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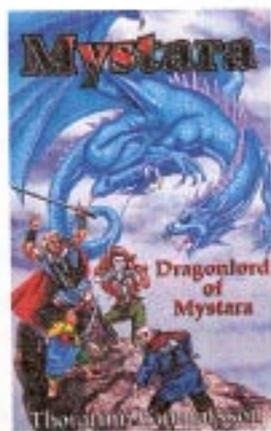


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### COVER

This issue's chilling cover art, painted by Stephen King (a Scottish artist, not the American horror author), was to appear on the cover of an earlier issue. We are elated to present it now, as a belated reminder that summer will not be with us forever.

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# 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. If you wish to have your letter published, you must sign it. We will withhold your name if you request it.

## Guideline confusion

Dear Dragon,

Perhaps you can help me. I recently contacted TSR about submitting my work. I received DRAGON Magazine's Writer's Guidelines and felt as if my effort was all for nothing. I am writing several novels, and I need more information on submitting work to your company, not just DRAGON Magazine. Will someone hear my cry?

Philip Lee McCall II  
Miami FL

*Okay, Philip, let's see if I can clear this up for you. When contacting TSR for submission guidelines, please be as specific as you can. If you want novel guidelines or art guidelines, ask for those specific guidelines. If you're not sure what guidelines TSR offers, I'll briefly review them and some general submissions rules.*

*DRAGON Magazine has guidelines that incorporate all the necessary submission information on one sheet of paper. Whether you want art, fiction, article, or cartoon guidelines, just send a business-size self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) and we'll send them to you.*

*If you, like Philip, want TSR's novel guidelines, you can send an SASE to: TSR Book Department, Lisa Neuberger, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.*

*If you wish to receive TSR's art guidelines, send an SASE to: Peggy Cooper, Art Director, at the above P.O. Box address.*

*Note that TSR's Games Department doesn't have guidelines since it is their policy not to work with freelancers who've not been published professionally. If you aspire to writing or editing game products, you must first gain publishing credits elsewhere (such as in this magazine or DUNGEON® Adventures, for example).*

*The first rule of submissions is: Don't send TSR anything (except the SASE for the guidelines, of course) until after you receive the appropriate guidelines. Our guidelines answer most of the basic questions potential submitters have. If you get the guidelines and follow them, you're only increasing the chances of having*

*some of your work published by TSR.*

*The second rule is: Always include an SASE with your submission. The SASE you send should be no smaller than the one you initially mailed your submission in. Postage costs are a concern to us, but so is the time we would need to take in addressing envelopes. We get a lot of mail, and we can't afford the time to address all those envelopes. If you want a response from us regarding your submission, you need to include an SASE.*

*The third rule is: Never send your originals. Do not send the actual artwork; send a photocopy, a slide, or a transparency. Always retain a hard (paper) copy of any manuscript you send us. Do not mail disks unless we ask you to.*

*The fourth (and final) rule is: Be polite. Whenever you contact TSR (or any publisher for that matter), act like a professional. Publishers are human too (well, most of us are); we sometimes make mistakes or misplace things. Some submissions just never reach their destination. Believe me, if you're having a problem with your submission, a kind word and a little patience will go a long way toward getting your problem resolved.*

*One common request from gamers is that TSR should publish their homemade campaign world. While we appreciate the offer, TSR creates all its own campaign worlds these days. Also, projects of this size are beyond the scope of DRAGON and DUNGEON magazines.*

*There, I hope that answers Philip's (and everybody's) concerns on submissions. If you have further questions, get the guidelines.* —Dale

## Undiscovered gaming treasures

Dear Dragon,

Recently, I had to kill 45 minutes in my wife's favorite quilting store. During my wandering, I discovered several items that can be useful to gamers everywhere. Here are a few:

1. Corrugated cardboard cutting boards.

These either are one yard or one meter on a side and are marked in 1" or 1-cm squares. If you play in a room with carpeting, lay one of these boards on the floor and you have a stable surface for figures, etc. They fold up for storage and are cheaper than vinyl-coated mats.

2. Graph paper up to 24" x 24" in several grid sizes.

3. Graphic layout rulers up to 17" square (plus triangular and circular ones as well).

4. A wide assortment of washable and permanent graphics pens and markers.

5. Design books detailing the art of many

cultures including Celtic, Greek, Egyptian, Renaissance, Japanese, and Native American. Many of these are in full color with plenty of photos and examples.

6. Fabric for covering game screens, books, or playing surfaces in an amazing array of colors and patterns.

Now, I wait for sales and get great bargains on this stuff (mostly referred to as "notions" in the fabric trade). Check out your local paper or phone book under "Fabric" or "Craft supplies".

Gary A. Chilcote  
Laurel MD

*What a great thought, Gary! Thanks for sharing your ideas with the readership of DRAGON Magazine.* —Dale

## Missing game materials?

Dear Dragon,

I'm a big fan of the AD&D® game, but the latest addition to my shelf has been the 5th Edition of Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game. It's a great game, but I can't seem to get ahold of any of the supplements, and they don't have a British address. Please take pity on a frustrated British gamer!

Paul S. Longhurst  
Portsmouth, England

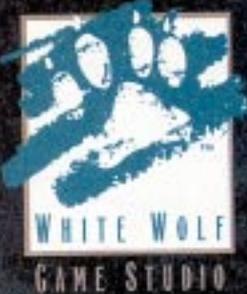
*I just now talked to the friendly folks at Chaosium, and they have the following advice. Anyone who has problems finding gaming products in an area should contact the company that publishes those products. The game company can put gamers in contact with the companies that distribute products in the gamer's area. The distributors then can refer the gamer to the nearest store which carries the desired products. (This advice also applies to game companies and publishers everywhere.)*

*Paul, you can contact Esdevium Games, Chris Harvey Games, or Hobbygames Ltd., all of which distribute Chaosium products in Britain. Good luck and good hunting.* —Dale

\* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.

# Wraith

## Face Death



THE WORLD OF  
**DARKNESS**

## Constructing a character

The way I see it, two things should happen when a player rolls up a new character for a role-playing game. The first is “character creation”, where you generate the numbers that define the abilities, skills, advantages, and weaknesses of the character. This process is governed by the rules system you’re using. The second process is the one I’m going to discuss here—the process of constructing a character, i.e., a person, around those numbers. Let’s assume you’ve just generated a character’s statistics. It makes no difference for my purpose what those numbers are or what game you’re playing.

Whenever I want to uncover information on a new or unknown topic (such as a newly created RPG character), I fall back on what I learned in my journalism classes. Journalists ask six basic questions: Who, what, when, where, why, and how. You can construct a strong, solid PC by asking these same questions about your character.

### Who?

Asking “Who” or “Whom” questions about your character helps define her personality—the kind of person she is—by identifying the people (other characters in this case) around her. Defining who the character is includes determining such aspects as: Who are the character’s most common foes? Who started the character on the road to being an adventurer? Who were the character’s parents? Who were her childhood friends? Who are her current enemies? Whom (if anyone) does the character work for? Whom does the character love? Whom does she hate? Whom does she trust? Whom does she talk to when she is upset? This type of question can define not only the PC, but also some of the NPCs that inhabit the campaign setting.

### What?

Questions in this category determine more about the character’s life. They determine his history and current status. The game system determines what the character’s skills and so forth are, but a character is more than just a list of statistics. Remember that within the context of the game, the character likely has lived most of his life as a “normal” person for that game’s setting. What did he do for a living before he became an adventurer?

What prompted the character to become an adventurer? Other questions can be much simpler. What color is the character’s hair? What color are his eyes? What is the character’s age? What does he do in his free time—that is, when he’s not out saving the world as a heroic adventurer? What skills does the character possess that aren’t quantified in the game? What are the character’s favorite foods, music, and books? What are his personality quirks? What are the character’s ethnic, educational, and social backgrounds? What does the PC do when he’s alone?

### When?

These questions provide a time frame for the PC and for many of the questions in the other sections. When was the character born? When did the PC decide to take up the adventuring life? When did the PC arrive in the campaign city (starship, military base, planet, detective agency, plane of existence, etc.)? When does the character get up in the morning? When does she go to bed? When does she practice her skills? When does she visit her family and friends? When did the character meet the other PCs?

### Where?

Answers to the questions in this category gives the character locations for the events of his life. They provide a home and an anchor for a character. Where was the character born? Where was he raised? Where does the character live when he’s not on the road adventuring? Where does he practice his special talents? Where did he learn his adventuring talents? Where did the character go on his last vacation? Where is his favorite restaurant?

### Why?

This probably is the most important category for your PC. These questions define the PC’s motivation, and the character’s commitment to doing the right thing. Why did the character first decide to become a hero? Why is she laying her life on the line to help people she doesn’t even know? Why bother? Why not use her abilities to become a wealthy criminal or a famous celebrity instead? Why is the character in the campaign’s locale now? Why does the character work with other PCs? Why does the PC use the weapons she does? Why did the PC choose to use (and improve) the skills she does?

### How?

These questions round out many of the topics and issues brought up in earlier categories. How did the character gain his weapons, fighting skills, or that scar on his right cheek? How does the character use his abilities (silly stunts, combat tactics, etc.)? How does the character pass the time between adventures? How does he dress when he’s not in his adventuring gear? How does the character get around every day (horse, aircar, superpowers, etc.)? How does the character maintain a “normal” life and still find time to be an adventurer?

The questions listed here are just samples; they only scratch the surface of constructing a character. You can go into as much depth as you like. Some of these questions may seem minor, but they are intended to get players and GMs thinking about aspects of their characters’ lives not normally considered. You needn’t ask these questions in the order presented. Find an interesting topic and use all the categories to pursue that topic to its conclusion.

If you’re having problems thinking of questions, explain this system to your gaming group. Then, have the GM go around the gaming table firing questions at the players after the characters’ statistics have been created, but before the campaign actually begins. Players can ask each other questions as well.

If the GM allows it, players can help out one another with suitable answers if one player draws a blank on a particular question about his PC. The GM should keep control of this type of this brainstorming session so that the characters do not evolve in a direction inconsistent with the campaign the GM has devised. (A note to GMs: Don’t pass up a good idea that’ll add fun and flavor to the campaign simply because you didn’t think of it. After all, it’s the players’ campaign as well.)

With both the character creation and construction processes complete, the players and GM now are ready to begin the real fun: the game!

*Dale A. Donovan*

# JYHAD™



A Deckmaster™ Game of Modern Gothic Horror.

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## “Thrown to the weasels”

©1994 by James Lowder

The Melisi brothers were my friends, and I trusted them when they said the game would be fun. After all, they'd been right about *Monty Python* and the short stories of H. P. Lovecraft. So this “role-playing” stuff would likely turn out to be a good time, too.

Oh, I had some nagging doubts about the endeavor. The Bros. Melisi may have introduced me to Cthulhu and Spiny Norman, but they also hunted bees with rubber bands (despite being allergic to bee stings) and fought duels atop their shed with homemade quarterstaves (despite knocking each other—and me—from that roof more than once). This was 1977 or so, and I was in junior high at the time; but even then I recognized the perils of eccentric companions.

Of course that didn't stop me from sampling this new game of theirs. It was, I came to learn later, one of the early versions of the GAMMA WORLD® game. Those of you who've played any edition of that mutant-plagued SF game can guess how long my neophyte character lasted. I should have realized my prospects were bleak from the outset:

“Are these numbers good?” I asked eagerly after generating my character.

“Stats”, the GM corrected. “They're called stats, and, yeah, they're okay. How good the character is—and how much fun the game is—depends on you.” He opened a book and stood it in front of him like a riot shield, then upended a large bag of dice. “You set to play?”

Before I could utter a word, the other two members of my group shouted their readiness. They had veteran characters, toughs who had survived a whopping two sessions each.

“Okay, Jim. You're going to be the scout”, noted the captain of our stalwart, but quite doomed little band.

“I'm not sure I want to be scout”, I offered, then glanced at my character sheet, which remained as cryptic as stereo instructions written in Japanese. I shrugged and added, “But if you guys think my character can do that, I guess that'll be fun”.

We made it across a football field's worth of the post-apocalyptic wastes—five

or ten minutes into the game—before the giant radioactive weasel showed up. “What are you all going to do?” the GM asked, eyes glittering in a way alarmingly like those of the radiation-mad weasel he'd just described.

“We run!” my companions chorused.

“I run, too”, I said, though it was more a question than a statement.

The GM shook his head. “You're playing the scout, remember? You're too close to the weasel to run. It'll attack you if you stay or go, so you might as well fight.”

A couple of dice rolls later my character was weasel chow. The fight didn't even delay the thing long enough to stop it from catching the more lightning-reflexed and fleet-of-foot in the party.

Within fifteen minutes the intrepid mutant hunters were all dead. I sat there, stunned, while my equally defeated companions happily compared notes on how we'd all died. They thought I'd acquitted myself pretty well, getting in a couple of strikes against the weasel before the bloody end. No reason to be mad at them, they said when I asked why they hadn't helped me; they were playing mercenaries, after all, and that type of character can never be trusted.

I didn't buy it. They had pimped me over big time, and it hadn't gained them a thing. Some game, I huffed to myself. The rules flummoxed me, and I really didn't see the fun in designing a character, only to have it eaten by a giant glowing mutant ten minutes later.

“Sometimes that's the way the games go”, the youngest Melisi noted sagely. He eyed his oldest brother and smirked. “Especially with him running things. But if the dice had landed differently, you might have killed the monster.”

I tried to imagine the victory he described. It would have been great—the mercenaries running like rabbits while the new guy stood nose-to-snout with the slaving weasel. . .

“We've got time”, the GM said, “so let's try a different game. You'll like this one better, Jim. It's a fantasy game—knights and dragons.” He chuckled in a nasty way that I would later come to associate with countless baddies from FGU's VILLAINS &

VIGILANTES\* game and a horde of cultists from Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game. “You might survive a whole adventure this time. This is called the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game.”

Hesitantly I agreed—it was either that or up onto the roof for quarterstaff practice. But I did enjoy this game a whole lot more, in part because I rolled up a dwarf named Raephel the Berserk who was fun to play, whether he lived or not. In fact, he was horribly self-destructive, which naturally meant he survived the game. Everyone else in the party died, pounded into mush by some ogres because our leader mispronounced the wrong name at the wrong time, but Raephel made it out of the castle in more or less one halberd-carrying dwarven piece. (For you Realmslore scholars, Raephel is the dwarf flipping coins onto the Stalwarts' Club chandelier in my novel, *The Ring of Winter*.)

