays in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting and our characters travel extensively there. We have found that many areas in the Realms have real-world equivalents, and this makes their societies easier to relate to.

As an example, some comparisons we have assumed are: Calimshan to Arabia (of course, we now have the AL-QADIM® setting in the South); Chult to Africa; Shou Lung to China; Kozakura to Japan; Moonshae Islands to Ireland/Wales; Cormyr to Northumbrian England/Scotland; The Dales to "Robin Hood" England, etc.

You get the idea. Most other areas are just . . . there. We understand that several locations in the Realms are purely fantastic settings with no real-world comparisons. For role-playing purposes, however, this can be a major stumbling block. What do the people look like? How do they dress? How do they act? What kind of regional accents do they speak with? What is their architecture like?

We believe these are important aspects for the feel of the game. It is rather boring to walk into Tammar and discover it to be the same as Waterdeep.

Can someone please provide a list of real-world equivalents to all the lands of the Realms? We especially want to know about Halruua, Tethyr, and Thesk for our own gaming, though a complete listing would prove invaluable.

Travis N. Gillespie  
Derby KS

Have you every thought of running a "personals" column, so that dedicated dungeonheads can get in touch with long-lost gaming buddies? Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about (and I must name names).

In 1979, while serving in the Army, I was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. I was intro-

duced to fantasy role-playing by a guy in my unit, Jerry "Odin, come here, boy!" Fritz. I gamed with Jerry and his wife almost every day for a year. My two characters, Cymric and Sigurd, made it to 11th level the hard way.

From 1981 through 1983, I was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany. I gamed rather consistently with three fellow soldiers: Thomas Voyles, Jim Dirles, and Jim Chapman. Tom only played dwarves, like my wife only plays elves. Dirks played a paladin, Sir Chandar, who had a jewel-encrusted lion's head on his breastplate. (A *magic mouth* spell enabled it to roar upon command.) Chapman played a neurotic ranger. (He stabbed himself in the arm to see if his armor was magical.)

If any of the above-mentioned read this, I would appreciate hearing from them. To my gaming pals from Germany, Thorlard and his "little" brother, Bjarni, give greetings.

Kerry C. Zane  
10016 Alden Ave.  
Bloomington CA 92316

I would like to applaud David Hower's comments in issue #198 on DM "concept-borrowing." Mr. Hower obviously has vast and varied experience with literature, legend, and cinema that enables him to create such intriguing adventures. Many gamers would look on such activity as plagiaristic and unoriginal. I believe just the opposite is true: DMs who can blend elements from history, fiction, films, and other sources into their campaigns with style have my admiration. Although some DMs may shy away from such borrowing, it is a perfect tool for some.

When I used to DM the AD&D® 1st Edition game, I had an exceedingly difficult time with themes for adventures and campaigns. I could lay the traps, monsters, and treasure for a dungeon crawl, but could not develop convincing plots. Now, five years later, with my background in the arts and humanities expanded significantly, I find it much easier to open new vistas to my players, whether it be a single adventure or entire world.

I recently began DMing my first AD&D 2nd Edition game, a RAVENLOFT® campaign that I will hope will prove entertaining, long-lasting, and horrifying for my players. With the exception of one, all the domains the characters will inevitably find themselves in (courtesy of the Mists), will be of my own design. Almost all of them are sprinkled with elements from historic

and fictional sources. If they search hard enough, my players might discover the fingerprints of Gregori Rasputin, Sherlock Holmes, Japanese "ghost-theater," H.P. Lovecraft's eldritch horrors, Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*, real-life voodoo cases, Mary Stuart's celebrated Arthurian trilogy, and even—it was bound to happen—*Aladdin*.

I suppose the point is that if all these influences can find their way into the gothic horror campaign, imagine what the average DM, superior to myself and more experienced with AD&D 2nd Edition game, could do with a standard fantasy campaign. I encourage all DMs to weave their adventures with "borrowed" elements. It will help new campaigns get off the ground, as well as keep existing games rolling. The most rewarding surprises come when familiar—and sometimes unfamiliar—themes appear in unusual places.

Andrew Wyatt  
St. Louis MO

In issue #196, a nameless TSR staff member wrote in to "Forum" about the depiction of women in TSR products, particularly with respect to published artwork. To the woman who wrote this letter, I can only say: Well put, but I wish you had the courage to use your name. I am glad that some attention finally is being paid to this, even though the recognition is coming a little late for my taste.

I know that there are some gamers out there who will disagree, or who may be tempted to dismiss such concerns as just another example of "political correctness." Please don't. I'm a 25-year-old male gamer who treats political correctness the way dwarves treat orcs. When the above situation gets to the point that it bugs a guy like me, things have definitely gone too far.

My objections aren't political, they're practical. Put bluntly, such depictions interfere with my fantasies. I play the D&D® game because I enjoy imagining a world with magic and heroes enmeshed in a mighty clash of good against evil. Like any other fictional endeavor, however, this requires a certain suspension of disbelief. That is exactly what such depictions ruin for me.

Would any of you readers even go traveling in skimpy outfits like that, let alone adventuring? I sure wouldn't. I wouldn't go adventuring *with* anyone dressed like that, and neither would the female charac-

ters whom I occasionally play. These people are supposed to be respected heroes and feared villains, not idiots who don't know enough to cover up when they go outside. To consistently portray female characters this way is insulting, especially given the double-standard that generally exists with respect to depictions of males and females in fantasy art. Unsurprisingly, this bothers many women (and we wonder why more women don't play). It also bothers me. That sort of thing is not a big part of my attraction to the game, and if it's a big part of yours, then I respectfully suggest that perhaps you're thinking of another kind of fantasy.

Have things gotten better? I think so. Are some people overreacting? Probably. The person who won't read the DRAGONLANCE® novels because the females on the covers are well endowed has clearly gone off the deep end. I will even acknowledge that part of the SF/Fantasy genre does include silly-looking Conan and Barbarella types. In moderation, that's okay. But then I read stuff like Roger E. Moore's editorial in #198, where he talks about the need for TSR staffers to be "asking dealers to please cover up the super-abundance of uncovered feminine mammaries that appeared on the artwork of many booths" (at the GEN CON® game fair). I just want to scream.

So please, everyone, can't we all just be mature about this? Enough of the fur bras and chain-mail bikinis already; women deserve better, and so does the game. It may not solve the problem of too few female gamers all by itself, but it'd sure be a heck of a start. A little respect shouldn't be too much to ask.

Joe Katzman  
Toronto, Canada

I would like to offer a response to a letter in issue #199 whose writer had a problem with a player who would not role-play. The player just played hack-and-slash, regardless of what the other players did.

I live in a small town in rural Wisconsin. Because of this and my schedule, I have only limited access to other AD&D players. I currently adventure in two groups. The first group involves a friend (and believe it or not, his mother occasionally), my younger brother, and myself. The second group includes only my brother and me.

In my experiences, which span only about five years, I have seen examples of both good and poor role-playing. I have found that a good role-player, but more often a good Dungeon Master, learns to fudge the dice rolls for dramatic effect. Dice rolls may even be totally disregarded if the DM wishes to paint a more realistic (or fantastic) image.

As an example, the hack-and-slash character the author described is in a typical battle with some orcs. It may be that one of them has a rare crystal that is worth a lot of money. So, of course, the character

is planning on killing all the orcs, getting the experience points and the crystal. Since the player seems to be refusing to role-play, why not have the orc drop the crystal when it is killed (shattering the valuable), thereby depriving the character of his reward? If the orc isn't killed, the crystal isn't dropped and shattered.

Another example deals with information instead of money. Imagine that the party captures some evil mage. The mage knows about an ambush that is planned for the party. He is reluctant to tell the party anything, so the hack-and-slash character goes at it, even though the other characters tell him not to. The mage dies.

Even if the mage talked before he died, it's possible the wizard lied. This does not concern the other characters in the party, though, because they know the truth. (The mage saw that they tried to help him and left a note telling of the real ambush.) At a critical moment, the party members fall behind and only the hack-and-slash character is caught in the ambush.

Another problem with this is that the character is turning evil. NPCs will still help his compatriots, but will withhold aid from the hack-and-slash character. He will be shunned, avoided, discriminated against, and charged higher prices for shoddy materials that he buys.

These are only a couple of ways the player can be forced to role-play. Another way to force the issue would be to include more mental puzzles and intrigue. Intrigue is a nice way to bring in role-playing without violence.

Finally, there is another way to get more role-playing out of your group. Try to get more people to join. I know that there are a lot of people out there who would be interested in the AD&D game; they just have to be found and introduced to the game.

Nathan Bruha  
Elroy WI

Although the "Forum" readers responded to the "stoneskin problem" in droves, as reported in issue #199, I'd like to throw in my thoughts on the subject. In my campaign several years ago, I had exactly the same problem, with every PC being loaded with *stoneskin* spells so as to be untouchable. My first step to fixing the problem was to restrict a *stoneskin* spell to the mage casting it; i.e., he couldn't cast it upon anyone else. It isn't so bad when mages alone have the spell, as they aren't usually in melee, and they really do need the protection. Even so, there are several ways to take down a *stoneskin* quickly, and stay within the game rules:

- a flock of 30 or 40 stirges.
- a school of up to 100 or so piranhas.
- an *insect plague* or *ice storm* (hail version) spell.

I always ruled that each insect bite counted as one attack, even if it took several bites to do 1 hp of damage.

While a fighter's sword can't damage a

mage with a *stoneskin*, there is nothing to stop that burly fighter from grabbing the puny mage, covering his mouth and nose, and smothering the mage to death. Another useful rule is that even if an attack is negated by a *stoneskin*, the attack disrupts any spell the mage is trying to cast, even if the attack did no damage. The final point is that the DM should not allow one mid-level spell to disrupt a campaign; if need be, change the spell so it is not so damaging.