I'm grateful to the Melisi brothers for introducing me to role-playing games. Not only were they a great way to pass the time in a small town like Whitman, Mass., they fired my imagination and fostered my interest in writing fantasy and horror stories. My knowledge of the games eventually landed me a job in TSR's book department and afforded me the opportunity to write four novels. I'm certain that all my role-playing experience will color the projects I'm now developing for other publishers, too.

There were other benefits from this rocky first foray into role-playing, lessons about being open to new things and learning to make the best of a sorry situation. This latter bit of wisdom has served me especially well. You see, my first experience as a gamer was exemplary of most of my others, even after nearly two decades of gaming.

Only a few years back, just after I started work at TSR, Steve Winter, Zeb Cook, and a few others invited me to join in a lunchtime game they were playing. It was SPI's *Empires of the Middle Ages*, a basic sort of war game. I was nervous about it. Not only was I the neophyte at TSR, I'd never played a war game before. And

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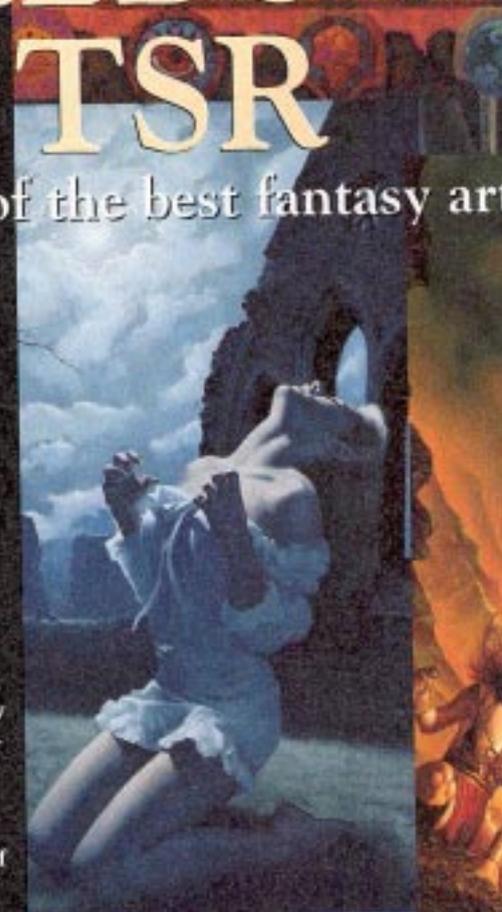
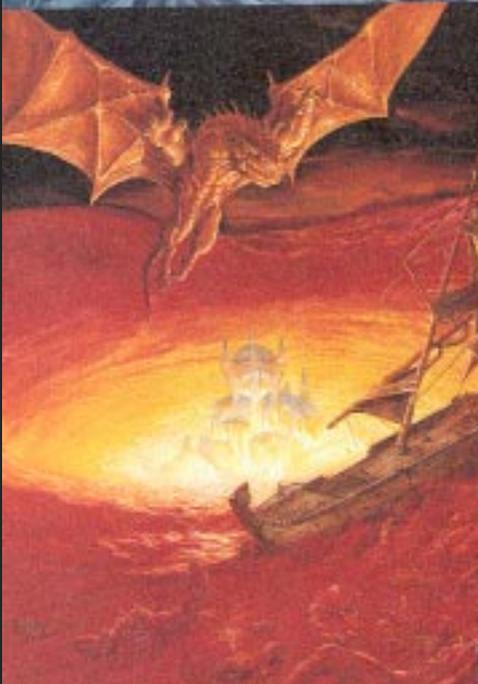
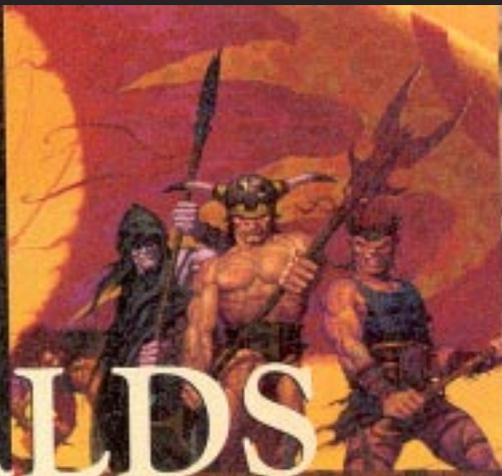
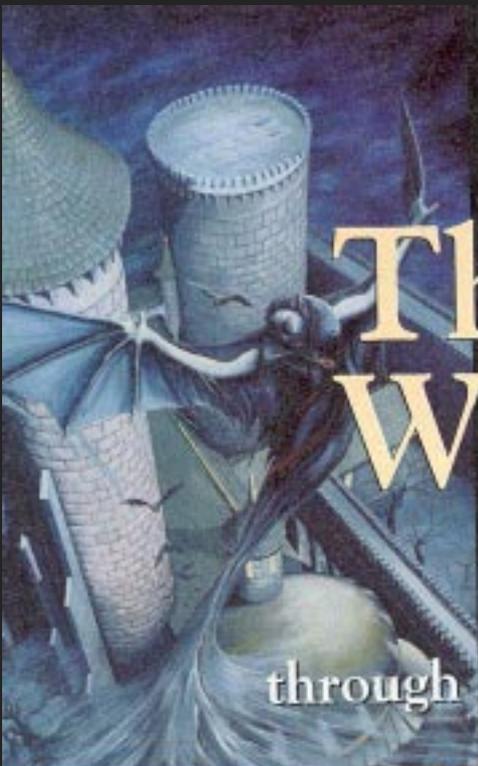
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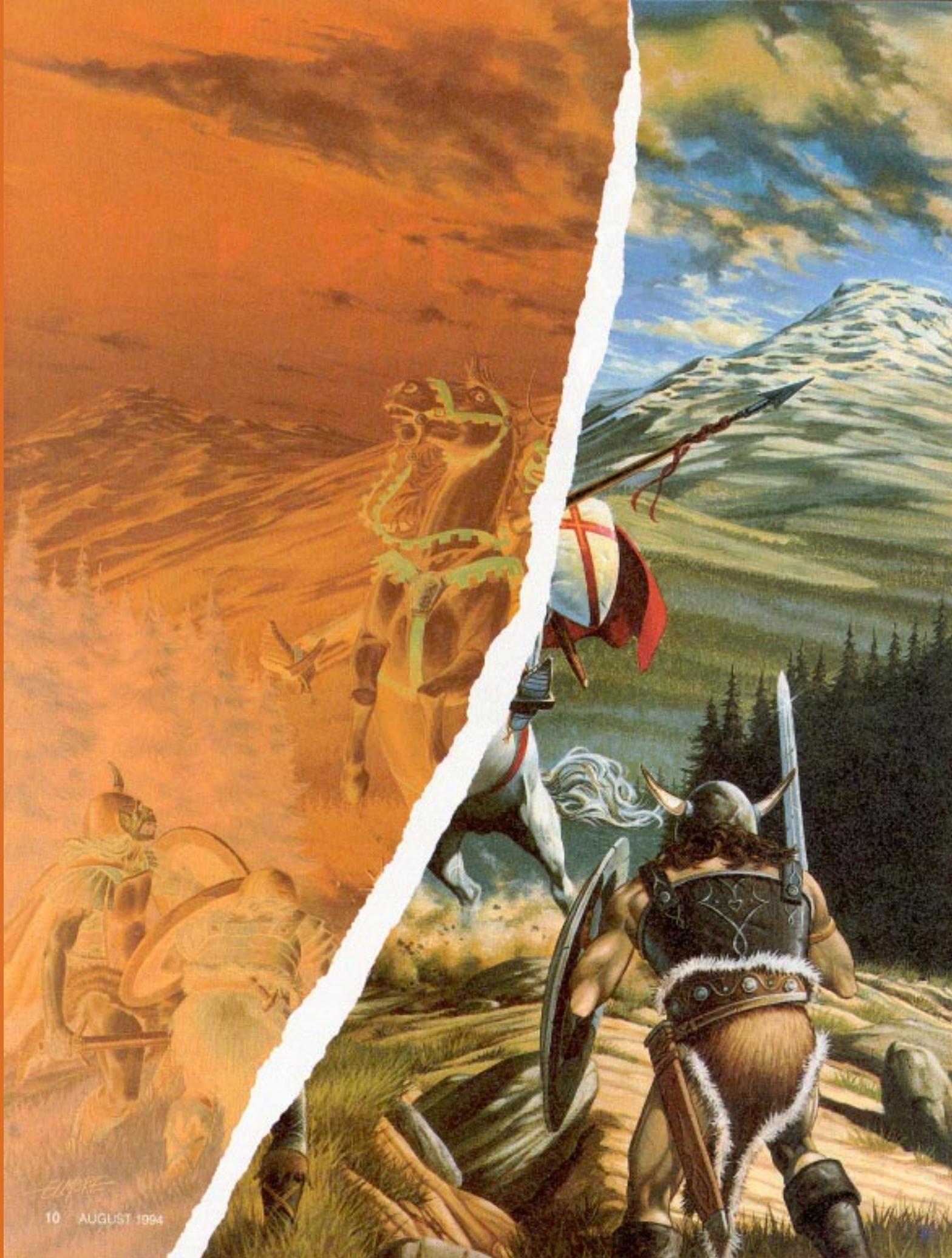
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# Right from the Start

A seven-step approach to starting a campaign

by **Eric Noah**

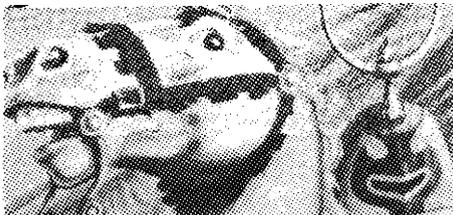
Artwork by Larry Elmore

When I was 10 years old and the D&D® game was a novel and mysterious pastime, starting up a new campaign seemed as simple as rolling up a few characters and “making a dungeon”, as I often put it. These “campaigns” were campaigns only in the broadest sense: series of adventures linked together only by merest coincidence. At that age, these adventures seemed quite marvelous, but as I and the

game both grew, the need to develop plot, character, setting, tone, and theme became strong in me. I began to see the game’s true potential as a creative outlet, for beyond hack-and-slash, beyond escape-from-reality, beyond act-out-your-favorite-book was the potential for a group of friends to create one grand tale after another. Woven together by the Dungeon Master from the players’ desires and char-

acters’ actions, and worked into the background of the campaign setting, these adventure stories become vivid tapestries that decorate our memories for years.

When it comes time to begin a new campaign tapestry, don’t let the creation of your campaign be solely “rolling up characters” and “making dungeons”. Presented here is a seven-step guide to starting a fantasy campaign.



## Research

Your first task is to take a look at the setting for your campaign. Have you been working on your own fantasy world? Are you a die-hard Realms fan? Have you been itching to try something new and different? This is your chance to explore all the possibilities. Even if you have access to only one setting, you still have a lot to work with: in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting for instance, you should consider every geographical feature, every country, and every city as potential gaming material.

Your job is to list the options. Start by listing each setting you have access to. For each of these, make a sublist of potential regions suitable for adventuring. Also make lists of possible character types that would work well in each setting. It is important at this stage to avoid deciding on one idea or area too soon; the more open your mind is to unusual options, the more possibilities you give your players to choose from.

*Example:* I have looked through all of my game-world materials and come up with the following lists:

The FORGOTTEN REALMS world:

The Great Desert

—PCs can be natives or outlanders

Waterdeep

—Undermountain is good source of material

—Perhaps an all-thief campaign

Moonshae Isles

—great Celtic flavor; superstitious natives

The DARK SUN® setting:

—Many variations and new rules

—PCs should start out as slaves

The DRAGONLANCE® campaign:

—Start either one year before the Cataclysm, or one year before the War of the Lance

## Survey

This important step frequently is never taken by DMs. They often forget that their players have desires, too, and should have a say in what kind of campaign is run. A simple survey, which can be run either formally or informally, can help generate this information. A formal survey might have prepared survey sheets, with lists of potential campaign settings, sub-settings, and character class and race options. An informal survey might simply involve the DM asking the players how they feel about trying this or that possibility. In either case, however, it is vital that the DM and the players discuss the results so that all is perfectly clear to all involved.

*Example:* I informally survey my players. Dave has had characters adventure in

Waterdeep before and feels he knows it to an unfair degree; he likes the idea of the desert-based game; the Moonshaes hold appeal for him because of the potential to be part of a slightly grittier, down-to-earth game; The DARK SUN world intrigues him, especially after I answer some of his general questions about it. The DRAGONLANCE campaign seems like a possibility for him, too.

Andy seems not to have any preference, except that he wants to play a bard PC.

Sandi, a new player, likes the description of the Moonshaes and the desert, but thinks the DARK SUN campaign would be too hard to understand and doesn't yet see the appeal of urban-based adventuring.

## Choose

All the votes are in, and now you must choose what the campaign is to be, based on the survey you conducted. In an ideal situation, a consensus will result and all players will be pleased with the choice. If you have no clear-cut choice, at least try to avoid a setting that any player absolutely hates.

*Example:* Since Dave seems eager to get back to his gaming roots, Sandi specifically says she likes it, and Andy wants to play a bard (and bards are popular there), I decide on the Moonshae Isles as the campaign's setting. With the research I did earlier, I decide that the starting location will be Corwell Town; it is well-described, down to earth, and a logical home base.

## Generate goals

Now that you know where things will happen, you have some more thinking to do. Take into consideration your wishes for the larger scope of the campaign, the desires of the players, and the features of the setting that make it unique, and then generate some goals for your campaign. These are not written in stone; in fact, consider them scribed in pencil: easily altered at your whim. At this point, focus your goals on how to help players achieve their desires, and on how to incorporate the unique features of the setting into the campaign.

*Example:* Based on what I know about the Moonshaes and my players, I generate the following goals:

1. The characters should have an opportunity to encounter bards, druids, firbolgs, superstitious Ffolk, and Northmen; the PCs should visit moonwells, Murloch Vale, and many of the isles of the Moonshaes; they should feel the effects of being rather cut off from the rest of the Realms.

2. Initial adventures should be kept relatively local, basic, and firmly rooted in reality in order to help teach Sandi the rules, give Dave a taste of nostalgia, and to allow a gradual transition from low-fantasy to high-fantasy later in the campaign.

3. Andy's bard character should have the chance to meet and work with other bards, practice the art of entertainment, and feel the effects of developing a reputation.

## Prepare materials

It doesn't seem fair that players should walk into the task of running believable characters cold. You can prepare them to play by creating a packet of information for each player. These packets, which should be distributed about a week before everyone gets together for the first time (see "The first session" below), can include:

—General maps of the region in which the characters will be adventuring. Hand-generated maps work best, as the DM then has control over the completeness and accuracy of the information presented.

*Example:* I draw a general map of the Isles and mark major cities, well-known features, and a trade route or two. I leave lots of blank space so my players can add to it as they explore. I also draw a rough map of Corwell Town, again with much blank space.

—General information on locations, inhabitants, religions, current conflicts, basic history, and hints for adventure.

*Example:* My packet's first page lists well-known traits of the Ffolk, the Northmen, firbolgs, goblinkind, and the breakdown of which PC races are available and in what proportions. The second page lists and briefly describes four major cities, three isles, and a nearby forest. The third page contains information exclusively on Corwell Town; government, products, people—all very generally described. Page four reveals the major religion of the Moonshaes, and how other religions are viewed. Page five shows a brief time line of events here. Page six has a list of legendary places or things that hint at the possibility of adventure.

—Limitations on class and race. Not all options are possible in all places. You might decide that PCs cannot be dwarves, or cannot be necromancy specialist mages. You also may have the desire to push certain classes or kits that are more appropriate to the setting.

*Example:* I decide that there are no restrictions for race selection, but that nonhuman races are relatively rare in many parts of the Isles and may be harassed. I also list the class possibilities (all basic classes permitted), potential problems each class might face (wizards are not trusted and in places are outright persecuted; priests of foreign religions are generally tolerated, at best), and generate lists of the kits I allow for each class, indicating the kits that are most common for native characters.

## The first session

This step involves the DM and the players working together to generate characters, go over rules, and get the campaign off to a running start. The whole group gets together and plans on spending the session getting ready for their campaign. This pre-game session includes a number of steps:

With the DM to oversee the proceedings

and answer questions or make suggestions, the players generate their characters based on the information from their information packets. The DM's job includes deciding on the ability-score generation method, keeping an eye on the dice rolling, and encouraging players to keep their characters' identities secret for now.

*Example:* Andy, Dave, and Sandi show up and we get down to business. As we chat, my players generate their characters according to the guidelines and restrictions presented in the packet each received last week. Andy's PC is a half-elven bard (blade kit), Dave's is a half-elven cleric/mage, and Sandi's PC is a gnome thief. I can tell this campaign will be fun.

The DM then discusses with each player information about the character, including class-, race-, and kit-specific rules, and to establish some background for the character. While this goes on, the other players are buying their characters' equipment and fixing up their character sheets.

*Example:* My conference with Andy includes discussion of the special abilities of the blade kit for bards, a quick review of half-elf abilities, and establishes the PC as a mysterious stranger to the campaign's base area. Sandi needs to know what her PC's thief abilities are good for. Dave needs some advice on selecting an appropriate deity. All these topics are covered in individual conferences.

The players introduce their characters to each other and the DM via a simple role-playing exercise. You can set up any situation in which the PCs are together in one place, and then let the players take over. You need to step in only when conversation starts to slow or when the players need some obvious information. Encourage active role-playing.

*Example:* I set up a situation in which all the PCs are in the common room of the boarding house where each has taken up temporary residence. I get them into the mood by describing the smells of a port-town mingled with aromas from the kitchen. I detail the common room, with its thick rugs and fireplace. I ask where each character is sitting in relation to each other. Then I let them go, free to talk in character about what brings them here, where they've been, and what they hope to accomplish. If things drag, I am prepared to play the part of the nosy old halfling woman who runs the boarding house.

As the session ends, wind things up with a briefing on the use of house and optional rules. Anything that deviates from a standard AD&D® game campaign should be explained carefully. House rules include things like critical-hit tables, new PC races or classes, or any other personal changes to the rules. Optional rules include training, encumbrance, "death's door", and many others. It's no fun when a player's plans are foiled just because of a rule she didn't know about.

*Example:* I quickly cover the optional

rules used in this campaign, and then introduce a new method for dealing with energy-drain attacks that makes them a little less devastating. I take any questions on these or other rules.

## Design

This step is what you've been waiting for: "making a dungeon". Now, however, you have so much more to work with than you would have if you'd created the first adventure before knowing your players' desires and character goals. As you design this important first adventure, make sure you keep in mind the following goals:

The adventure should include some unique features of the campaign setting. Don't make this a generic story; make it fit into the scheme of the region.

*Example:* Unique features that I can use in the first adventure include local attitudes toward magic use, a sylvan wood near town, and a local druid grove.

PCs should have a chance to meet some important permanent NPCs of the region. These NPCs are vital in making the setting seem like a real place where real people live and work, regardless of what weird situations the adventuring characters keep getting into.

*Example:* I decide that the first adventure will include meetings with the owner of the boarding house, the captain of the guard, and a rather unpopular local bard.

PCs should each be challenged according to ability. Making sure each character gets to play some vital role in the story is one of the key skills a DM must develop, and it will get your campaign off on the right foot.

*Example:* I include some sneaking and filching for Sandi's thief, some scamming and brawling for Andy's bard, and some magic for Dave's cleric/mage in this first adventure.

The adventure should set up possibilities for future adventures. Drop hints throughout the story of potential future story lines. Let NPC villains escape. Let PCs hear seemingly unimportant rumors in taverns. Let coded messages and phony treasure maps be found with the usual treasures. Your players will feel like they are part of a vibrant world and are helping create a vivid story.

*Example:* Though the meeting with the captain of the guard and the discovery of the counterfeit gold coins seem like side issues in this adventure, I know that I can use them in the future as hooks to new adventures.

If you follow these seven simple steps (and they really are simple), you and your players are well on your way to weaving a vivid, detailed tapestry of a campaign. Have fun!

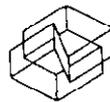
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10' tall, skinny, green, mean-looking, and, oh, yeah, I almost forgot, he needs to be climbing out of a crypt



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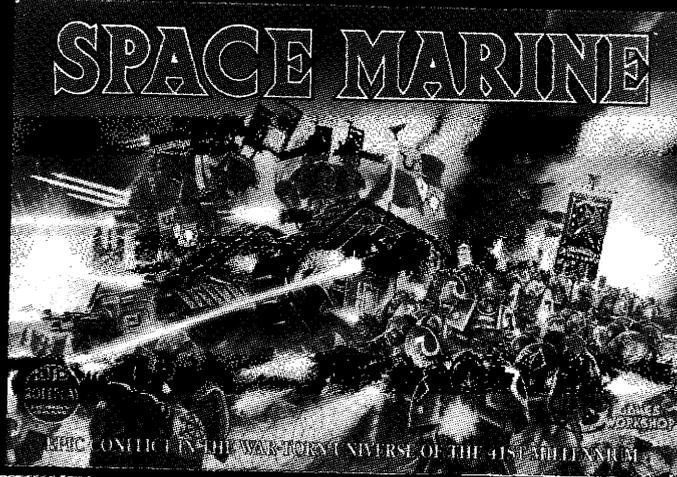
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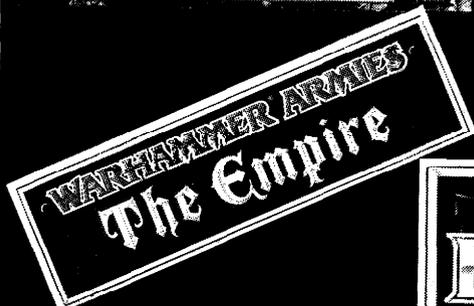
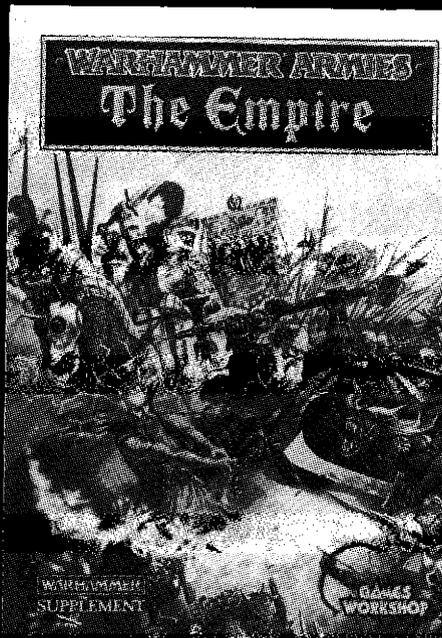
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# The Sound of Adventure

by Andria Hayday



August 1994 marks a turning point for one of TSR's oldest and richest game worlds: the MYSTARA™ setting. Originally created for players of the D&D® game, the MYSTARA campaign boasts well over a decade of development. Now this classic realm has an entirely new look and a new sound! This month TSR launches a MYSTARA product line for the AD&D® game, featuring adventures with stirring sound effects, character voices, and music on an audio compact disc (CD).

## The new MYSTARA setting

For those who have yet to explore it, the MYSTARA setting is a living, ever-changing realm filled with noble warriors, powerful wizards, crumbling castles, and mighty dragons. Its cultures resemble those of Europe around the 15th century, but with a distinctive fantasy flair. Heroes shape and define this world. In time, the bravest and the best may become Immortals, legends who live forever. The setting is vast; it covers an entire planet. At its heart lies the "Known World", a tightly knit tapestry of over 15 sovereign kingdoms—each with its own unique flavor, all fraught with political intrigue and ongoing struggles for glory and power.

The new MYSTARA line focuses on the

most popular kingdoms in this great setting, spotlighting each in turn by further developing its color and flavor. This tighter focus makes it easier and more exciting to explore the MYSTARA setting than ever before.

The first kingdom in the spotlight is Karameikos (kare uh MEE kohs), a classic medieval realm where knights take to the sky on griffons and explorers discover ancient secrets in its deep, haunted forests. Here's the MYSTARA product line-up for 1994:

**Karameikos campaign setting** (August, \$30). This deluxe boxed set offers an audio CD, two full-color poster maps, eight full-color hero cards, 12 parchment player props, a 128-page Explorer's Guide, plus a 32-page *Adventure Book*. Both books are lavishly illustrated in full color. The *Explorer's Guide* presents the people and places in Karameikos, and includes a whirlwind tour of surrounding lands. The *Adventure Book* contains two quests set in the wildlands of the north.

Like all 1994 MYSTARA adventures, both quests feature sound tracks digitally recorded on audio CD. The tracks are played one at a time—setting the stage for a particular encounter, showing the outcome of

a hero's actions, or painting a vivid "picture" of a key scene through sound. The CD doesn't take the DM's place; instead, it becomes tool that she uses to bring each part of the adventure to life. (Imagine having a sound engineer at your side during play!)

For the convenience of new AD&D game players, these quests (and the adventures described below) are compatible with the FIRST QUEST™ rules. That doesn't mean the FIRST QUEST game is required, however. If you own the AD&D hardcover rule books, you have everything you need to play!

**MYSTARA MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix** (August, \$18). Supplementing the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome, this 128-page, full-color book presents more than 100 wondrous and terrifying creatures unique to the MYSTARA setting, defined for the first time ever in AD&D game terms.

**Hail the Heroes audio CD adventure** (November, \$15). Heroes search for a hallowed artifact, racing against cunning rivals who intend to find it first! This adventure includes an audio CD packed with clues, a 32-page *Adventure Book*, four parchment sheets, and a color poster depicting a map the heroes find during their quest. (This adventure reveals part of the secret history featured in *Dragonlord of Mystara*, the first novel in a trilogy launched July, 1994).

**Night of the Vampire audio CD adventure** (November, \$15). In this test of wits, heroes must unravel a mystery to survive a night in a vampire's isolated mansion of terror. This adventure includes an audio CD, a 32-page *Adventure Book*, four parchment sheets, and a full-color poster-sized map of the mansion.

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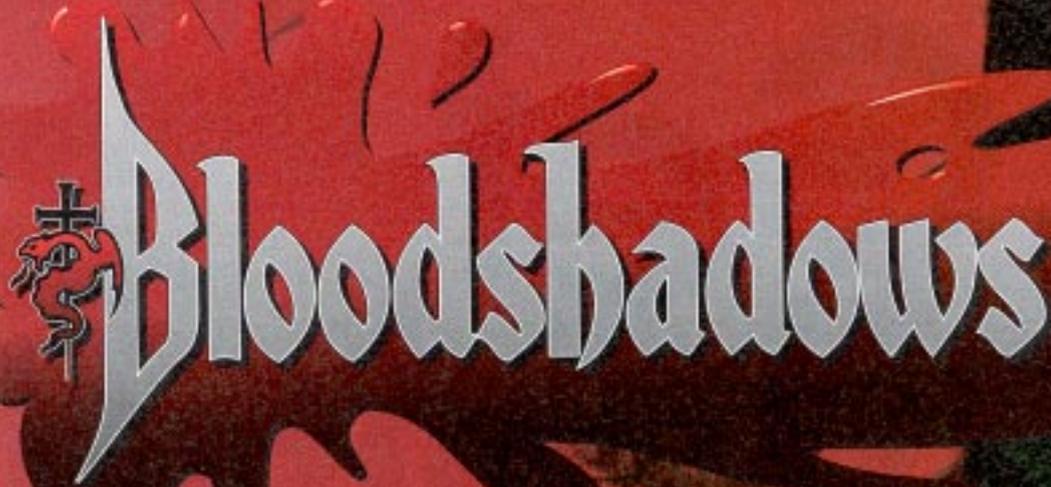