David Howery  
Caldwell ID

I agree completely with Jonathan Keepers' letter (in DRAGON issue #199) concerning the lack of respect role-playing and war gamers receive during their inclusion at science-fiction conventions. Too often we are not considered "a serious hobby," and some members of SF fandom say "gamer" as if it was a dirty word. No offense to Trekkers as I am one myself, but how can sitting around a table playing a game and having a great time be any less serious than dressing up as a pointy-eared alien?

I have attended science-fiction conventions where sixty or so gamers are asked to squeeze into two small hotel rooms while large-sized audio-visual and lecture rooms for the SF crowd have gone only half-filled. I have heard remarks about how weird gamers are, and again I say which one of us is dressed in the uniform of a fictional space federation?

I intend no injury to science-fiction fans as I, too, enjoy these movies, series, and books. All that I ask is an equal respect for my hobby.

Sean Murphy  
Moore OK

An Open Letter to the Mised:

Paladins, Paladins, Paladins! Once again, this ultimately good class rears its ugly head, only to be smitten by DMs and players whose understanding of Lawful Goodness is twisted by history's examples of men who claimed to be Lawful Good, but were never Good, and only questionably Lawful. (Although they obeyed their own twisted rules to an extent, they mostly only enforced them on others.) Since this is a fantasy game we're playing here, we can ignore history and at least attempt to role-play based on the ideals.

Paladins are a fun, if misunderstood, class. If both DM and player set out in the beginning to define the paladin's personality, role, and behavioral code, then there should be no problem. A paladin should possess priorities and principles, but this takes an understanding of what it means to be a paladin.

First, a paladin is a warrior. This means that he fights, but unlike many others, he fights for his beliefs, for his ideals. He is one dedicated to the doctrines of his church, to vows which he takes to that end, and in a large part, this should determine his behavior in most situations. Any-

one who plays a paladin, but does not know which god or gods she worships, and what the church's main doctrines are, along with what vows of paladinhood she took, should immediately stop and re-evaluate the character. Paladins are very much like clerics in this respect. A paladin should have a code of behavior, a set of vows, and should know the "do's and don't's" of her religion.

More important, a paladin is Lawful Good. Of all the alignments, this is perhaps the least understood and poorest played, and in a society of relative morals and crumbling ethics such as ours, this is not surprising. Alignment is not defined by what you want other people to do, or by how you coerce others to act, or even by how you think people should behave, but by how you yourself act.

"Lawful" means one lives by the law, or obeys a fairly well-defined code of ethics or morals, not because one is stupid and can't think of anything better to do, but because one truly believes in the law as the proper way to act. "Good" means that one's actions are basically unselfish, that one doesn't actively seek to harm others (which is "evil"), or even passively allow harm to occur (which is "neutral"), but that one also does things for others, beneficial acts of kindness and helpfulness, and that one treats others with the respect due them.

Where the two meet is where true Lawful Goodness may be found. If the law is not "good," it must be changed, and it cannot truly, in good conscience, be obeyed for long without serious effort being made to do so. If what is "good" is not "lawful" (e.g., robbing the rich to give to the poor), one should find a lawful way to help. (Although, if good is the ultimate consideration, exceptions may be made for the sake of others.) When it comes to enforcing the law, justice should be tempered with the most mercy one can muster. This, essentially, is Lawful Good behavior: the greatest good allowed by law (or vice versa).

For a paladin, alignment is everything, controlling even his relationship to his church. His ultimate service is to his alignment (or more precisely to his god, who is the embodiment of his alignment and ideals), and should the church go too far across the line that his personal convictions draw, he must be ultimately true to himself and to his deity.

Second, a paladin is not a cavalier. Paladins should not be allowed to cop attitudes. Hallmarks of paladin behavior are humility and kindness, not snobbery and self-glorification. Paladins also have an edge over cavaliers: their Wisdom. A paladin will not, relative to his Wisdom, act foolishly, by attacking a huge monster he has no hope of defeating, or even continu-

ing to fight when it would be wiser for the safety of his allies to retreat. Paladins are not glory-seekers.

Lancelot, in the movie *Excalibur*, may have had his problems, but he knew where his loyalties were, and his main priority was the giving of himself to the service of his God. We all know he failed, and that in itself should serve as a lesson of how not to act as a paladin. (Eventually, of course, he redeemed himself, but only by first humbling himself as much as possible.)

Third, there's the matter of a paladin's personality. No two characters of any class should act alike, and this is certainly true for paladins. They should be individuals with styles that reflect their society, homeland, up-bringing, culture, religion, and many personal quirks. Lancelot, for example, was French (at least originally), and thus naturally a bit snobbish. Once you got beyond this, he was more likeable, and a bit of a romantic. An English paladin would be somewhat standoffish, but insufferably polite and proper. A German one, on the other hand, would be more militaristic and boisterous, and probably a lot of fun to be around.

Certainly, different religions would cause major behavioral differences. One may believe drinking is okay (to an extent), especially on certain holidays. Another may encourage wars like the Crusades. Others may be more peaceful, preferring conversion to conflict. Beyond this, each paladin also would take certain vows and have beliefs that make him unique. Indeed, paladins should be as unique as any other character.

Fourth, all paladins were created equal, but not identical. They should not be overbearing, preferring to lead by example. A paladin should not be a leader simply because of a high Charisma score, which all too often is the case, but because of the strength of character which earns the respect of others and breeds the willingness to follow in those he would lead. A good leader is followed out of loyalty not lust, and this loyalty must be earned.

Ultimately, a paladin is who she is because of her beliefs, which dictate her actions. She is not one who follows rules that she neither likes nor believes in just so she can be powerful.

Christopher A. Hunter

Bartlett TN

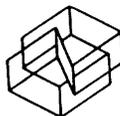
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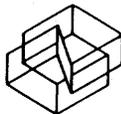
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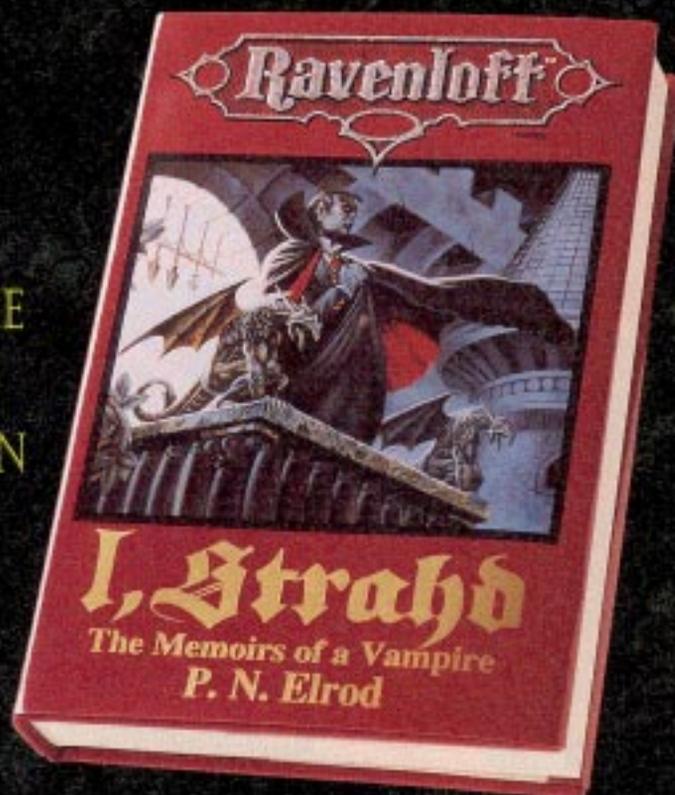
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# CAMPAIGN JOURNAL:

**Campaign ideas for the AD&D® AL-QADIM® setting**

by Gregory W. Detwiler

Artwork by Karl Waller



# Arabian Adventures Galore!

The AL-QADIM® supplement for the AD&D® game is a sizeable campaign world, whether taken alone or with additional source materials (such as the *Golden Voyages* supplement). Some of its many potential adventures are traditional in the fantasy genre, while others are unique to the land. This article lists major scenario possibilities, with suggestions on which PC classes are best suited to each adventure.

## Exploration and trade

Like Sinbad, adventurers may travel over vast distances to find adventure, generally in areas the party has never seen before. The search can be purely for knowledge (which will be rare unless a rich NPC is bankrolling the party), for sources of treasure to loot, or for trade. After all, Sinbad was a merchant though he rarely brought cargoes to port. In general, such a trip involves exploring uninhabited regions and searching for trade outlets where there are human or demihuman inhabitants.

Historically, the Arabs were great traders. Considerable cultural and mercantile interchange occurred between them and their Christian neighbors during the periods of peace that separated *jihads* (holy wars) or Crusades. They sent explorers and trading fleets to both Africa and the Orient, putting the the Arabs in a lucrative position as middlemen between the buyers from the West and the goods of the South and East.

The great European voyages of the Age of Exploration were motivated by a desire to get to the goods directly, avoiding Arab middlemen. At that time, the Middle East was dominated by the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which was almost constantly at war with at least some part of Europe for several hundred years. If the Turks had continued to allow trade between East and West, the Americas might never have been discovered, at least not until the Aztecs and Incas had become technologically advanced enough to face the Europeans on their own terms.

If you accept the AL-QADIM setting as the FORGOTTEN REALMS® worlds version of the Middle East, your PCs can set off from Zakhara on voyages to another part of the Realms or Kara-Tur. A campaign with plenty of travel and character turnover would be an excellent excuse to mix PC classes from various realms. A trade-hungry merchant-rogue could count among his crew a knowledge-seeking Western mage, a corsair captain, a masterless samurai (ronin), a hakima to keep an eye on potential customers, and a collection of mercenaries, including western fighters, native-born askars, or Oriental bushi. For the owner of the vessel, just keeping this motley crew from cutting each other's throats can be an ongoing adventure in itself.