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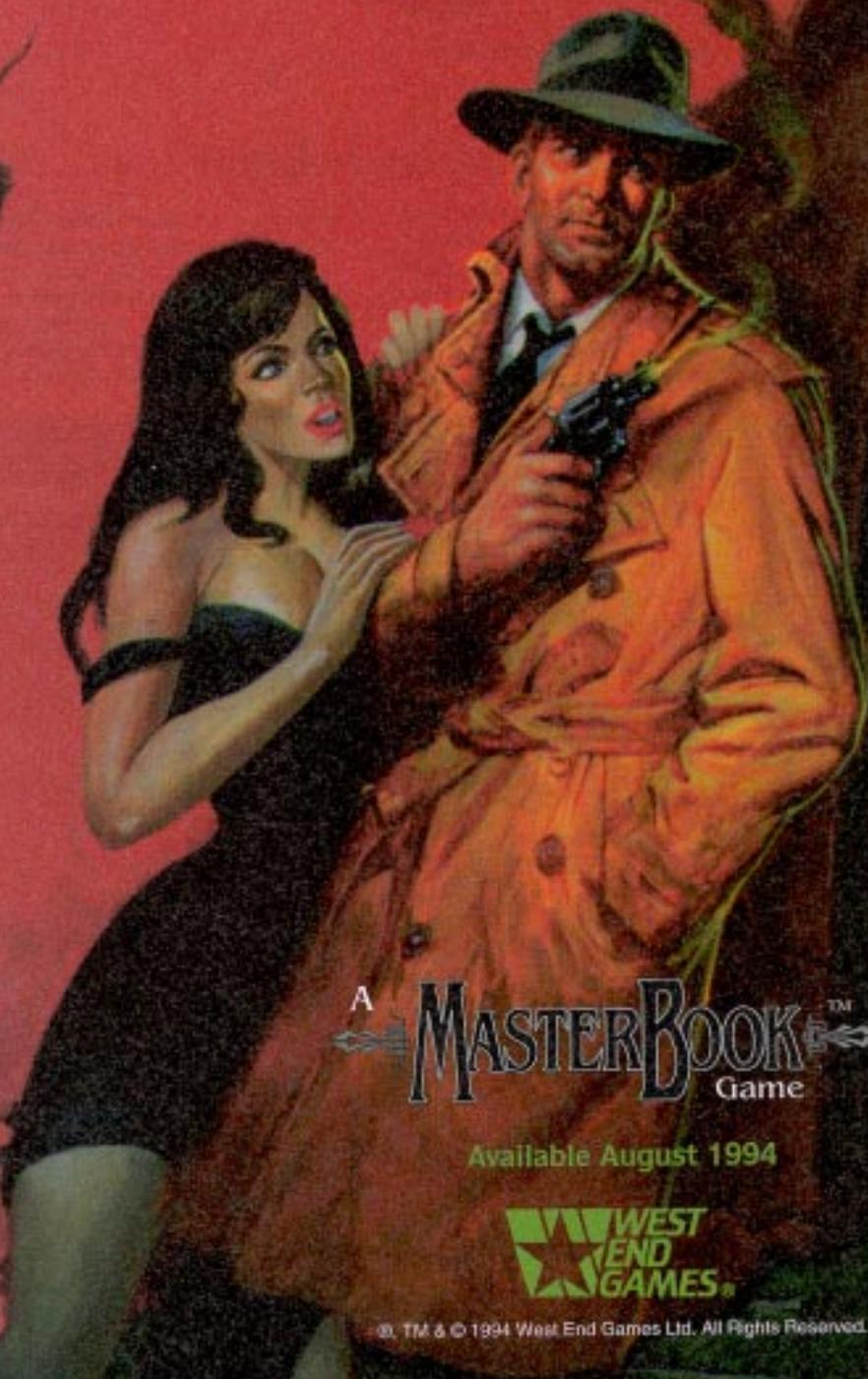
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# Get Motivated!

by Gregory Gledman

Artwork by Brian Durfee

## Another approach to character creation

The heart of role-playing isn't tough to find, it's in the name itself. At the core of the gaming experience is playing a role that is different from yourself in some respects, similar in others, and placing this new persona in an exotic locale or situation. Much of the fun in gaming comes out

of pretending to be this new person and seeing how this "other you" reacts to situations. It is this experience that made role-playing different than its war game antecedents. However, one of the pitfalls in gaming is that often, players become enamored of the locale rather than the

person, and what results is a step backward. The personality of the character becomes less important than whether or not she has an *ice storm* spell memorized which, to my mind, is putting the cart before the horse. It is the characters we play that separate RPGs from war games,



and it is the personalities of the people in a fantasy world (both PCs and NPCs) and their interaction with one another that makes the game fun, just as it makes the literature and mythology of the genre interesting. When we think of Middle Earth or Camelot, it is the characters who inhabit those settings that we remember.

## Motivations

The first step in creating a realistic character is easier than one would think. In analyzing characters, one classic question is “What does this character want (in this conversation, relationship, etc.)?” This question often reveals the core of a character. By starting with a want for your character, you can extrapolate reasons for that want, which leads to clues on motivation, background, desires, etc. By conducting an “interview” with the character and allowing yourself free license to make up answers where no clues are given a substantial amount of information can be generated. For example, a short interview with Hamlet during his “To be or not to be” soliloquy reveals certain things about his character and motivation:

What do you want?—I want to kill myself.

Why?—I’m failing my father by not killing his murderer.

Why don’t you kill him?—I’m not sure he’s guilty.

Why aren’t you sure?—It might mean my mother knew about the plot and had him killed, I’m not sure I want to face that.

Following a line of inquiry (especially when you can make up new facts to fit the answers as you go along as one can do in the character-creation process) can yield information about a character’s psyche, background, and motivation.

Motivations are a point of trouble in many campaigns. Usually, the only thought to motivation is a scant few seconds to consider the blank space next to “Alignment” on the character sheet—after which, the player can return to more important matters such as how she should spend her last 15 gp. Instead of this slipshod method, why not ask a simple question to the player, “Why does this person (the PC) want to be an adventurer?” The answer can be telling. The following paragraphs examine some basic motivations, with notes as to why they might exist in a given character and how a few questions can reveal the depths and origins of those motives.

## Greed

If most game PCs have a motivation, this is it. Adventurers are fascinated by treasure, going to great lengths to determine its location and risking their lives to acquire it. The flip side is that players rarely seem to be accumulating all this wealth for a purpose—it’s just there, to be spent upgrading one’s equipment to make it easier to get more gold, which will be

spent on further upgrading of equipment. In the real world, few people who aren’t Donald Trump live that way. Money is virtually always a means to an end, even if that end is to live comfortably.

So if the answer to “What do you want?” is “Money”, then the next question is “Why do you want money?” Sample answers could be to buy land, to finance a revolution, to live comfortably, to ransom King Richard so he can return to the throne, to buy the biggest art collection in all the Realms, etc. The next question would be (taking one of the above answers) why does the character want to finance a revolution? “Because my father was killed by the King’s guards.” This brings about a series of questions—why was he killed, what was your relationship with your father like, what did he do for a living, etc. So instead of a character who wants gold, we now have an individual who wants gold for a cause and is probably distrustful of authority figures (nobility in particular). Moreover, depending on the choices you make, this person could be very respectful toward his elders (especially men in the same age group as his father), and kind to children (especially orphans). As for the PC’s alignment, this character could be Chaotic Good—if the king is a vile despot, or Chaotic Evil—perhaps his father was an assassin—but this does not preclude his having a balanced personality.

## Duty

A common motivation for religious characters, duty is far from their exclusive province. After saying, “I adventure because I have a duty to (whatever)”, ask why does the character feel this sense of duty. What in the character’s history makes him feel that way? Is it his parents (there’s a reason “tell me about your mother” is a psychiatric cliché; it’s a good question), an event, a combination of events? Remember that people driven by duty are individuals, distinct even from people who share the same basic motivation they do. Duty can spring out of honor, love, or even fear, and by seeing what shapes the cause, we see the shape of the individual.

## Victim of circumstance

This is the person trapped into adventuring by circumstance—either they are chasing someone, they are being chased, or they are out to save the world. Even here, the right questions can yield results. Why are the characters being chased, and by whom? Why are they the ones who have to save the world? If there really is no other choice, how do they feel about it?

The most important part of this entire process is that there are no wrong answers. If the path of questioning you are following doesn’t yield interesting results, go back and change a response somewhere along the line, and follow the new direction. Think on your feet. You always can go back and discard what you don’t want.

An interview might look something like this:

Aaron has just rolled up a paladin character. His alignment is restricted to Lawful Good, limiting some of his moral choices, but as we shall see, even a character as restricted as a paladin can have depth.

Why do you adventure?—To right wrongs and defend the weak from the evil and powerful.

Why do you want to do that?—It is the code of our order.

Why do you like this code?—Because the paladins who follow it are respected by everyone.

Why do you want to be respected?—Because people have always thought that since I was strong, I was stupid.

Why is important to be thought smart?—I worked very hard as a boy in religious teachings and learned quite a bit. I didn’t like it when my work went unappreciated.

From this brief interview we can construct a possible character sketch for Aaron’s paladin, who we’ll name Theseus. Using the answers in his interview as an outline, we can then fill in the details:

Theseus’ order leans somewhat more toward neutrality than most, often siding with the common people against more powerful nobles. Still, they respect the established social hierarchy, and are trusted by most people in the kingdom. Theseus is insecure about his intelligence, and often can be found reading from whatever highbrow books he can get his hands on, usually theology, in order to quote them later (his memory for quotes is quite good). He is not the type of hero who rides into the sunset after a job well done—not, at least, before a healthy amount of thanks are given to him. He craves respect and is more easily gulled by flattery than a paladin should be. He craves respect, and will go to great lengths to obtain it, even risking his life. His bravery is questioned by no one, nor is his work ethic. He is somewhat single-minded about his tasks. He can come off as quite cold to those who don’t know him (he doesn’t feel comfortable around strangers, a result of his intellectual insecurity), but opens up considerably when with friends.

Obviously, other choices about Theseus could be made. Perhaps he isn’t shy around strangers, instead he overcompensates for his insecurity by being arrogant, or he’s bitter toward genuine intellectuals, etc. The above choices are just that—choices. It is by making these choices that three-dimensional characters can come into being in our imaginations.

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### **Bridle of equine control**

When this magical device is fitted onto any horse, no matter what its usual temperament, the horse immediately becomes docile and cooperative. The magic of the *bridle* suppresses any negative traits the animal would normally display, such as kicking and biting, stopping for no particular reason, or bucking unexpectedly. As long as the item is worn, the horse performs to the best of its abilities any tricks it knows, without the need of a proficiency check of any kind. Even when the mount is startled or frightened (including magically induced *fear*) the rider merely has to attempt to regain control of the animal to do so.

**XP value: 1,000**

### **Bridle of fearlessness**

Wearing this bridle increases an animal's Morale by 2d4+1 points. Loud noises, fire, smoke, and the sounds of battle never frightens a horse that is wearing this bridle. However, unless the animal is well-trained, this fearlessness also may result in the animal becoming uncooperative with its owner, an unwelcome attribute that may manifest itself in the form of any number of undesirable traits such as bucking or biting.

**XP value: 2,500**

### **Bridle of intelligence**

An animal wearing this bridle instantly gains 1d4+1 points of Intelligence, which may allow it to learn new tricks. However, unless the horse is on very favorable terms with its owner, it also instantly

develops a desire for freedom and will attempt to escape at first opportunity. Some of these bridles also (5% chance) bestow the ability to speak the Common tongue on the horse, which the owner will find extremely valuable, if he is good to the animal.

**XP value: 5,000**

### **Bridle of strength**

A horse wearing this magical bridle cannot carry any more weight than it normally would, but it can carry its normal maximum encumbrance (usually resulting in 1/3 normal movement rate) without suffering the usual penalties. Thus a mule could carry a full 500 gp and still maintain its normal unencumbered movement rate.

**XP value: 2,000**

### Feed bag of plenty

This magical feed bag provides an unending and nutritious supply of both bulk and concentrated foods, in the proper mixture, required for the daily consumption of the horse to which it is fitted. An animal given access to this item will need no other sustenance to remain strong and healthy, and neither will it require water intake of any kind. The *feed bag of plenty* provides for this as well.

**XP value:** 750

### Grooming kit of disguise

This collection of brushes, combs, sponges, and rags—all of which will fit into one side of any normal set of saddle bags—can be used once a day to completely change the outward appearance of any kind of horse. An entire hour must be spent grooming the animal with the contents of the kit, and upon completion the subject animal literally becomes another color—the overall markings will all be altered. The effects of the magic last for a full week, whereupon the animal's natural appearance slowly returns through the course of the eighth day. There is no limit to the number of times the kit may be used. The kit does not change the age, weight, height, or build of the horse.

**XP value:** 2,500

### Riding crop of speed

When applied by the rider, a horse moves at double its normal speed for one hour without suffering any detrimental effects. This magical item may be used

only three times a day, and any further use has no effect.

**XP value:** 2,500

### Riding crop of teleportation

This item may be used up to three times per day. When a command word is spoken and the crop is cracked against a horse's flank, the rider and her mount are instantly teleported up to 30 miles away from their present location.

**XP value:** 5,000

### Saddlebags of holding

These magical saddlebags can appear in any form or condition that any other normal pair would be found in, however, the *saddlebags of holding* open into a nondimensional space. The interior dimensions of the bag are larger than its outside dimensions. Regardless of what is put into either bag of this item, the saddlebags will always weigh a fixed amount. This weight and its volume limit are determined by making a percentile roll and consulting the table below:

d100 roll	Total weight	Volume per bag
01-70	100 gp.	30 cubic feet
71-90	200 gp.	70 cubic feet
91-00	300 gp.	150 cubic feet

If overloaded, or if sharp objects pierce it (from inside or outside), the *saddlebags* rupture and are ruined. The contents are lost forever in the vortices of nilspace, and there is a 10% chance that the other bag also will rupture as a result. Otherwise, it continues to operate normally.

**XP value:** 10,000

### Saddle blanket of comfort

A horse wearing this wonderful blanket never suffers from the effects of any kind of inclement weather. In the howling wind of a snowy mountain pass the animal will remain warm and dry; in the baking heat of a desert it will be cool and comfortable. Nonmagical hail stones will not cause the animal harm, nor will the biting sand of a desert storm. The item also conveys its effects upon the rider as long as she remains seated in the saddle; however, the magic does nothing to enhance either the horse's or the rider's vision during such extreme weather conditions.

**XP value:** 1,000

### Shoes of combat

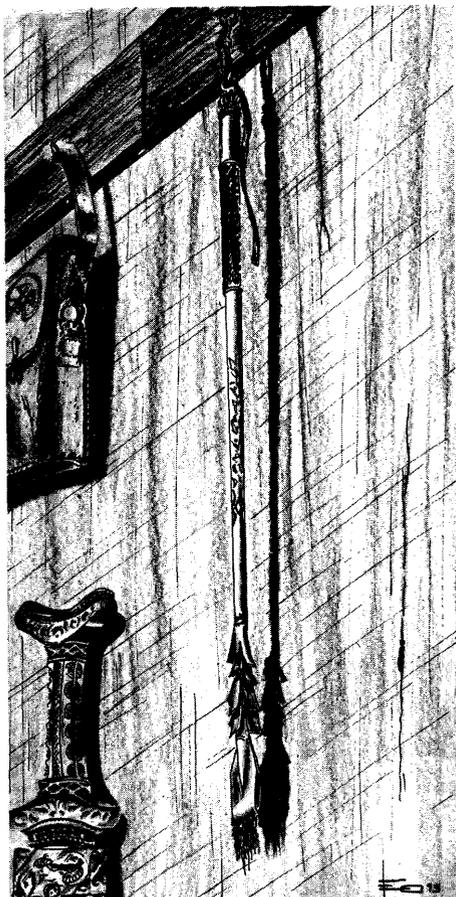
A horse wearing these shoes gains a +3 attack bonus with all hoof attacks. Successful strikes furthermore cause an enemy to take double the normal damage caused by such an attack. Also, if the enemy is humanoid, there is a 10% chance per successful strike that he will be knocked unconscious for 1-4 rounds.