Even if the DM restricts himself to what the medieval Arabs actually did, the campaign can still expand beyond Zakhara's borders. In DRAGON® issue #189, several articles on Africa, the Orient, and India discuss how to use those cultures and their equipment in a standard AD&D campaign ("The Dark Continent" by David Howery, "Arms & Armor of Africa" and "Rhino's Armor, Tiger's Claws" by Michael J. Varhola, and Tom Griffith's "The Other Orientals"). Africa in particular is well-covered with regards to trading goods, monstrous opposition, and the types of societies that could be expected. Its legends and lore were described in "An African Genesis," by Brady English, in issue #191, and the warriors of Africa were given kits to rival the kits of Zakhara in "Real Warriors Ride Elephants!" by Michael John Wybo III in issue #195.

If your party wants to go on trade expeditions, the corsair and merchant-rogue kits are naturals. Any type of warrior can go along as hired protection; if the trading vessel or caravan is trying to open up a nation's markets to the homeland, even a mamluk might be assigned as a sort of military liaison or ambassador. Remember, mamluks have civil service as well as military training.



Some rogues could go along as hired help, even if they have ulterior motives. Sa'luks, holy slayers (under cover), and matruds could all be present. Barbers can serve as traveling medics and groomers, with rawuns as entertainment. Beggar-thieves never hire on as help, as this would mean doing actual work. They will hang around the city gates when the caravan blows into town, but cross-country adventuring is not this kit's strong suit.

For magical protection, the mainstream wizard and priest kits may be hired on or assigned for really important journeys. A hakima is particularly useful for dealing with potential clients. Kahins and some types of mystics (anchorites and hermits) generally cannot be persuaded to go along, and moralists may antagonize the customers, which is not good business practice. Unless the party is searching for magical items, spell components, or other arcane items, the spell-casting classes will not be emphasized in this type of adventure. If a caravan is lost or attacked in the desert, however, a sha'ir who successfully calls upon the jann for help will be greatly appreciated.

## Warfare

Several types of war are possible in the AL-QADIM setting. The first is the war of national aggrandizement, the type of war that goes on everywhere. Warrior classes will be ascendant here, especially the mamluks, who are the best leadership material. Wizards who specialize in combat spells will also be important, whether the mage is question is an elemental mage who tosses the ever-popular *fireball* around or a sha'ir who has bound a war-monger genie to his service. The priest classes in this type of war are stuck with

their usual job of combat medics, though they may also help maintain morale (as do rawuns). Hakimas may serve as advisors, and they will be particularly useful in ferreting out enemy spies. In general, the thief classes will simply fade into the woodwork or lurk on the outskirts as scavengers, though desperate matruds may be hired on as cannon fodder, and barbers as additional medics. Holy slayers will not be much used, unless the national war is also a *jihad*.

The religious war or *jihad* is the type of conflict most commonly associated with the Middle East. The main motives are to spread the faith and exterminate infidels. Surprisingly, most priest classes will still be stuck in the old medic role in a *jihad* because only moralists will have the kind of narrow-minded fanaticism necessary to stir up true religious fervor in the troops. Imagine troops storming a castle wall with suicidal zest after hearing an ethoist say, "Those guys in there aren't all that bad, but they're not quite right, either!" Aside from rallying to fight a religiously intolerant attacker, ethoists and pragmatists leave much to be desired as morale-boosters in a holy war.

As with "conventional" warfare, any type of warrior class may qualify for a *jihad*, but the farisan will really stand out. In a nation ruled by a theocracy, they may even usurp the more professional mamluks in command, whether the latter like it or not. This could lead to some political intrigue, which can disrupt the war effort. The proper balance would be for the relatively intellectual mamluks to control military operations, with the farisan in the role of spearheads, leading glorious charges, storming parties, and the like. Even if this arrangement was negotiated

as a temporary compromise, it could wind up being permanent, as farisan who constantly lead glorious charges often wind up missing from the ranks of the living.

Mercenaries are uncommon in a true religious war unless they are coreligionists with the prime movers of the war (and if they are, you'd think they would be willing to fight without pay for the sake of the faith). Even sorcerers may find themselves in less prominent positions, as clerical miracles are given precedence over scholarly magic. Priests will look with particular suspicion on the genie-contacting sha'ir, both because sha'irs communicate with supernatural beings and because sha'irs may (if lucky) use priest spells as well as wizard magic. As with normal warfare, most of the rogue classes won't be of much help, except as medics (barbers), morale-boosters (rawuns), and plain cannon fodder. There is, of course, one major exception to this bias against rogues.

In the holy war, the holy slayers really shine forth in full glory. Each (theoretically) fearless assassin is a one-man or one-woman commando team, ready, willing, and able to cut down an enemy general or other leader at the Grandfather's or Grandmother's command. Indeed, without at least a religious cold war going on, the holy slayer will not have much to do in the campaign.

If any PC rises to high enough rank to command the services of holy slayers, a word of warning is in order. In the example we are discussing, it is assumed that a moralist faction is trying to impose its religious beliefs over the entire region. One religion will probably have no more than one fellowship of holy slayers. Since holy slayers are assassins for their faith, anyone who tries to beat down all other faiths will have every other fellowship of holy slayers in the region gunning for him! In this case, a holy slayer of the crusading aggressor may come home to report success, only to discover his leader mangled by a collection of jade jambiyas, obsidian long swords, blowgun darts, red-feathered javelins, etc.

Finally, we have frontier warfare, which ranges from repelling local barbarians to launching punitive expeditions against the hillfolk to raiding the locals for slaves. In Zakhara, the nomads of the wastelands, whether desert or steppes, will be primary targets. In such a campaign, you could have an entire party made up of desert riders resisting the imperial offensive. If weaker cultures are included in the campaign, you could simulate the historical slave trade the Arabs pioneered.

Using Arabic-style armies to fight the armies of other non-Western regions will make for a fairly even contest. The AD&D 1st Edition *Oriental Adventures* supplement states that the lightly armored and more mobile warriors of the East are able to outmaneuver and destroy the heavy and clumsy *gajin* forces of the West. Simi-



larly, in DRAGON® issue #189, David Howerly states in "The Dark Continent" that native African armies are superior to heavy Western forces on their home ground due to the heat and local diseases. Disease would still be a problem for a Zakharan army, but in matters of heat, ease of movement, and maneuverability, both sides would have equal ability.

Both Arabic and Oriental (including Indian) armies have a far greater proportion of cavalry than their Western counterparts, and such forces would perform equally well in African deserts or savannahs. The jungle blocks the use of pole arms and other large weapons, but such weapons aren't used by cavalry anyway. Of course, cavalymen aren't likely to be wildly enthusiastic about being dismounted for combat, no matter how practical it may be in the jungle or rain forest. Far-East enthusiasts should note that these factors work for the armies of Kara-Tur and the Realms' equivalent of India as well as for the armies of Zakhara, should the Dark Continent be invaded from the East instead of the North. A local band of guerrillas playing hide-and-seek in the jungle with a ninja clan would make a very interesting scenario, indeed.

In the case of slave raids, a more likely strategy than out-and-out invasion would be normalized trade with some of the stronger kingdoms, with Zakharan goods paid for in part by slaves. Here, the local kings can either raid their neighbors or simply sell off the less desirable of their own subjects. Even if a colonial invasion is planned, the Zakharans could go the route of Julius Caesar in Gaul and bribe local allies to help them against other tribes, negating the home-team advantage by picking off the native tribes one at a time. When the long-standing enemies are crushed, the Zakharans can finish off the conquest with a treacherous attack on their erstwhile allies, who would now be standing alone to face a foreign army by now well acclimated to the tropical environment. Dirty pool, perhaps, but that's the way empires are created.

## Intrigue

True role-players favor scenarios of intrigue above all others, with negotiation and a battle of wits taking precedence over spells and swordplay. In intrigue-based adventures, the warrior types are deemphasized, unless there is intrigue in the military high command or an attempt to spark mutinies among the troops. Mamluks and possibly farisan will be the most important soldiers here, due to their connections. Spell-casters also are not visibly prominent, though the casting of divination and mind-control spells behind the scenes can be decisive. The hakima will be the most important priest kit in an intrigue-heavy campaign, for obvious reasons, while the peculiar resources of sha'irs (such as gen and genie spies) will also be useful.

When a glib tongue is the weapon of choice, the rogue classes really shine as the decisive PCs. Thieves, especially sa'luks, will be tactically important, as someone who sneaks into a home to steal something can also sneak into a home to eavesdrop on a private conversation. Beggar-thieves, matruds, and holy slayers can perform the same function. As the bards of Zakhara, rawuns may use their popularity and talent to go places that most people are banned from, performing in (and spying on) even the mansions and palaces of the wealthy and powerful.

In a political campaign, it is often important to get among the common people, whether to hear their opinions or to spread rumors and dissension. Here, the barbers and beggar-thieves truly come into their own. Barbers are adept at spreading rumors and relaying information between various covert groups, while unobtrusive beggar-thieves can overhear many a conversation in the marketplace.

The marketplace is a rich site for intrigue, and the merchant-rogue has a major role in political conflicts as well. The successful ones are important taxpayers who may shell out extra money for political favors. Merchant-rogues who sell silks and other luxury items for the rich may even be personal acquaintances of the upper class. As with barbers, they can relay messages between customers belonging to different factions, whether as simple go-betweens or to coordinate their operations. Next to rawuns, successful merchant-rogues are most likely to have access to the ruling class. Finally, their abundance of wealth and equipment enables them to bankroll or supply any dissident group.

Aside from their abilities as spies, holy

slayers also will be useful in their normal role as assassins. In fact, aside from holy wars, intrigue is their main field of action. Not only can they remove troublesome opponents, but a low-key killing that is not public knowledge—but is nevertheless mentioned behind the scenes—can intimidate wavering allies or frighten opponents to insure their loyalty or neutrality. In a purely political campaign taking place in palaces and mansions, the holy slayers may do what little actual killing takes place during the adventures.

## Blood feuds and vendettas

This combination of warfare and intrigue is a private struggle between individuals, organizations, or tribes. Families, tribes, holy-slayer fellowships, and specific religions are all potential enemies in blood feuds. For religions, vendettas resemble a holy war, except that the enemy does not have his country's resources behind him.

The most common cause of a blood feud is real or imagined slight that sullies the honor of a particular family or nomadic tribe. This grievance can become the source of a single adventure or can be a background menace throughout the campaign. Eventually, though, things should come to a head, if only because the PCs will grow tired of being attacked by the same nomadic tribe every time they set foot in the desert, or of fighting off hired thugs every week in city alleyways.

As stated in the AL-QADIM rulebook, honor is crucial in Zakhara. The only precedent in the AD&D game is the honor-point system of Kara-Tur: "First and foremost, if any character, no matter what race or character class, ever allows his honor to fall below zero, that character is out of the game. The player should crum-



ple up the character record sheet and toss it away" (page 35, *Oriental Adventures*). Presumably, the erring PC whose honor is tarnished has committed *seppuku*. In the Land of Fate, no one would kill himself over a matter of honor, but a PC can be slain by a family member or a fellow tribesman seeking to restore the group's honor.

As in *Oriental Adventures*, true role-playing is much more important in Zakhara than it is in the standard pseudo-European settings. Just looking at a host's unmarried daughter the wrong way can get a PC in trouble, and any PC based on the stereotypical barbarian who wenches in every town is not going to last very long in the Land of Fate. An offended party will take revenge as soon as possible, preferably when the victim least expects it. If Osman the camel-driver has been ogling a veiled woman who has a barber in the family, Osman should either grow a long beard or shave himself, since he will never know who might make an "accidental" slip with a sharp razor at his throat.

Bigger organizations provide the potential for any number of feuds. For instance, the Brotherhood of the True Flame kills all elemental fire mages who will not join their organization, and any PC who turns down an invitation to become a member can expect *fireballs* whizzing by at the most inopportune times. Of course, the Brotherhoods policy could easily boomerang if it surfaces too often and too violently. The general populace considers all elemental mages to be evil, solely because of the Brotherhood. Given Zakhara's obsession with honor, how long would it take before all the other elemental mages decide to redeem the honor of their profession by turning the Brotherhood of the

True Flame into a horrible example? The same goes for any other evil wizard organizations the DM may create.

Vendettas can also start when a mosque is defiled or ransacked. Generally, moralist priests will be the prime movers for this sort of adventure, with members of the other priest kits being victims or at most hitting back in self-defense. Temple feuds provide plenty of action for farisan, and the adventure could end with an armed clash between armies of these Zakharan paladins belonging to rival sects. In general, though, religious squabbles don't play as well here as in the standard AD&D setting, due to the greater tolerance for opposing faiths in the Land of Fate. Racial vendettas are even more unlikely, unless some outlandish foreigners unwisely drag in their old regional feuds. Foreigners who do so usually receive a sharp lesson in local etiquette at the hands of the authorities.

Again, the holy slayers shine in religious feuds. The PCs are still seen as "enemies of the faith," while the low-key nature of the violence makes it less likely that the forces of law and order will become involved. Conversely, one of the PCs may be a holy slayer who disobeyed orders for some selfish reason (like survival), thus drawing the wrath of the entire fellowship down on the party and eventually leading to a major battle at the fellowship's headquarters. If not, the party should resign itself to an endless string of stolen or ruined supplies, mounts and pack animals run off, homes burned down, and increasing numbers of friends, family, allies, hirelings, and henchmen who develop slit throats—to say nothing of frequent attacks on the PCs themselves.

## Genies

At first glance, this seems like a catchall for all sorts of other adventures, with only a particular creature type to bind them together. Veterans of the AD&D game may even compare it with the misadventures of those who deal or tangle with fiends. However, the Land of Fate gives its own flavor to geniekind, making them more than just another set of supernatural monsters. The primary reason for this is the sha'ir wizard kit.

The advantage of being a sha'ir is that you can get genies to do things for you. The major disadvantage is that, sooner or later, the genies will want some favors in return. All genies, from the jann on up, expect to be rewarded for their efforts—if not immediately, then sometime in the future. Sha'ir PCs who rise in levels can expect to go on various missions that the genies would like to see done.

Not complying with the wishes of the genies has several nasty side effects. Attack is one of them. The party will probably get involved in the fight as well, often to discover that they gain no reward for the expenditure of blood, spells, and vital equipment other than saving the sha'ir's hide. In many cases when a "business deal" turns sour and results in conflict, the sha'ir and his party will gain no experience points for their victory, assuming there is one. The same thing happens when battling monsters a deity sends to punish the sha'ir for sending his gen after priest spells.

It is the second disadvantage that makes requests by genies look like *quest* or *geas* spells. If the sha'ir does nothing to repay his supernatural benefactors, then all genies will refuse to deal with him in the future. This boycott effectively destroys the sha'ir as a viable character, turning him into nothing more than a magic-user who can take forever to have a spell ready to cast. If the PC party has at least one sha'ir along, they can expect at least a few genie-sponsored adventures once they reach mid-level, often with no more reward than the sha'ir being allowed to continue making use of his powers. Who said PC parties have to turn a profit on all their adventures?

The flavor of Zakhara gives that realm a style all its own, and that flavor infuses the adventures that take place there. If the DM is fully aware of this difference between the Land of Fate and other AD&D realms, he can use it to ensure his gaming group will have plenty of surprises in a wide variety of adventures. This is, of course, what the game is all about. So plan carefully: the PCs have no Fate but the Fate which the DM gives them!

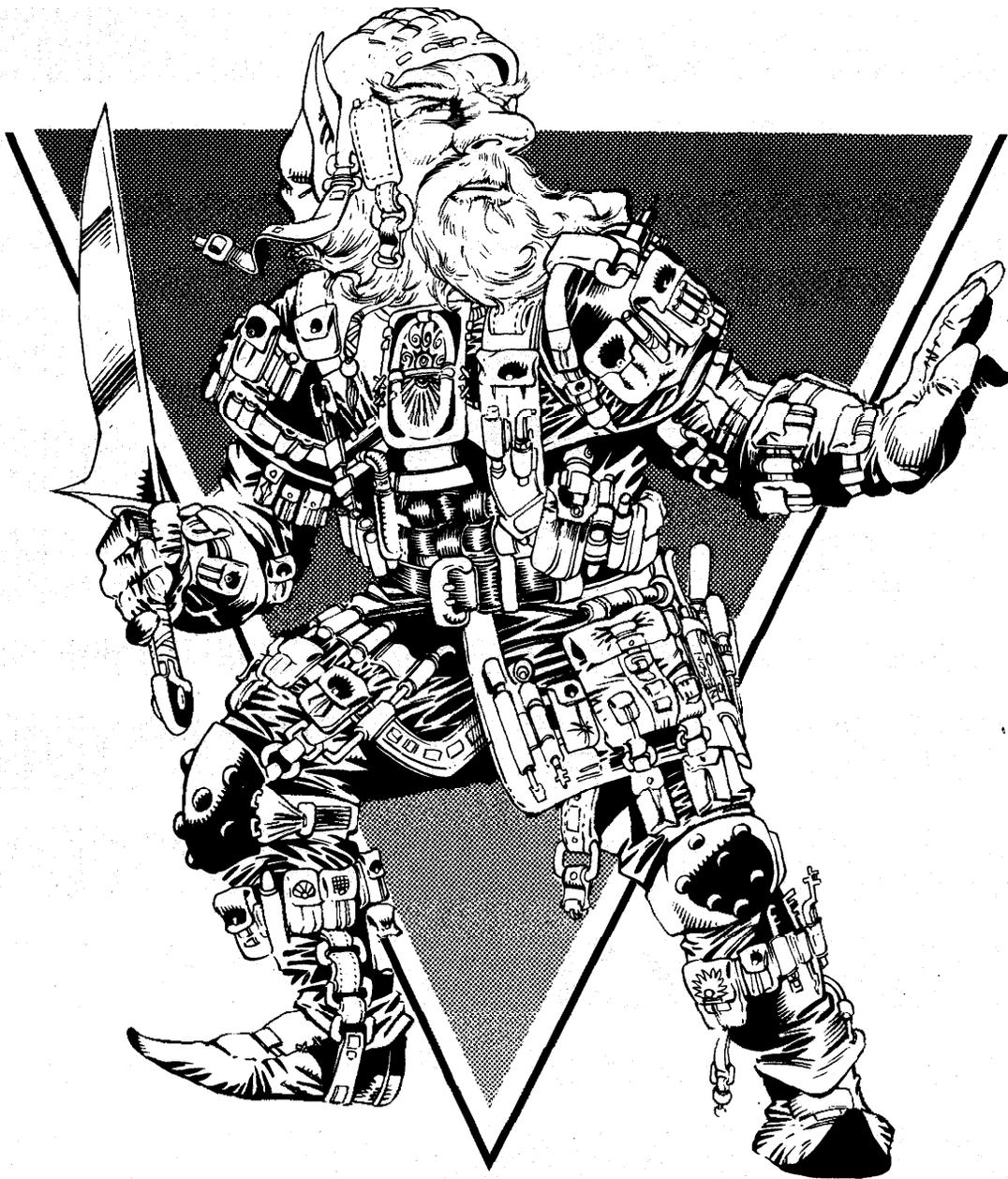
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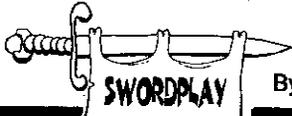
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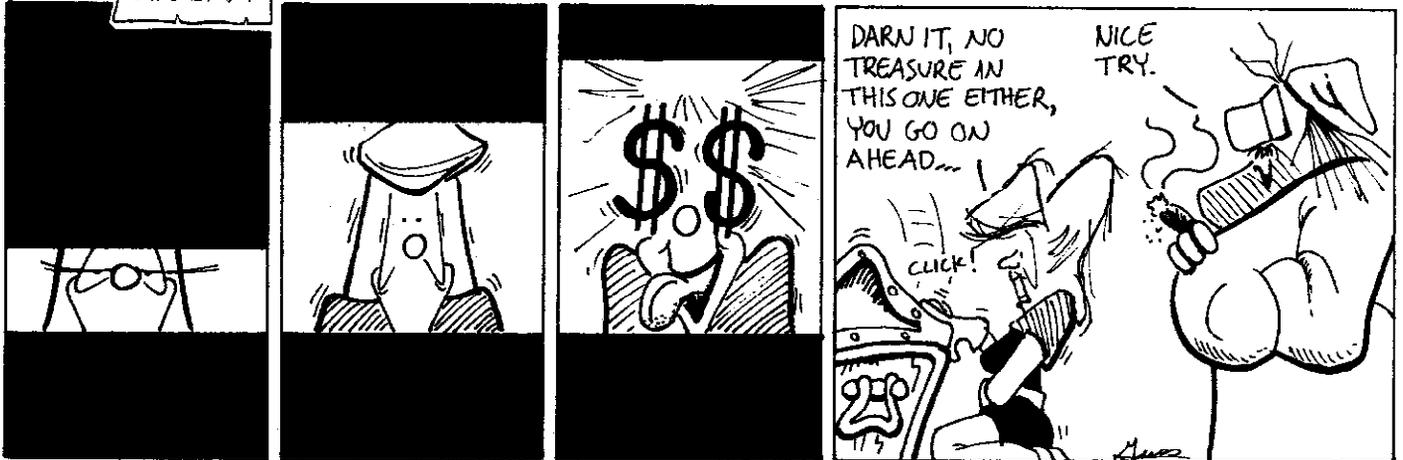
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# Dragonmirth