**XP value:** 5,000

### Shoes of flame

Upon command of the rider, magical flames leap and dance about the hooves of the horse who is wearing these shoes, providing a very impressive sight.

In combat, the horse does an additional point of damage per hoof strike due to the flames and creatures of 3 HD or levels and lower must make a saving throw vs. spells or be affected by a *fear* spell equivalent to that cast by a 5th-level wizard. Furthermore, both the horse and the rider are



protected from fire in the same manner as if they were being affected by a *potion of fire resistance*. The rider's protection is in effect only while he remains in the saddle.

The magic of the shoes ensures the animal itself is neither injured nor frightened of the flames, but that does not stop other combustible items from bursting alight upon contact. Thus, it is an easy task for the rider to gallop about setting fire to the fields surrounding a village, or creating a raging brush fire on the plains to deter pursuit. (Though most good-aligned creatures would hesitate to take such destructive measures.)

**XP value: 1,500**

### Shoes of leaping

A horse wearing these magical shoes will be able to leap forward as far as 20' horizontally and 8' vertically provided the animal has a sufficient running start.

**XP value : 3,000**

### Shoes of flight

These shoes allow a horse, and its rider, to move through the air on command, at its normal speed (which may have otherwise been hampered by rough terrain and the like). Encumbrance still slows the animal accordingly.

These shoes also allow the horse and rider to *levitate* upon command at a vertical rate of 5' per round. Should the occasion ever arise that the horse falls for some reason, the shoes automatically activate a *feather fall* function that operates in the manner as a ring of that kind.

**XP value: 4,000**



### Shoes of obscurity

Once per day, these shoes cause the horse and rider to become *invisible* for up to three hours. In addition to this ability, the rider may command the *shoes* to bring forth an obscuring mist, smoke, or dust as appropriate, which appears to rise up from the ground around the animal until both the horse and rider are completely hidden. This function continues to work if the animal moves. Anyone attempting to track the rider with this ability in operation will suffer a -5 penalty on proficiency checks. The magic of the shoes also masks the scent of the horse and rider to some extent so that even canines suffer a -3 penalty on all die rolls when attempting to track a horse and rider so protected.

**XP value: 3,000**

### Shoes of protection

These magical shoes function in a similar manner to the *ring of protection* and are subject to the same restrictions—most importantly that they cannot be used in conjunction with magical barding. The rider gains no benefit to his own armor class when his mount is wearing these magical shoes unless otherwise noted. They are found in varying strengths, which can be determined on the table below:

#### d100 roll Level of protection

01-70	+1
71-82	+2
83	+2, rider also protected while in the saddle
84-90	+3
91	+3, rider also protected
92-97	+4
98-00	+5

**XP value: 1,000 per +1 bonus**

### Shoes of swimming

These shoes allow a horse to swim at a rate equivalent to its normal land movement. The shoes also confer the ability to stay afloat under all conditions unless the animal is over-encumbered.

**XP value: 1,500**

### Shoes of weakness

A horse wearing these shoes always acts as if it were fully encumbered, moving at 1/3 its usual rate and never being able to build up speed beyond a labored trot. The animal must furthermore rest for a full turn each hour regardless or collapse from exhaustion.

**XP value: Nil**

### Spurs of command

When worn, these spurs allow any rider to forego the usual proficiency check necessary to get their mount to perform certain specific tricks such as stopping, rearing, or walking backward on command. The mount automatically performs any such maneuver it has been trained for.

**XP value: 2,000**

### Trappings of displacement

This item appears to be a normal decorative cloth cloak for horses and can be found in a variety of colors, some even emblazoned with heraldic symbols and devices. The magical property of these items, however, is to distort and warp light waves. This displacement of light waves



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causes the horse and its rider to appear to be 1' to 2' from their actual position. Any missile or melee attack aimed at either of the two automatically misses on the first attempt. This can apply to first attacks from multiple opponents only if the second and successive attackers were unable to observe the initial displacement miss.

After the first attack the *trappings* afford only a +2 AC bonus, which also may be applied to saving throws for both the horse and rider against spells, gaze-weapon, spitting, and breath-weapon attacks, etc.

Note that 80% of all *trappings of displacement* are sized for warhorses, and the other 20% are sized for normal riding horses.

**XP value: 5,000**

### Trappings of the elvenkind

These *trappings* are made of a neutral gray cloth and are indistinguishable from ordinary *trappings* of the same color. However, when a horse is wearing it, this item enables the animal to be nearly invisible—as the *trappings* have a chameleon-like power.

Outdoors, in natural surroundings, the horse wearing the *trappings* is almost totally invisible. However, the horse will be spotted easily if violently or hastily moving, regardless of the surroundings. As well, if the horse's rider is not similarly clothed in a *cloak of the elvenkind* or some similar device, both will quickly give themselves away. See the chart for degrees of invisibility.

### Outdoors—natural settings only

Heavy growth	90%
Light growth	85%
Open fields	75%
Rocky terrain	75%

The *trappings* offer no protection indoors or underground, and the chances of concealment, even in natural settings, is significantly reduced because of the animals great size.

**XP value: 2,500**

### Trappings of protection

The various forms of these magical items all appear to be made of cloth and can be found in any color of the rainbow, decorated or not. Each magical plus of a *trappings of protection* betters the horse's armor class by one and similarly a bonus to all saving throws. To determine how powerful a given *trappings* is, roll percentile dice and consult the table below:

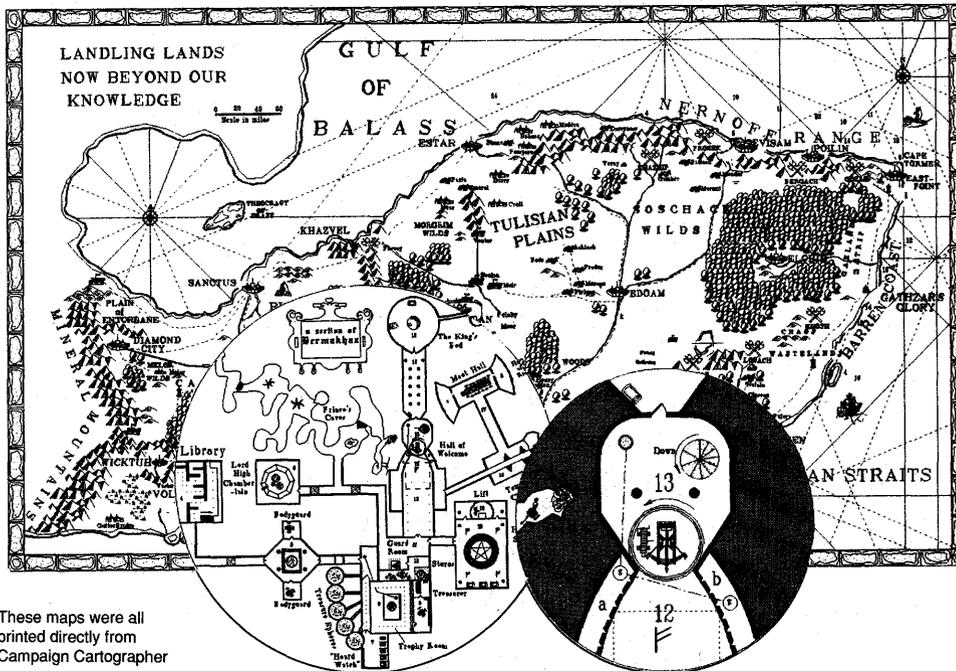
d100 roll	Power
01-35	<i>Trappings</i> +1
36-65	<i>Trappings</i> +2
66-85	<i>Trappings</i> +3
86-95	<i>Trappings</i> +4
96-00	<i>Trappings</i> +5

These devices can be combined with other items, such as normal armor and *shoes of protection*, but they do not function in conjunction with any sort of magical barding.

**XP value: 1,000 per +1**

Ω

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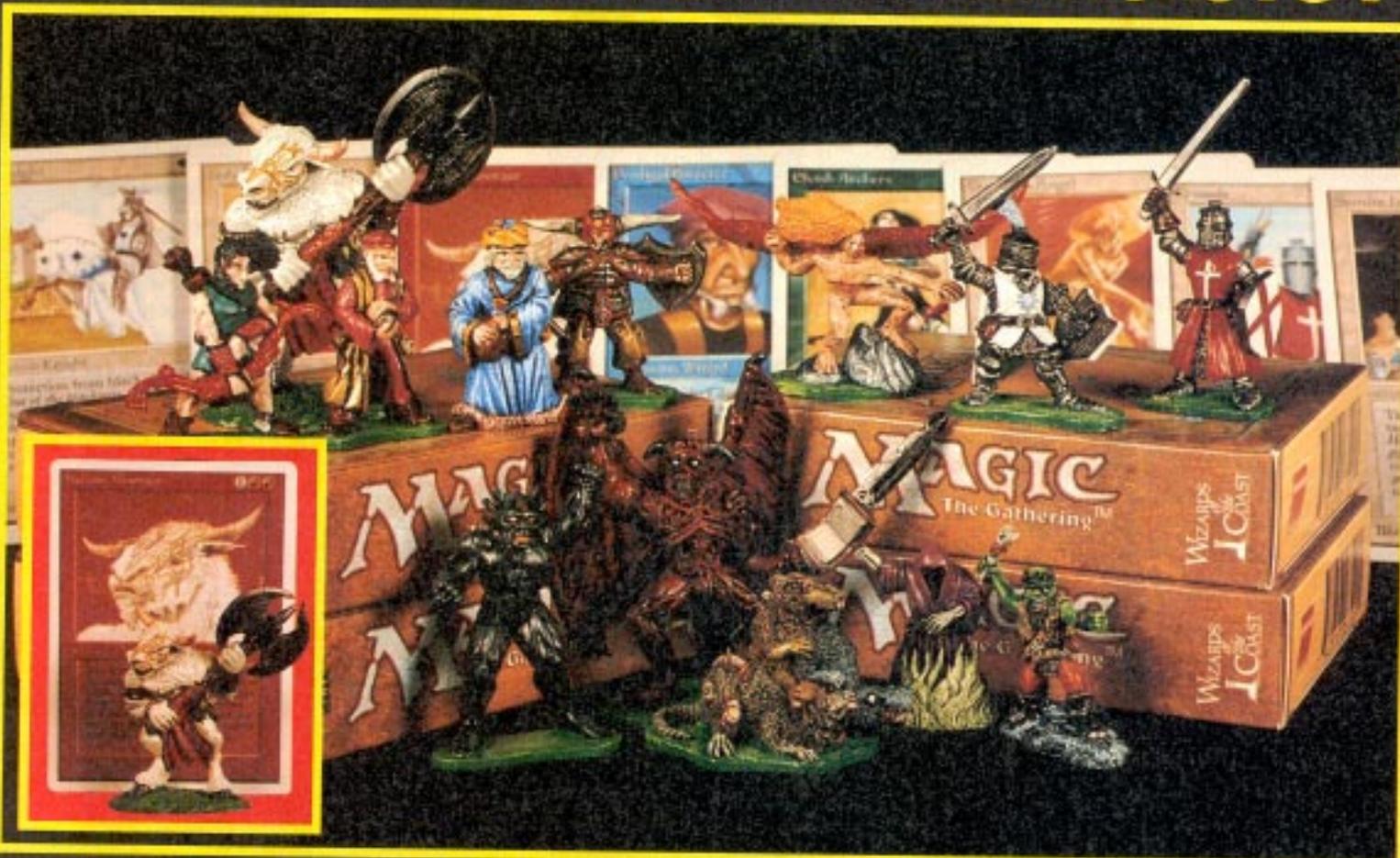
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## Pick and choose your

Any collection of people forms its own traditions, its own shared memories, and its own collective personality. This applies most strongly to tightly knit groups that face danger together, such as the typical adventuring party in role-playing games (RPGs). Failure to form such bonds can result in disaster when the group disintegrates in the face of the enemy. Therefore, in addition to the time they spend creating backgrounds and role-playing notes for their characters, gamers may devote some thought to the history of their party. This adds depth and flavor to the game. It may also save the characters' lives.

### History of the group

This article provides three lists of background possibilities for a group. The first covers the reasons how the party began. The second covers customs, rituals, and common practices. The third covers actual history that happened to the party. These tables, however, offer only a framework. The fun of inventing a group's history lies in making up the details.

These tables might explain that the party has a lifelong nemesis, but it is up to the players and the GM to determine what or who the nemesis is, where it lives, how the party ran afoul of it, and so on. This article only provides inspiration for things an adventuring group might experience. Players and GMs get to invent all the complexities of these events, deciding exactly how and why things happened, who played a role and what it all means for the group today. This gives the GM a chance to expand the players' knowledge of the world. It also gives everyone a chance to exercise creativity.

Everything this article does suggest can be seen in several ways. Simply because a group has a custom does not mean its members always live up to it. Simply because a group works for some powerful figure does not mean that she is their only patron. Each time players generate a new event, they get to decide how to integrate it into the story line.

### The GM's job

The GM should pay attention to every detail of a group's background. Party history offers instant adventure source material; for instance, the party's old



by  
Thomas  
Kane  
Artwork by  
Kevin Ward

# TEAM

# party's origins, customs, and history

friends and patrons may send the PCs on missions. The nature of those friends and patrons also helps shape what those missions might be. Adventurers accustomed to serving a chivalric nobleman end up in very different predicaments from those who work for a criminal mastermind. Bits of the party's past may return to haunt it, as the party's old enemies interfere with quests, or become the objects of quests themselves. These techniques make the game far more believable than such standard plot devices as having someone hire the party in a tavern. They also make the group's history palpable and of immediate import, encouraging role-playing.