By Matthew Guss



## Yamara



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By Barbara

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"Curses, it's pledge week."



"What? Kiss you after you've been catching flies with that tongue?"

by Rex F. May

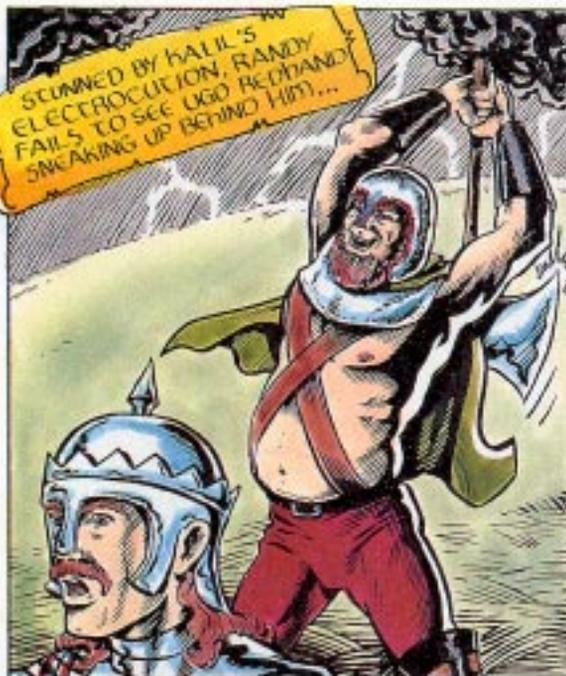
by Edward B. Wagner



E. B. Wagner

"What makes you think this firewood is from the enchanted forest?"

# THE TWELFTH EMPIRE





LET ME KILL HER ROB!

NO, SHE'S BECKY'S MOTHER, AND SHE CAN'T HURT US NOW, ANYWAY.

HOW'S MR. SMILEY?



NOW THAT'S WHAT I LIKE WHEN I'M BLEEDING TO DEATH, A SARCASTIC GRIFFON.

KEEP STILL, YOU'LL BE FINE, BUT YOU'RE LUCKY NONE OF THESE HIT ANYTHING VITAL.



ROB FIN'S RIGHT, WE SHOULD FINISH SHANDARA, WE WON'T GET THIS KIND OF CHANCE AGAIN.

OW! CAREFUL, BRENNA.



TRY IT IF YOU WANT, SMART GUY.

BUT MOM'S GLAMOUR WAS UP WHEN SHE WAS KAYCED, SHE WON'T BE AS EASY TO KILL AS YOU'D LIKE.



WATCH.

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY Stephen D. Sullivan

LETTERING Thom Zahler

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# ROBINSON'S WAR

PART 46



SEE?



LUVIAR'S GARTERS!

YOU'RE LUCKY YOU WEREN'T ALL KILLED. ELVES AND FAERIES ARE IMMUNE, BUT IF BRENNA AND BILL DIDN'T HAVE SOME MAGIC ABOUT THEM...

JUST SEEING FAERIE GLAMOUR CAN KILL NON-MAGICAL BEINGS. LIVING WITH MOM-- EVEN IN HER AMNESIAC STATE-- PROBABLY BUILT UP YOUR RESISTANCE, DAD.

GUESS THAT EXPLAINS MY SPLITTING HEADACHE.

THEN WE ALL BETTER GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

I FOUND THE SCROLL. C'MON, BECKY, IT'S TIME TO GO HOME.

BRENNA..?



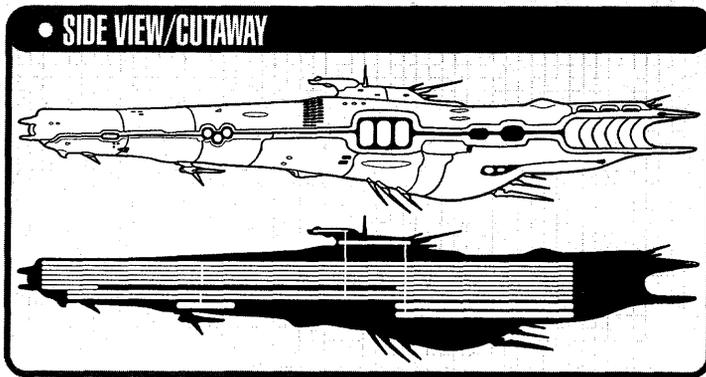
OF COURSE I'M GOING WITH YOU, ROBINSON EDGAR.

BRENNA, I...



NEXT: LAST HAND

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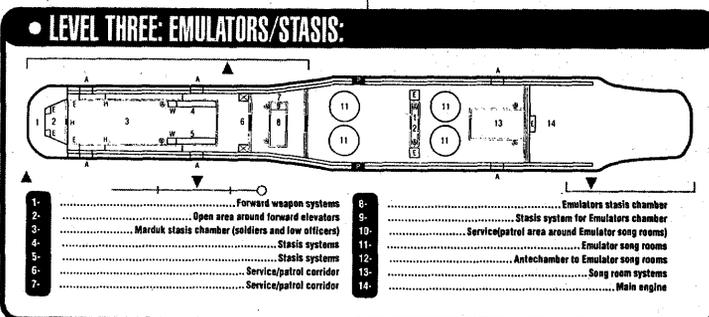
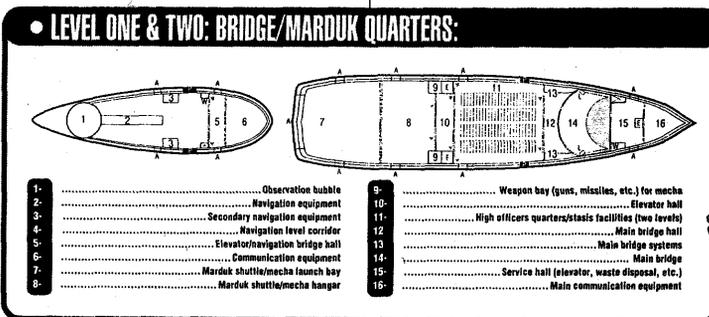
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- Floor plans for the Macross Cannon and space cruiser.
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- Interior art by Wayne Breaux and others.
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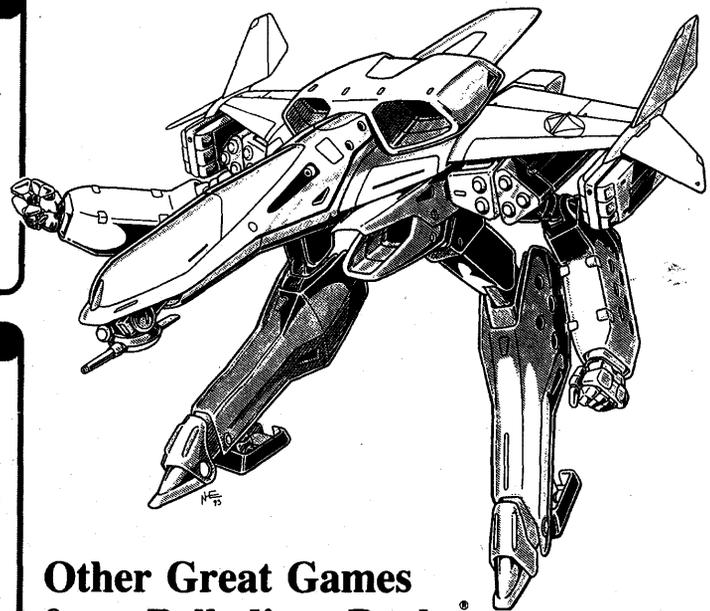
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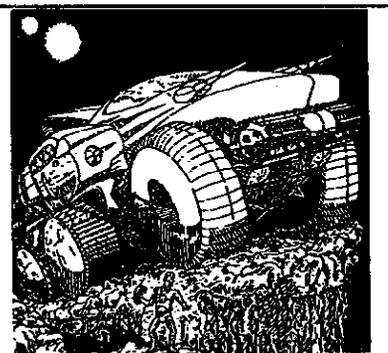
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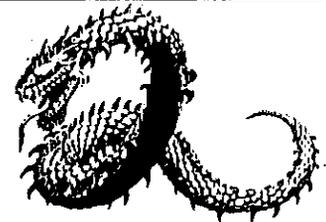
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TSR 012

# Through the LOOKING Glass

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Menzoberranzan (Ral Partha)

## A good miniature is like a good movie

Some of the things that film reviewers look for in movies are that all the parts fit together, the plot fills out well, and that there is continuity throughout. If the movie is lacking in one or more of these areas, it gets pretty poor marks.

Miniatures share some of these elements, e.g., fitting together well, etc. Many of these aspects are determined when figures are cast, and two of the most important facets of casting miniatures are mold alignment and mold fill.

When you get parting lines (also called mold lines), or "threads," those tiny strings of metal that you frequently find clinging to your new miniatures, they are related to the casting process.

If the mold alignment for a miniature is off by even a fraction of an inch it can

cause a shift in the miniature, a pronounced parting line that sometimes makes the miniature unrecognizable or, as is more often the case, requires a great deal of work to correct. Even with near perfect alignment there will often be a visible line where the mold halves meet. That's to be expected, so I don't worry about them unless it's a heavy line or cuts through intricate detail that might be damaged as I remove the mold line.

The threads are a good sign to me. They are caused by tiny vents the moldsman makes to ensure that the miniature fills entirely. If the vents weren't cut, air bubbles could form in small or narrow parts of the figure, such as an outstretched hand, that would prevent the metal from filling those areas. The vents allow the air

to escape and the metal to fill the mold completely. When this happens there is usually a little metal that makes it out through the vent, creating the thread. Often the threads are removed with a simple brush of the hand, other times the vent was a little too large and the thread may be tougher to clean off.

Now on to this month's reviews.

### Reviews

#### Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

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Mail Order: Yes

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#### #10-551 Menzoberranzan set

AD&D® FORGOTTEN REALMS® figures

Sculptor: Dennis Mize

Scale: 25 mm

cost: \$18.95

Based on the FORGOTTEN REALMS® products and novels, this boxed set contains all your favorite characters, and a few more. Being the loser that I am, however, I'm not familiar with the source material, so I only recognize Drizzt Do'Urden, the hero of R. A. Salvatore's novels. Regardless, Dennis Mize, one of Ral Partha's (RP) veteran sculptors, has created one great set of elves.

The set is cast in RP's Ralidium, a lead-free pewter. The material is harder than the old white-metal mixtures, so modification is a little more difficult, but the figures can take a little beating without noticeable effect.

The figures are near perfect technically. Most of the parting lines are invisible and the worst of them is very minor. There are few threads and all the figures are fully formed.

The figures come in a variety of poses. Many have a feeling of motion that will lend a great deal of life to the figures after painting.

Drizzt, the male with his left foot on a

rock and raised arms, is wielding a really a nice sword. A minor mold line runs across his shoulders and through his head a little gentle “stroking” with a #10 brush (with the grain of the hair) will remove any trace of the line.

The set contains four female drow that form quite a contrast. From the rigid, angry-looking woman in full-length robes and detailed shoulder piece to the smiling, poised female in the off-the-shoulder, silky dress(?), the women of Menzoberranzan are varied to be sure. The other women appear serious and businesslike, one equipped as a cleric and the other in long gown and head-piece. These figures are highly detailed, from their faces to the trim on their clothing.

There are also four males other than Drizzt, and they all appear ready for battle. Two wear drow chain mail and carry swords and bucklers. The detail of these figures, plus their accessories like the feather-plumed hat, makes each unique. The other two, a warrior with tunic and short cloak plus a long-robbed priest with shaven head and dagger, are also great pieces of work. The facial detail of all these figures is incredible.

Lastly, there is Drizzt’s panther. The proportions of this huge feline are excellent. The dark elves are also incredibly proportional, but I suppose that we often take that for granted in humanoid figures. On animal figures, good proportion really stands out, since it’s very difficult to get right. Years of scrawny or pin-headed horses have demonstrated the difficulty to the miniatures enthusiast.

Whether you have a need for dark elves in your game, or know the source materials, these figures are excellent and can serve many purposes.

#### #10-602 Shademehr Encounters Baakesh Va

The Sterling Collection

Sculptor: Tom Meier

Scale: 25 mm

cost: \$29.95

Ral Partha and Larry Elmore teamed up before to produce *Silver & Steel*, a phenomenal set of female characters sculpted by Dennis Mize based on Elmore’s artwork. They’ve done it again!

This time the sculptor was Tom Meier, one of the founders of Ral Partha and one of the most talented sculptors in the industry. Don’t let the 25-mm scale fool you, the monster in this scene is almost 9-cm tall (over three inches), and is huge.

The quality of the casting is excellent, with barely visible mold lines along the horse’s back and along the sides of Baakesh Va’s neck. Included with the figures are instructions for assembly and a card depicting the original art by Larry Elmore.

The detail on these figures is incredible. (I’m sure you’re getting tired of all the adjectives, but they’re necessary.) The horse is well proportioned and highly



Menzoberranzan (Ral Partha)



Shademehr Encounters Baakesh Va (Ral Partha)

detailed, from flowing mane, rearing pose, and forward motion to tack, saddle, and rider. The saddle has padded side panels and the bridle even has plates across the forehead. (While this may irritate the horse, it looks great.) The pose is one of the most life-like I’ve ever seen a horse sculpted in.

The rider is lowering his lance. His torso is detailed and his face is great. He also wears a finely detailed fur cape. The detail was even extended to the base which, though relatively plain as the snowy scene would demand, clearly shows the horse’s prints.

The beast is by far the single most impressive part of this scene. (I keep calling it a scene because it isn’t really a vignette or diorama, though it could be.) Baakesh

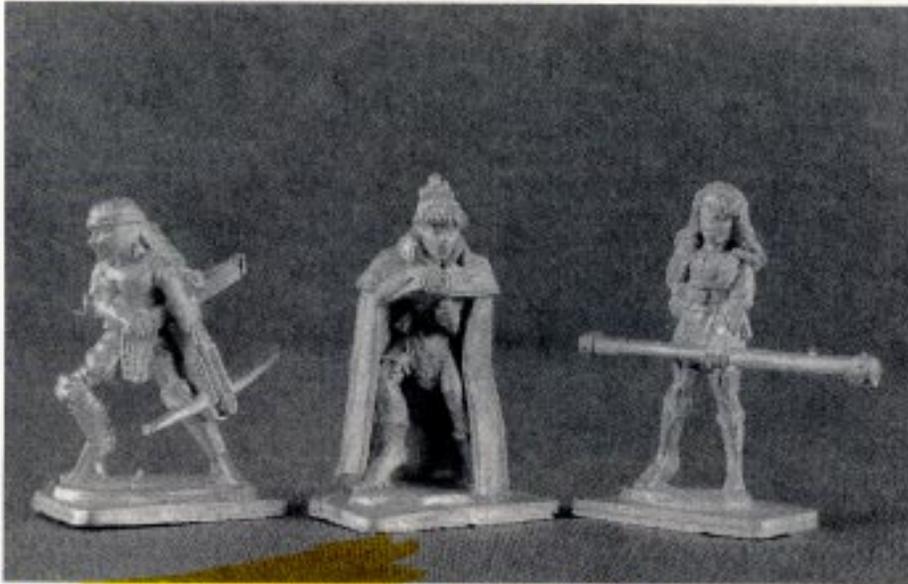
is in four large pieces: base, torso, and head. While the base is plain snow, the rest are incredibly detailed (there’s that adjective again).

The musculature on arms and legs, the scaled armor and fur trim, the fur cloak, and metal plates across his back—are all great and sharply detailed. His four-fingered hand grips an axe whose handle is as long as the horse. The head of the beast is exactly as seen in the artwork, right down to the cold stare and slightly open mouth.

Okay, enough frothing. This is quite a challenge to assemble and paint, due to the size, weight, and detail, so it is not for the faint of heart; but for those who feel they are up to it, this is a tough figure to beat.



Vampire Rogues (Rafm)



Female Rogues (Rafm)

### Rafm, Inc.

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 Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$3.00

### #3958 The Rogue

Fantastique Noir Vampyres series  
 Sculptor: Bob Murch  
 Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$4.25

Rafm's line arrives as support for the increasingly popular vampire role-playing games. While there may be some controversy over the role-playing games, there is none over the quality of these figures—Bob Murch is an experienced sculptor and he shows it in this line.

The mold lines on these two are almost nonexistent, though a trace runs through the hair of one which will require a little clean up. These are produced in Rafm's lead-free pewter alloy, Rafm 94.

The figures depict a well-dressed gentleman, though his clothes bear a tear or two, and a ghoulish skateboarder (not that all skateboarders are ghoulish, mind you).

The well-dressed fellow has wild, shoulder-length hair, slacks, a long coat with wide lapels, and boots. Accessories include old-fashioned spectacles, a button or medallion on his left lapel, an ank on a chain around his neck and he's licking the blade of a knife held up to his face. I went to school with that guy!

The other figure—the ghoulish skateboarder—is also very sharp. While this

guy definitely will have problems finding a date to the prom, he's a great miniature. He has an extra wide-body skateboard, there's a sweater tied around his waist, his chest cavity seems to be more cavity than chest and he wears a baseball cap turned backward over his long, stringy hair. In addition, his face will not get much help from Oxy 10 and his dental insurance probably won't cover those teeth.

The detail on both figures is crisp and well done. If you play a vampire-style game, you'll probably want to look these over. If you don't, you'll want to look anyway, just for the entertainment value. Beyond the vampire genre games, these figures would work great in Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\*, FASA's SHADOW-RUN\* and other role-playing games.