Once PCs have friends, they naturally want to call on them for help. Some GMs can find it frustrating when adventurers try to pass part of their work on to others. However, when they are properly handled, NPC contacts provide a wonderful tool for advancing the plot. The GM can use these characters to provide background information and vital clues. This allows the GM to shorten the time spent in adventure introductions, getting the game started faster and encouraging players to pay more attention to details.

The GM also should remember that NPCs have their own motivations and roles in an adventure. One should not have the party's friends end up working for the opposition too often, because this simply leaves the PCs frustrated and alienated. However, NPCs may be misinformed. They may let their personalities color their advice, with eager warriors underplaying threats and pessimists overstating them. They may call on the PCs to take certain sides, thereby trapping the party in a conflict of loyalties.

## Creating the history

The remainder of this article consists of three lists of party characteristics: Group origins, Customs, and Group events, set up so that they can be used with percentile dice to randomly generate the facts of a party's history.

To begin the process of creating a party history, the players should choose a group origin by consensus or dice roll. Then, each player should pick either one custom or one group event for the party. (Players who desire may determine these items

with dice rolls.) The player should decide how his character was involved in this event. Then, all the players should collectively decide which customs and events relate to one another and how they affect the whole group.

In small groups, players may wish to choose two customs or events each.

Players may determine all information from these tables either through dice rolls or by conscious choice. Both methods have their advantages. By simply choosing events, customs, and motivations for a party, players may create exactly the sort of group they desire. Conscious choice also ensures a logical combination of events. However, random rolling can create quirky combinations of goals and events. The challenge of developing a story to accommodate these diverse results can bring out real creativity, resulting in a more complex and interesting story than one that is assembled more mechanically. The GM also may prefer random rolling if he fears that the players will choose only events favorable to themselves. The ideal solution may be to initially determine a group's background randomly, while retaining the option to reroll any clearly inappropriate result.

Note that these tables can be used to generate a history for a party in an existing campaign or for a group just setting up a game campaign.

## Origins

First, players should determine how the party came together. This information sets the tone for the rest of the group's events and customs. The GM may want to choose a group's origin in order to fit the sort of campaign he wants to run. However, a party does not have to follow its original purpose throughout its entire existence. Coming up with reasons why a party changed its mission provides yet another way of defining the spirit of the group.

The following list gives likely ways for a group to form. The party or GM may either choose one, using this list for inspiration, or roll one randomly with percentile dice.

**01-05 Ancient order.** The party is an arm of some age-old society, such as the ninja, the Masonic Orders, or the Chinese Triads. This society may have widespread

influence, or it may be a tiny local cell. Players should pick a theme for the society. Typical ancient orders serve as fraternal brotherhoods for followers of a religion, members of a profession, adepts of some mystery (such as magic use or a specialist school of magic), or a group that bands together for self-protection against a common enemy. Most ancient orders have elaborate initiations, passwords, codes of honor, and other rituals.

**06-10 Barroom buddies.** The PCs are all patrons of a certain bar (or other social establishment) and occasionally undertake daring deeds together, either for money or to help mutual friends. Adventuring parties of this nature have become a cliché. However, they can be interesting to play if the characters give thought to such questions as why their particular characters happen to stick together and how they each ended up in this position. This type of party origin works well in a game with a lighter theme, where most scenarios are built around buddies trying to get one another out of assorted scrapes.

**11-15 Chance companions.** The PCs barely knew each other before beginning their adventuring careers; they met only by accident, or because some employer assembled them from far and wide. This meeting may have taken place long ago, and the group may now have some structure. Nevertheless, PCs may not like each other, and some may have secrets from the rest of the party. All members of this sort of group should pay attention to developing individual character histories.

**16-20 Conspiratorial clan.** The PCs have a secret political goal. They wish to depose a powerful enemy or to seize power in some institution. They may conspire against a government, a mercantile guild, an organized crime figure, a wizard, or any other powerful person.

**21-25 Destiny's chosen.** Some seer or prophet identifies the PCs as chosen ones for some quest. This may involve either protecting folk from some legendary peril, or it may involve a quest on behalf of some religion. Mythology provides numerous examples for this sort of campaign. The *Belgariad* series by David Eddings is an example from contemporary fantasy fiction.

**26-30 Disciples.** The party serves

# SPIRIT



some religion, sorcerer, prophet, philosopher, or instructor of the martial arts. This does not mean the PCs must have homogeneous alignments, personalities, or abilities. Each disciple may follow this spiritual leader in an individual way.

**31-35 Family ties.** The PCs are all related to one another. Their family is either a noble house with political and military interests, or a close-knit clan like those of the Middle East or Appalachia, one that takes care of its own. In either event, the adventurers go on their quests to help other family members, avenge family dishonors, and increase the house's fortune.

**36-40 Kingpin's henchmen.** The PCs are henchmen of a powerful figure in organized crime. This patron uses them as muscle and to acquire items she desires. Many of the PCs serve this figure for money or out of fear. However, these organizations also may have an ancient tradition of honor, like that of Japan's yakuza.

**41-45 Order of honor.** The party is a branch of a chivalric order, dedicated to brave deeds on behalf of some cause. This cause may be a holy crusade, a wizard's

quest for knowledge, an oppressed race's quest for justice, or a people's drive for freedom.

**46-50 Mercenary brotherhood.** The party organized itself for the purpose of undertaking dangerous tasks for money. Not all mercenary brotherhoods are alike. Some may be as avaricious as their name implies. Others can consist of honorable people who simply happen to pursue a warrior's profession. The *Oathbound* and *Oathbreakers* books by Mercedes Lackey describe a mercenary sisterhood of the latter nature.

**51-55 Merchant's agents.** The party works for a business of some sort. PCs may have the task of carrying valuable cargo to markets in distant lands, such as those visited along the historical Silk Road. Merchants may dispatch the party to explore unknown territory, looking for resources or potential trading partners. Alternatively, the merchants may employ PCs in urban intrigues against criminals, interfering governments, and rival businesses.

**56-60 Noble retainers.** The party pledges fealty to some lord or king, and carries out forays against the liege's ene-

mies or quests on behalf of his honor. The model of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table immediately comes to mind. Alexander Dumas' *Three Musketeers* presents an example of noble retainers in a different setting.

**61-65 Roguish band.** Most people view the party as pirates or bandits. The PCs live in some secluded area, surviving by their strength and their wits. They may see themselves as guerrilla freedom fighters, like numerous bandits from Chinese legend. PCs in such a campaign also may come from a savage culture that considers banditry a legitimate profession, such as many of the Central Asian nomads. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, listed piracy along with agriculture and trade as one of the primary ways for a city to sustain itself. Robin Hood, of course, provides another example of a heroic bandit in literature.

**66-70 Secret agents.** The party consists of spies operating on behalf of some criminal, merchant, or foreign government.

**71-75 Strangers in a strange land.** The PCs belong to a race or culture that is foreign in the campaign. They might be Westerners in an Oriental campaign, dwarves in a human kingdom, half-orcs in an elvish kingdom, worshipers of a good deity in an evil land, supporters of a disgraced nobleman, or misfits of any other type. Some PCs may represent members of the dominant group who, for whatever reason, have befriended the majority of the party.

PCs in this sort of party find the outside world hostile at worst and mysterious at best. They must rely on one another. They may have entered the region together on some errand, or they may have met once they arrived, perhaps through some family or mutual aid society. A party of this sort may face adventures to escape persecution, slavery, lynch mobs, or false accusations. People in the government or criminal organizations also may see them as ideal undercover operatives, because they are expendable and because, as outsiders, they should have no previous loyalties to local political figures.

**76-80 Training cadre.** The PCs hope to become operatives for some powerful wizard or other patron. First, however, they must prove their skills to her. The party undertakes whatever adventures it can to hone its abilities and showcase its talent.

**81-85 Veterans.** The PCs survived a war or great disaster together. They owe each other their lives. Now, they are finding it difficult to return to normal life, both because of the intensity of their experience together, and because society has no place for them. Therefore, they remain together, and seek gold and glory where they can find it.

**86-90 Wanderers.** The party cannot remain in one place. Perhaps it has a long quest (chosen from some other entry on this list) that forces it to travel the length

of a continent or more. Perhaps the PCs simply feel wanderlust. In either event, the party passes through many lands. It must occasionally stop to support itself along the way, and the jobs such vagrants find may often be dangerous ones.

**91-95 Wizard's servitors.** The PCs are servitors and apprentices of a powerful wizard. They search after magical secrets for her, and perhaps take a role in wizardly politics.

**96-00 Would-be heroes.** The PCs want fame and glory. They will undertake any quest to obtain it. Would-be heroes have an obvious value in a comic campaign. However, they need not be seen as buffoons. Dumas' *Three Musketeers* could fit this role during the early stages of their career, as could many other heroes in fiction.

After establishing a group's origin, players must determine how long the group has worked together. This need not have anything to do with the experience levels of the characters. Inexperienced adventurers may have spent long, dull years together before actually seeing danger. If they work for merchants, town councils or even the armies of peaceful nations, they may have hoped to continue this stable career indefinitely. High-level adventurers, on the other hand, may have developed their skills rapidly, or may have joined the party late in their careers, after leaving other adventuring groups. (Players who develop details on those groups too make the game even richer.)

Those who wish to determine the age of a party randomly should assume that the typical group has operated for 1d10 years—but do not treat a roll of "0" as ten. If a "0" appears, roll 1d12 to determine the number of months a group has operated.

## Customs

Every party has customs. These range from dangerous and highly symbolic initiations to unofficial traditions such as chugging dwarven brews at the Sign of the Clover inn. Customs may develop as the consequence of major events in the group's history, or they simply may be ideas that caught on. Players assigned to develop group customs should consult with players developing group events, in order to draw realistic connections between the two.

**01-03 Anthem.** The group has a trademark song or ballad. It may sing this piece at appropriate times, such as before setting out on a journey. Should a bard at an inn happen to perform the group's anthem, the PCs may see this as a good omen, a call to general merrymaking, and a reason to tip the musician heavily. A poetically inclined player, ideally one playing a bard character, might actually compose this piece.

**04-06 Badge of honor.** Some or all members of the group have medals, tattoos, coats of arms, or other symbols

commemorating a heroic deed in the group's past.

**07-10 Charismatic leader.** A powerful character leads the group by virtue of general respect, luck, and force of personality. The party should assign one PC this job. This does not mean that PC needs to make all the decisions, or that the others need to obey him. It merely indicates that the party thinks of him as its leader.

**11-13 Code of chivalry.** The party honors some code of ethics. This may be knightly chivalry, a code of honor like that recognized by Japan's yakuza, or simply a few principles. The party may wish to write down basic tenets of the code of honor early in the game. This prevents long arguments about the meaning of the code. Briefer arguments can add to the role-playing as long as they concern things the *characters* would debate.

**14-17 Constructive anarchy.** The party firmly resists any attempt to lead it. This may stem from some former dictatorial leader, or it may simply be group preference.

**18-20 Cover occupation.** The party pretends to do something mundane for a living. This may include serving as couriers, guards, or wagoners while on the road, or perhaps in owning a small store.

**21-23 Cutthroat competition.** The social atmosphere in the party is exclusive and demanding. Everyone wants to stand above the others, and everyone wants the biggest share of booty. If a firm leader supervises this group, the competition may simply hone the group's edge. Otherwise it can cause conflict.

**24-26 Division of spoils.** The party has a firm policy on dividing any loot found adventuring. Players can invent such a system themselves.

**27-29 Duels.** The group settles internal conflicts by ritual combat. Depending on the party's choices, this may be to first blood, to the death, or to any other point. Party members also should consider what weapons are allowable and under what circumstances PCs would fight each other.

**30-32 Exclusive membership.** Officially or unofficially, the group is selective about its members. Old adventurers treat newcomers with suspicion and judge them carefully to see if they meet group standards. Group members may divide themselves into a distinct pecking order. Those at the top of the order get first pick of treasure and other benefits.

**33-35 Grognard.** The party considers grumbling its favorite pastime. Group morale actually may be high, but adventurers still like to complain. Favorite topics for complaints may include certain meddling authorities, food, living conditions, and so forth.

**36-38 Initiation.** The group requires an initiation for membership. This can be a boisterous night at a tavern, a brief blessing from a priest, a dunking in the fountain, a practical joke, a period of hazing, or an elaborate ordeal with secret

rituals and dangerous tests.

**39-41 Internal court.** The group has an internal tribunal for settling disputes. The PCs should decide how their tribunal makes decisions and who serves as its judges.

**42-44 Institutional leader.** The group has a formal leader who serves as its spokesperson and makes decisions. Players must decide how they pick their leader and who she is. Note that the other PCs do not necessarily respect this leader.

**45-47 Mascot.** The group has a pet or possibly a young follower as a mascot.

**48-50 Meeting place.** The group traditionally assembles at a particular tavern, private fortress, or other meeting place.

**51-53 Motto.** The group has a motto, be it humorous or deadly serious. A player should make one up.

**54-56 Official history.** The group keeps a log of its adventures, either for record-keeping purposes or in order to relive and immortalize its exploits. Some player should keep a genuine log. The entries in this log, of course, may reflect the viewpoint of that player's character.

**57-58 Password.** Group members identify themselves with some ritual code or identification measure.

**59-61 Party democracy.** The party makes decisions by formal votes and strict majority rule.

**62-64 Patron deity.** The party pays homage to one or more deities. Different parties approach religion in different ways. A circle of knights may devote themselves to extreme piety and holy quests. A band of buccaners may give a laughing nod to gods of the sea or of thievery.

**65-67 Quotation.** Some PC or NPC once said something that the group now uses as a watchword. The quotation can be a serious piece of advice, a half-serious reminder ("Remember, hero, do not forget to wipe thy sword"), or a joke. A quotation also may be something that the speaker did not intend to be memorable, but which struck people as funny or significant at the time. Parties may develop many quotations during play.

**68-70 Racial pride.** The party consists mainly of members of one particular race or nationality. These characters take pride in that. They may express this pride as camaraderie, or as prejudice against others of different races or nationalities.

**71-73 Racial tolerance.** The party enforces strict equality and cooperation between races, whether individual members like each other or not.

**74-76 Ritual.** The group performs some ritual on regular occasions. This can range from blessing the bodies of the slain to observing the festival of a certain god to celebrating the end of a journey with drinks at a certain tavern.

**77-79 Rivalry.** The party has a rival. This may be another mercenary squad, an arrogant nobleman, a mischievous sprite, or any other adversary. The rivals are not likely to fight a battle; instead, they strive

constantly to outdo one another, and to make their opponents look foolish.