### #3696 Rogues

Fantasy series  
 Sculptor: Stephen Koo  
 Scale: 25 mm cost: \$5.75

While we're looking at rogues, I thought this was a good blister of *femmes fatale*. There are three figures in the blister, each representing a different type of rogue. There's a ninja-like figure, a thief, and a don't-turn-your-back-on-this-one type with a staff.

Each has minor parting lines, but only the lines on the right side of the ninja's face and down the right leg get heavy, and even those clean up easily with a half-round needle file, since it's over a low-detail area.

The ninja wears puffy pants that gather at the knees, knee pads, and chest padding (ninja never can be too careful), plus the traditional face and head covering. The miniature has a katana and a heavy cross-bow, plus a belt pouch, boot knives, and quiver of bolts. The detail is good and the figure is well proportioned.

Our thief is posed for a good sneak, on tiptoes and wearing soft, low boots. She has a long cloak to cover the fact she has daggers in each hand. Her tunic is detailed and fringed, the cloak has a detailed collar and is fastened by the neck. She also has a knife strapped to her right thigh.

The staff-wielding woman has highly detailed clothing, with a short vest over a trimmed shirt and a detailed belt. She also has ornate boots that end halfway up the thigh. Details include a belt pouch and the unseen dagger behind the back. (Keep your eyes on her.)

This is a good set that will add variety to your selection of females and certainly add depth to your collection of rogues.

## Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

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### #1033 Magic Carpet Ride

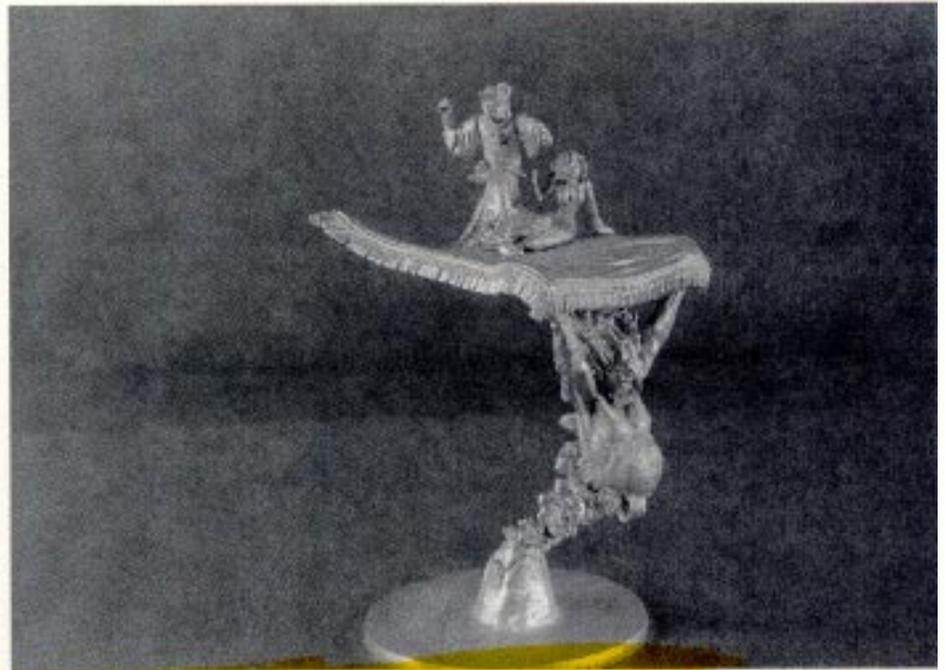
Diorama series  
Sculptor: Tom Meier  
Scale: 25 mm  
Cost: \$13.95

For the last year or so Tom Meier of Thunderbolt, an extraordinary sculptor, has created dioramas of incredible detail and imagination. This is one of the newer additions and lacks neither element.

When I looked over the figure for parting lines, I was only able to find one light line down the woman's left arm. Brian Hitsman, Thunderbolt's moldsman, did a great job casting these figures.

The diorama, as the photo shows, depicts a couple taking a ride on a carpet that is held aloft by a djinni.

The facial detail is great and the expressions are quite realistic. The woman, who is dressed in a halter top and fluffy pantaloons, appears to be frightened by the ride, while the man is standing protectively over her and has a look of extreme concentration on his face. His garments denote him as an important man, possibly



Magic Carpet Ride (Thunderbolt Mountain)

a prince, judging from the crown and expensive-looking clothing. He carries no weapons but details of his dress include gem-studded neck jewelry with a medalion hanging down the back, ornate boots,

pouches, and jeweled buckle for his belt.

The djinni is highly detailed as a creature of the air, with a solid upper body that becomes wispy and intangible below the belly. He wears an unreadable expres-

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Knight with Mace (Heartbreaker)

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### #5013 Knight with Mace

Fantasy series

Sculptor: Chaz Elliot

Scale: 28 mm

Cost: \$2.00

Heartbreaker, who's only been on the scene for a couple years, has put out some really fine figures. Chaz Elliot, a talented sculptor and artist, has a distinctive style that makes his work recognizable from any other sculptor. Heartbreaker just started producing figures in a pewter alloy, so the prices changed from \$1.75, to reflect increased costs.

This knight has virtually no parting line. The figure has sharp detail and is clear of any mold flaws.

The knight wears heavy, bulky armor with ornate shoulder pieces, detailed trim, and knee guards. The mace is a huge ball of metal with a few knobs. His helm is slitted, has a plume and bears a symbol of the sun, and he carries a plain, oval shield. The backside of the knight has a pouch hanging from the belt.

The figure comes with a square, plastic base for mounting. With a good color scheme, this would be a fantastic model for any collection.

sion, as he tows the carpet across the skies. His arms are quite muscular looking while his chest and belly are much less so-he has a huge pot belly.

Assembly is simple, but I would recommend that the carpet be pinned to the djinni's hands, for more strength, lest the carpet break off. The djinni fits very well

into its base and there should be plenty of strength to hold the figure up.

The detail of the figures, especially the faces, is exceptional, making this one great figure.



Jerry missed only one gaming session.

### #5006 Elf Champion

Fantasy series

Sculptor: Chaz Elliot

Scale: 28 mm

Cost: \$2.00

Not one of Heartbreaker's newest releases, I chose to review this because it's such a good figure. Another one from Chaz, Heartbreaker's backbone sculptor, you can see his style in every detail.

There are mild parting lines inside the left leg and inside the right arm. Neither will require much effort to remove.

This figure's armor is bulky and has sharp lines and details. The abdomen has layered plates mimicking abdominal muscles and the shoulder pieces are carved with shapes. The shield is stylized, bears a starburst emblem, and is backed with a wood grain.

The face is great, with sharp features and Chaz's trademark for elves-heavy eyebrows. The hair is long and full with a headband to keep it in place. This figure also comes with a separate, plastic base to mount it on.

I really liked this figure, it just screamed personality. From the oddly shaped shield and sharp lines of the armor to the way the character has his head ever so slightly tilted over his right shoulder, this figure seemed unique to me.

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### #9022 Burlok Damminson, Dwarf Engineer Guildmaster

WARHAMMER FANTASY \* line

Sculptor: Michael Perry

Scale: 28 mm

cost: \$7.99

More support for their successful fantasy miniatures battle game, Games Workshop (GW) is giving the dwarven general something to celebrate. Burlok is one of the special characters available to a dwarven army and he was discussed at some length in the *Warhammer Armies-Dwarves* book. Michael Perry has done good work on Burlok; the detail is great and the figure is impressive.

It seems Burlok had a problem with an experiment as a youth that blew his arm off. After that he was able to create a mechanical arm that proved stronger than the original. If you look across the battlefield and see this figure, you might want to keep your better units out of his reach.

There's no parting line to speak of on this figure, though there is a mild line on his back banner. The production quality is excellent.



Elf Champion (Heartbreaker)

Burlok carries a huge hammer and his left arm is a mechanical contraption of curious design. He wears trimmed chain armor and has numerous ornate knick-knacks on his belt. His beard is long enough to make any dwarf proud, and has a couple of beads in it, forming small ponytails on each side of the beard.

His helm is carved with his guild symbol, as is his back banner. The base of the back banner is a barrel that serves as the power source for the mechanical arm.

Burlok is a very good figure for a dwarf. (Can you tell I run orcs?) He comes with a separate, standard-sized, plastic base for mounting.

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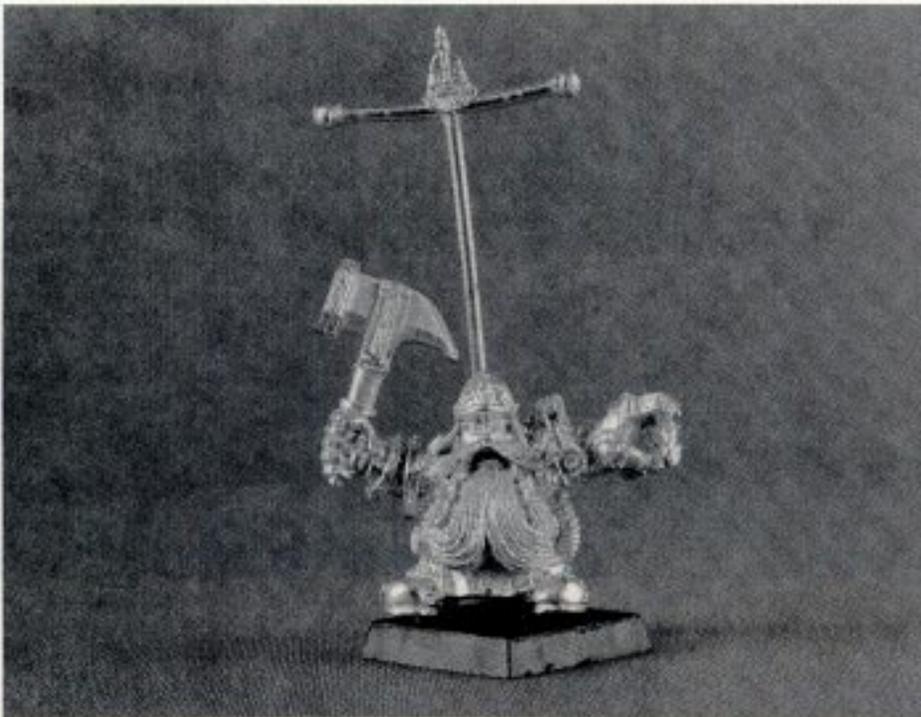
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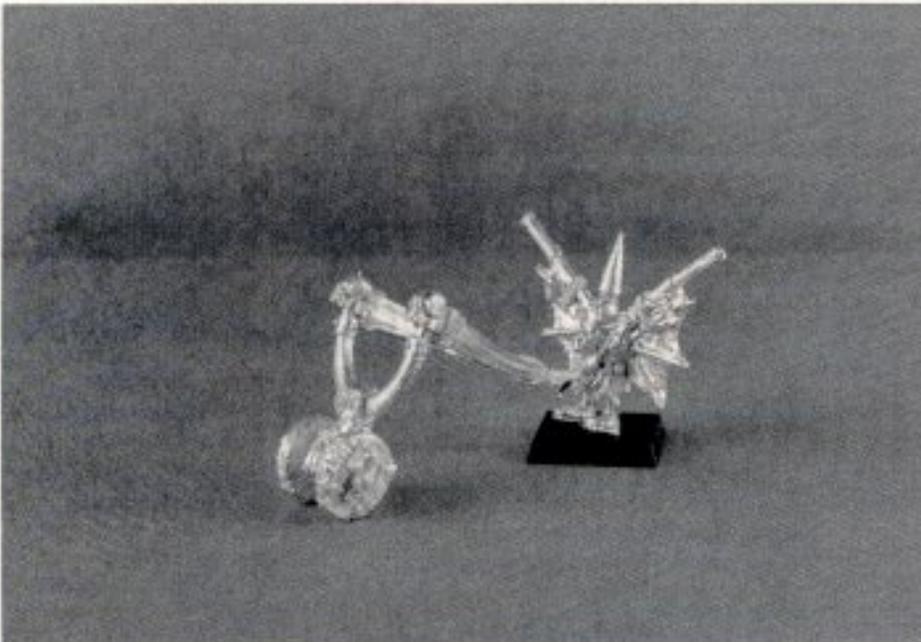
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Burlok Damminson (Citadel)



Goblin Doom Diver (Citadel)

### #8548 Goblin Doom Diver

WARHAMMER FANTASY line

Sculptor: Kev Adams

Scale: 28 mm

Cost: \$5.99

Also known as the Bat-winged Looney Lobber, this catapult is quite a dangerous war machine in play. Because the goblin wears those silly looking wings, not to mention a grin that marks him as not entirely sane, he is able to help steer himself to the target.

The figure comes in three pieces: the bat-winged looney (the goblin), the rubber band, and the catapult base. The figures have very light mold lines but there are a couple of heavy vent marks on the inside of the rubber-band piece. Kev Adams, a prolific sculptor with a great deal of talent, has created much of GW's Orc and Goblin line-and done a great job.

The goblin wears a brainless grin, complete with tongue hanging out, leathery "wings," and a spiked helmet (for spiking dwarves). His arms are tied into the wings

and he wears a belt with a ring on it, for attaching him to the catapult.

The rubber-band section ends at two skull-shaped posts that top the catapult, while the catapult itself is a heavy wooden base with wheels. There is a hand-shaped piece that holds the wooden slingshot to the base.

Overall, this is a well-detailed figure with a lot of entertainment value and a strange appeal, especially if you run an orc and goblin army and want to inflict a lot of damage. It may not be as reliable as a cavalry unit, but it's sure a lot of fun to watch it in action.

### Pick of the litter

Though there were quite a few great figures in this batch, the pick of this litter has to be Ral Partha's *Shademehr Encounters Baakesh Va*. The figure is just so impressive that it has to be given consideration by any serious modeler or collector.

From strictly a gamer's point of view (preferring functionality to display value), the most likely candidate would be Heartbreaker's *Elf Champion*, though Rafm's *Rogues* and RP's *Menzoberranzan* are both close runners-up.

Good gaming!



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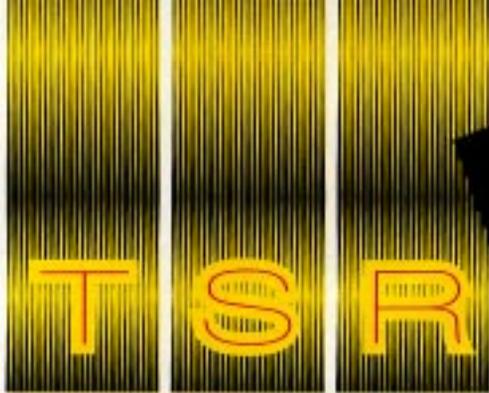
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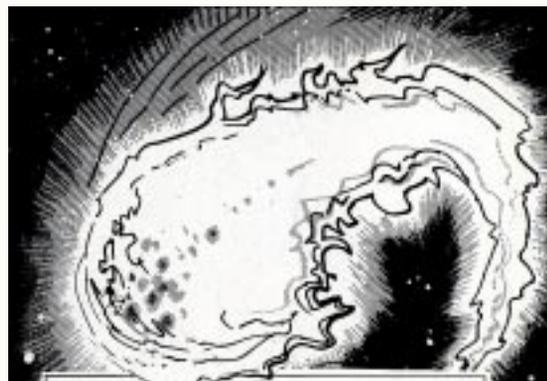
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\* "Dovedale" (D&D® game; 1-3), by Ted James Thomas Zuvich.

\* "The Iron Orb of the Duergar" (AD&D game; 13-15), by Peter Aberg.

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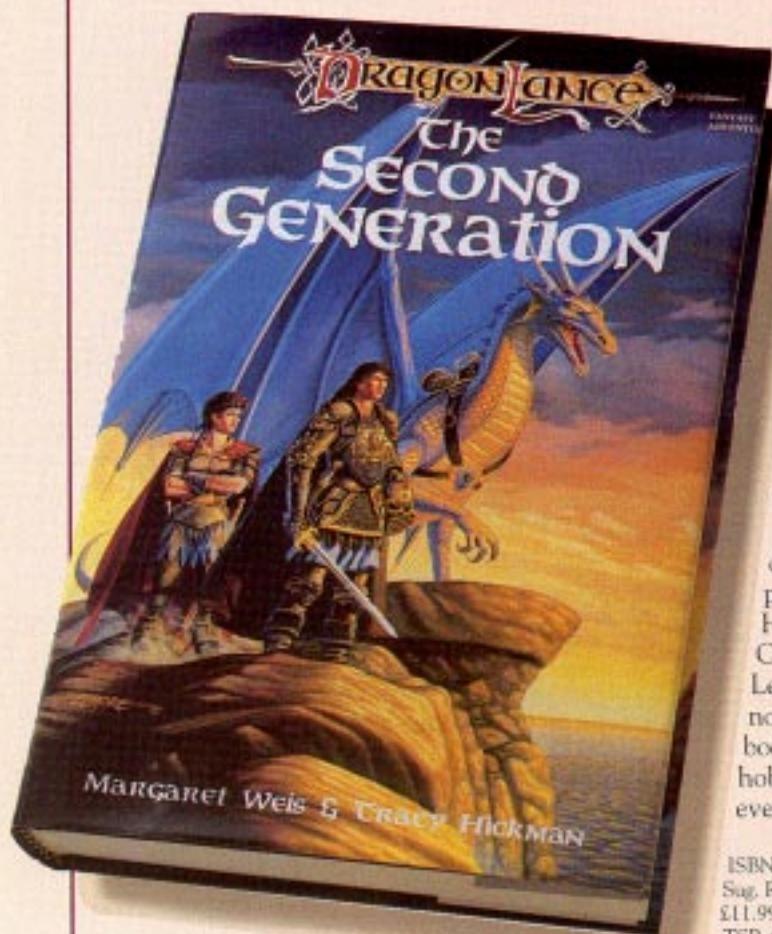
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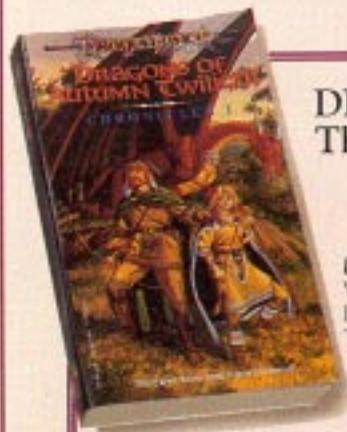
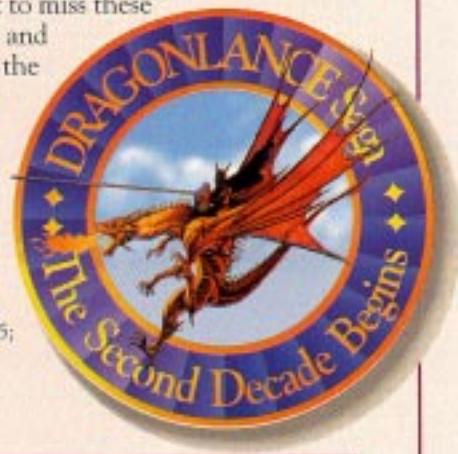


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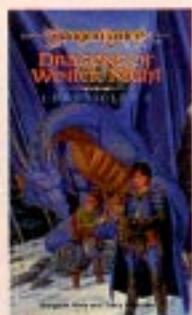
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