**80-83 Secrecy.** The group keeps its existence and its activities a dead secret.

**84-86 Share and share alike.** The party holds some or all possessions in common. The party leader or a general vote determines who gets to use powerful enchanted items.

**87-89 Taboo.** The group honors a prohibition of some sort. This can be a practical regulation, such as a ban against drinking before battle, or something esoteric, such as the Greek mystic and mathematician Pythagoras' commandment that his followers eat no beans.

**90-93 Tattoo.** Some or all members have a tattoo emblematic of the group.

**94-96 Tithe.** All group members must contribute a certain percentage of their income either to some respected cause or to a fund for buying things the party requires.

**97-00 Trademark.** Group members have a distinctive weapon, spell, garment, or other trademark.

### Group events

A group's past defines its present. Items from the following list give the party friends and enemies, contacts, and unfinished business. Therefore, the GM must provide approval and background detail for all these events. Group history also indicates the way party members see the world. Survivors of a disaster may struggle to avoid making similar mistakes, or they may squabble among each other, trying to assign blame. A party split by factions may feature politics and feuding, or it may insist on strict unity to keep the factions at bay.

To decide when an event occurred, the player who determined the event should roll 1d10. The event occurred during this year of the party's existence. If the roll for when an event occurred exceeds the age of the party, roll again.

**01-04 Abandoned quest.** The group gives up one of its major undertakings due to unbeatable odds, a dispute with its patron, or a more pressing duty. Depending on circumstances, this action may have injured the party's reputation. Some PCs also may harbor a determination to return to the abandoned quest and complete it.

**05-08 Attrition.** The party is enduring lean times. It has lost too many battles and has little to do. Old members gradually drift away. Those who remain hope to reverse their fortunes.

**09-13 Business interests.** The party acquires an interest in a merchant caravan, a craftsman's shop, or other money-making enterprise. If the party's business makes a profit, PCs can expect a stipend. They may have to defend their business from enemies, or to personally take cargoes of valuable goods to distant markets.

**14-17 Change of purpose.** The party changes its collective purpose midway through its career. Consult the Origins list

a second time; then decide on a reason for the change. For example, when a powerful lord loses a war, his trusted knights may find themselves recast in the roles of bandits. Wandering mercenaries may pick up a permanent job. When combinations make no sense, feel free to keep rolling on the Origins list, but even the strangest switches of purpose sometimes can be fitted into a story line.

**18-21 Contacts.** The party develops an NPC friend. This friend may be anyone or anything the players and GM desire, but typical examples would be priests, criminals, innkeepers, sages, guardsmen, servants in some household, wise old peasants, and young knights.

**22-25 Criminal patron.** The party makes a brief or extended excursion into organized crime. This leaves PCs in contact with one of the powerful figures in the underworld. This patron may prove a useful ally or a rewarding source of work. However, should the party cross its criminal patron, he will find a way to punish them.

**26-29 Debt.** The party goes into debt. Typical reasons include healing injured companions, purchasing a ship, castle, team of horses, or other valuable possession, paying ransoms, and buying forgiveness from underworld figures.

**30-33 Desertion.** A prominent character abandons the party. The reasons can include cowardice, treason, personality conflicts, conflicting loyalties, or sheer accident. The GM may introduce this deserter as either an enemy or an unexpected ally in future adventures.

**34-37 Disastrous battle.** The party suffers a terrible defeat. Reasons include overwhelming odds, treason from within, inability to organize, a foolish plan, the disfavor of the gods, or simple bad luck.

**38-41 Disgraced.** The party's bad luck or dishonorable dealings bring it disgrace.

**42-45 Enemy.** The party makes a bitter enemy. This may be a monster, a political figure, a rival adventurer, a criminal, or any other worthy foe.

**46-49 Epic journey.** The party undertakes a great journey, leading it through regions known only in legend. It may have returned from this journey, or its current location could have been the destination. If the epic journey involved some noble deed, the PCs may have earned some fame.

**50-53 Factionalism.** The party divides into cliques. These may be rival political groups, or they may simply be groups of friends. Decide which PCs belong to which faction and why.

**54-57 Fortunate omen.** A priest, hermit, fortune-teller, or professional wizard predicted great things for the party. Decide who interpreted this omen, how the party happened to go to him, and what sort of good fortune the party might desire.

**58-61 Fugitives.** The party offends some priest or lord either through bad

luck, repeated failures, or crime. PCs now must escape from their new enemy. If the party does not flee to another land, its members must live as outlaws.

**67-70 Heroic deed.** The whole group or one PC performs a heroic deed, attracting great support from the people. Heroic deeds include killing legendary monsters, saving lives, and performing great acts of charity.

**71-75 Leader's rise.** A member of the party ends disorganization and factionalism by seizing control and providing strong leadership. Choose which PC fills this role.

**76-79 Leadership struggle.** Two or more PCs both consider themselves the party leader. They may resolve this dispute amicably, but are more likely to argue over every difference of opinion.

**80-83 New member.** A new member joins the group. The party may give this person either a warm or a cautious reception, depending on the newcomer's nation and on previous events.

**84-87 Patron killed.** Someone murders the party's chief employer. The party may or may not be under suspicion. In any event, PCs must re-establish themselves.

**88-91 Rescue.** The party saves the life of a noble, a priest, a mysterious sorcerer, a creature, or another NPC. Alternatively, someone else might rescue the party. In either case, memories of the incident remain. Unscrupulous saviors might use the rescue as an excuse to demand favors from the people they saved.

**92-95 Royal patronage.** A king or other ruler decides to make use of the party's services.

**96-00 Sacrificed member.** The group sacrificed one of its own members, trading him as a slave or as a meal to some monster, leaving him behind in a perilous battle, or setting him up to take the blame for some crime.

Remember that these lists are only the starting point in determining why a party adventures together. The rest of the work must be accomplished by a GM and players who are willing to make the most of their shared campaign.

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# BEHIND THE SCENES



The making of the PLANESCAPE™ setting

by Dori Hein

Artwork by Dana Knutson



**I**n March of this year, TSR, Inc., launched a new campaign for the AD&D® game: the PLANESCAPE™ setting. By now, reviews have been published, more products have been released, and word-of-mouth has spread, so this article's purpose is not to introduce you to the wonders of the product line. This article's purpose is to give you a behind-the-scenes look at how the PLANESCAPE setting developed—from idea to boxed set and beyond.

The creation of a new product line here at TSR takes a lot of effort—particularly a creation the magnitude of this setting. I'm not talking just the design and editorial staff either; no, the creation of the PLANESCAPE campaign truly was a company-wide endeavor at TSR. As the Product Group Leader during the inception of this line, I had the opportunity to work with every department of the company. This article is meant to give you, the reader, a glimpse of some of the people at TSR who aren't well known, or who exist

to you only as a name tucked away in the credits, and to recognize those people's efforts.

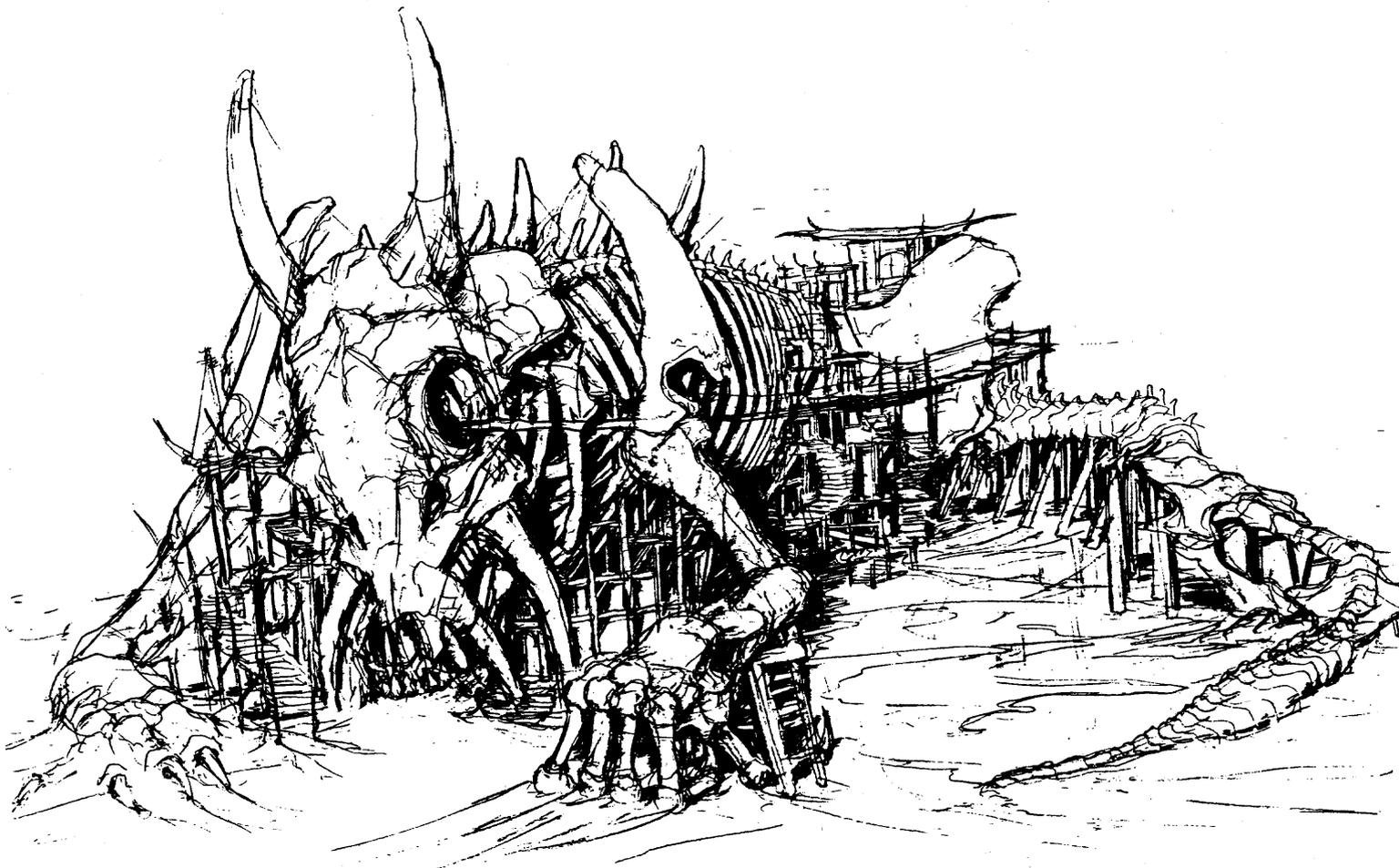
### **In the beginning**

First, there was Jeff Grubb, who wrote the original *Manual of the Planes* for the AD&D 1st Edition game. Although an exciting product, it wasn't translated into the AD&D 2nd Edition rules. I remember eagerly purchasing the *Manual* back when I played the 1st Edition game and longing to bring my gamers into the planes. The book was fascinating reading, for I loved mythology and the grand majesty of all the planes, but—try as I might—I couldn't create an adventure without killing all my players' PCs. So, regretfully, I put the book aside. I went on to other things and joined TSR back in 1991.

Then, at one of TSR's annual "come-up-with-new-ideas" meeting, Slade Henson proposed the idea of "Planescape"—a product line based on adventuring in the

planes. I immediately voiced my enthusiasm, and Slade talked to Jeff to find out if he was interested in reworking the *Manual of the Planes*. The three of us worked up a proposal for an entire game line. We wanted our idea to be something new and big, not just a one-shot product. Unfortunately, the proposal was shelved for a year or so. But the idea wouldn't die, and quite a number of people kept bringing it up in subsequent meetings. Although the line bears little resemblance to the original proposal, the name still stands. Kudos to Slade for a name that so rightly captures all the glory of the planes.

Due to the luck of the scheduling draw, the first boxed set went to neither Jeff nor Slade to design. (It's a complicated thing to plan for an entire year who gets which product to design or edit. It's Bruce Heard who handles that thankless task here at TSR.) David "Zeb" Cook was the lucky designer, and he had all of six months to design an entirely new game world.





Thanks to Jeff, Zeb had a wealth of material to work with from the *Manual of the Planes*, though that in itself presented problems. Zeb had to make his boxed set compatible with the 2nd Edition rules and make the planes more accessible to players and characters. With input from Jeff, Slade, and others, Zeb solved some of his problems by making player characters native to the planes, by reworking how spells and magical items work, and by simplifying planar travel and survival. Tim Brown, now the Director of PR&D, organized the scheme by which the planes are divided.

David Wise, the editor on the boxed set, worked closely with Zeb. They presented the planes in all their wondrous complexity—and made them playable, too. They gave the text a “voice” that rings throughout the PLANESCAPE line; Go ahead, berk—read it! Further, David had the seemingly impossible task of copyfitting a manuscript that had no layout specifications. The PLANESCAPE line was deliberately designed to break graphic boundaries and restrictions; while the result is a delight, getting there was not, and it fell to David to determine where chapters would fall and which piece of art would fill which space.

Meanwhile, future PLANESCAPE products were in the works—the *Planes of Chaos* set and *The Eternal Boundary* adventure—were started before the initial boxed set was finished. These products’ designers and editors—Lester Smith, Wolf Baur, Michele Carter, Rich Baker, Georgia Stewart, and Colin McComb—chipped in to present a product line as unified and consistent as possible.

Of course, the PLANESCAPE line is more than just words and ideas. It’s a realm of color and sight as well, conceptualized and molded by lines and paint. The artistic and graphic contributions from the other departments of TSR were essential to producing the PLANESCAPE line.

### Speaking of artists

While this was going on, I was busy dealing with all the other aspects that go into the creation of a product—namely, dealing with the other departments of TSR. Some very special plaudits go to Dana Knutson, a talented artist who took the half-formed thoughts of verbally oriented people and produced wonderful illustrations. Dana’s “medieval-tech” architecture is the backbone of the city of Sigil—indeed, of the planes as well. His “doodles” turned into the faction symbols and the Lady of



Pain. It was Dana's sketches that sold TSR's upper management on the PLANESCAPE line. You see, the concept of a game world encompassing all our other game worlds was a bit abstract to follow. But Dana's sketches showed TSR's executives a world we had not yet explored, much like the DARK SUN® line did a few years before.

Both Dana and Robh Ruppel, our PLANESCAPE cover artist, made themselves available for brainstorming sessions with Zeb, David, and me. Impromptu conversations happened in corridors, at the vending machines, wherever two concerned people convened. We would talk about Sigil, the city at the heart of the PLANESCAPE setting, and from those conversations emerged the image that graces the boxed set. Dawn Murin designed the box's bottom and the books' covers and this design has been carried over in subsequent products.

Robh and his wife Cindy Jackson, along with Dana and Dennis Kauth (Dennis is one of TSR's mappers) created the three-dimensional metalwork you see throughout the products. Although the Lady of Pain doesn't look like Cindy, her fingerprints are there, for she sculpted the face. Dennis's careful touches are evident on the knife blades surrounding the Lady like a halo. This team of artists and cartographer took a wonderful, painted version of the logo and created an outstanding three-dimensional piece of art. Neither Cindy nor Dennis are mentioned in the boxed set, but they should be. Hats off to them for designing a logo that so clearly captures the flavor of the planes.

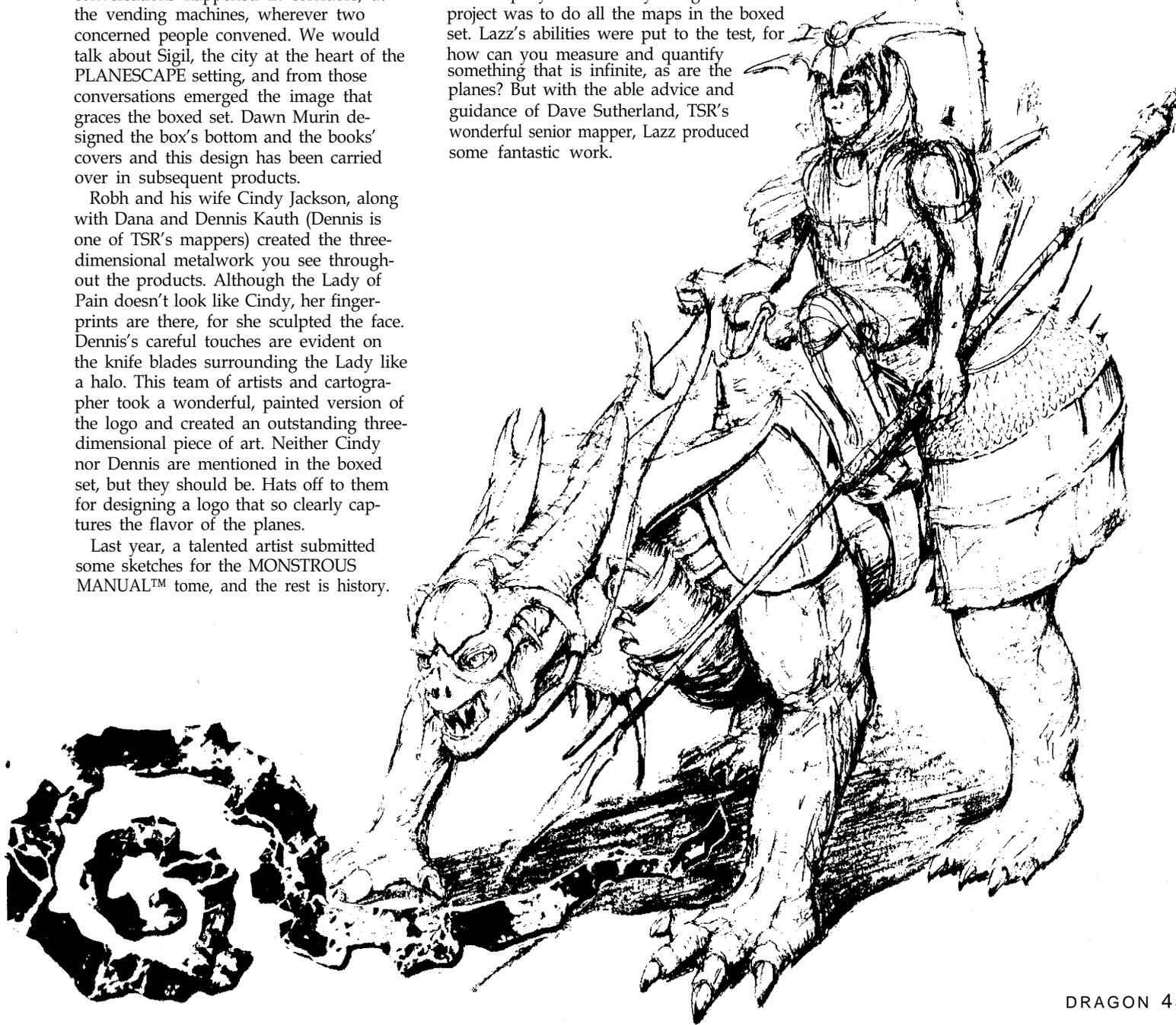
Last year, a talented artist submitted some sketches for the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome, and the rest is history.

Tony DiTerlizzi's work in that book clearly had a new and very special look. I wanted him for our interior artist, and everyone here at TSR did, too. (Interestingly enough, I received a letter while the PLANESCAPE set was in production by a gamer who wanted us "to put out a product dealing with the planes with the art by the guy whose initials are T.D.").

For the boxed set's maps, TSR had another new talent in the form of Rob Lazaretti. Formerly with GDW, Lazz joined our company less than a year ago. His first project was to do all the maps in the boxed set. Lazz's abilities were put to the test, for how can you measure and quantify something that is infinite, as are the planes? But with the able advice and guidance of Dave Sutherland, TSR's wonderful senior mapper, Lazz produced some fantastic work.

### Putting it all together

In today's technological age, however, wonderful art only goes so far. TSR's Service Bureau took the photographs of the three-dimensional art and took them another step. Working with Dee Barnett's beautiful graphic design, Tim Coumbe, Rob Repp, and Angie Lokotz transposed a colored-pencil rendition of marble into the exciting layout found in the PLANESCAPE box. These guys agonized over the pixel quality of scans, the sculpting of text around art, and, more.





Let me tell you about the effort that went into the production of my personal favorite: the DM's screen. The side facing the players has the metallic background, duped and reversed to fill all four panels. The Lady of Pain floats in the center. Surrounding her are the faction symbols in metallic relief. They are so subtle that they're almost invisible. I had gone to Sarah Feggestad (TSR's graphics coordinator) and Tim Coumbe with my idea, wondering if this could be done. The result is exactly what I'd imagined. I remember Tim talking to me after he showed me the printout. He said the screen had taken every byte of memory our equipment had, and that he'd been sweating that the computer would crash. But it didn't, and the result is an exciting example of what can be done with today's technology.

The reverse side of the screen, the side with all the tables, is no less a work of art. Angie Lokotz and I poured over that side, making everything perfect. Then David Wise glanced at a table and caught a typo. Sigh. The lesson I learned is that even when you think something's perfect, it's not. Fortunately we were able to correct the typo and now, perhaps, the screen really is perfect.

Much praise goes to Sarah Feggestad who, as the graphics coordinator, has the often-thankless task of organization. Sarah guides all the graphics personnel. Without her, art wouldn't be sized and scanned, our color wouldn't be in the right place, and our product wouldn't be ready for printing.

Then there's Peggy—dear, dear Peggy Cooper. She had to put up with art orders that were more like scribbled notes and crude sketches. She also had to put up with the oftentimes conflicting demands of management, production, and design; all the while, she juggled everything with a smile.

There are other behind-the-scenes people, too, whom you would never hear about. Take Tom Lavelly, Mary Abel, and Bob Choby, for example. They're not designers or editors—but they are integral to the PLANESCAPE line's success. Along with Jim Fallone, Cindy Rick, Jeanine Mielecki, Mark Painter, and Vickie Crane, they produced the exciting ad campaign for the PLANESCAPE line. Like the designers, editors, artists, and graphics personnel, the marketing people also gave their all. I happen to know Mark

worked until 3A.M. one night to get a crucial ad just right.

Lastly, there's Dave Hoeke, who has since left TSR, but to whom I owe a big thank you. He was our purchasing manager, and without him there would have been no 60-lb. Pentair Suede paper, no two-color interior covers, and no one to dicker over the cost in the pursuit of perfection. I remember a motto he had posted in his office. It goes something like this: "The pleasure of a product well done lingers far longer than the excitement of a bargain". That's what the PLANESCAPE setting is all about—a product where everyone at TSR works as a team to produce the very best we can for you, our customer.

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Ω



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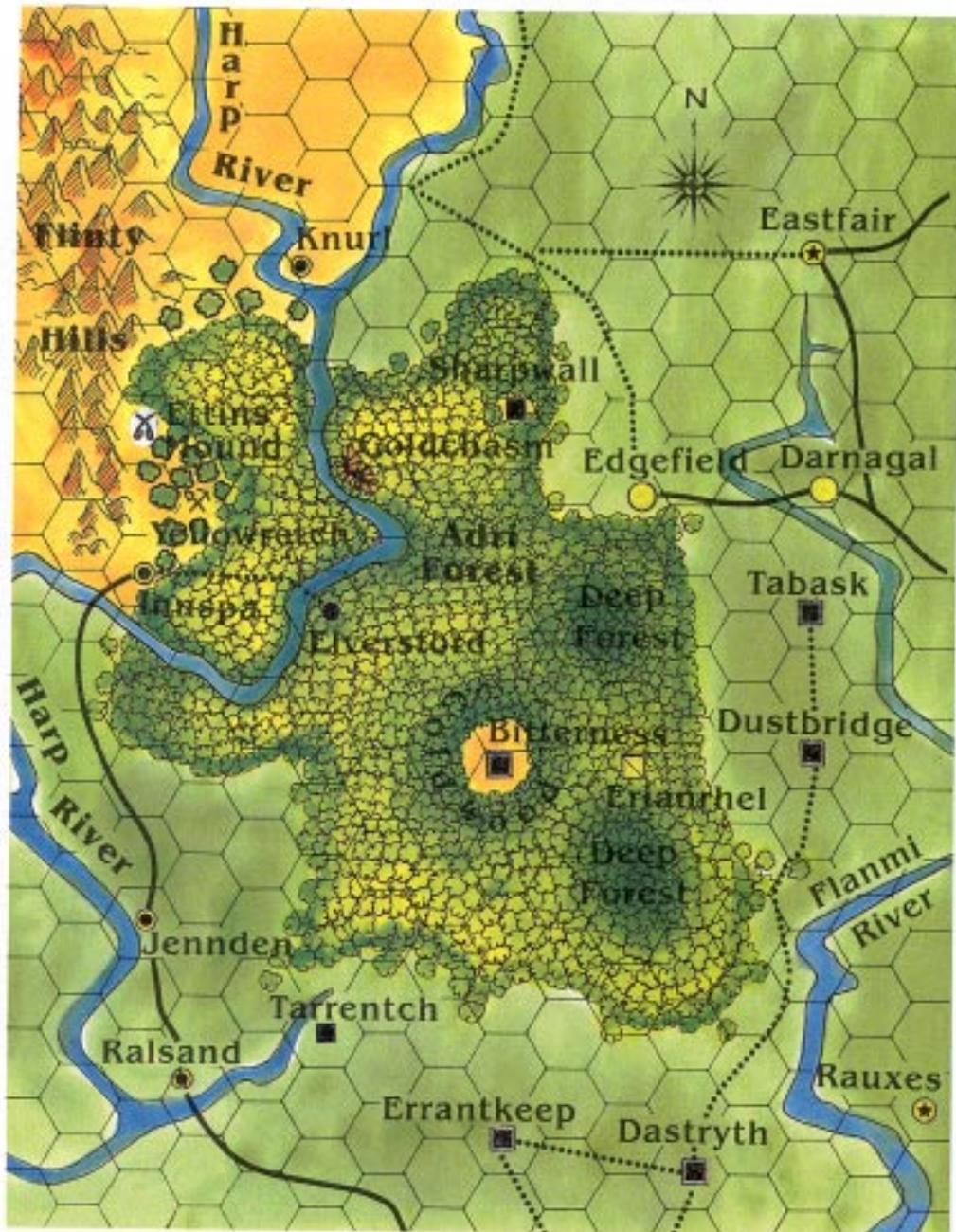


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# CAMPAIGN JOURNAL:

by Carl Sargent

Cartography by Michael Scott



# The Adri Forest



This is the third in a series of articles for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting. Previous pieces appeared in DRAGON® Magazine issues #204 and #206. These pieces were all originally written for the Ivid the Undying accessory, and together they constitute a survey of the high and low points of the most dangerous "kingdom" of Oerth—the decaying remains of Aerdy, the Great Kingdom.

The Adri Forest is perhaps but half the size it was when the Great Kingdom was founded, but it is still large and shelters many peoples and creatures. The whole of the forest has been regarded as part of the Great Kingdom historically, though the lands west of the Harp River were considered part of Almor or Nyronnd for a time. As detailed in this article, the forest can be divided into three distinct regions:

## 1. The ancient, deep woodland.

Here, few humans enter, and the terrain is fraught with danger.

## 2. The remaining bulk of the woodland.

This is home for foresters, rangers, bandits, and others.

## 3. The city of Innspa and the forested hills.

The hills about the southern extension of the Flinty Hills range.

## The woodland

About 90% of the Adri is mixed deciduous woodland, with the broad and sluggish Harp River cutting a swath through it to the west. The forest game is plentiful, and the forest's fringes always have seen their share of nobles out hunting. In addition to deer for the hunt, the rabbits of the forest are trapped for food, as are squirrels, minklike animals, and larger birds. Fishing is productive along the banks of the Harp. Add to this good supplies of mushrooms, herbs, fruiting plants, berries, and tubers, and the riches of the forest are easily enough to support the 25,000 or so people who dwell permanently within the forest's confines.

Races other than humans are rare outside the deep forest. There are a few hundred wood elves, and a very few high elves or forest gnomes. The demihumans

who live in this forest keep to themselves, and they defend their homes with snares, tripwires, pit and net traps, and poisoned weapons. There are so few of them that they do not take chances with outsiders. This applies even to the normally peaceable gnomes.

This scarcity of other races is a surprise to many who do not know the history of the forest. The elves have a good reason for disliking this forest, as the history of the Coldwood (see description below) reveals. Likewise the gnomes, who might have been expected to have taken to the wooded hills, shun them. Their avoidance is explained in the notes on Innspa and the hills below.

This leaves a human population which, though sizable, is sparse in terms of people per square mile. There are areas of the Adri where no man has ever set foot.

As far as costs and availability of goods go, food is readily accessible, but most other goods are almost unavailable at any price—save for such simple weapons as spears, bows, arrows, and battle axes.

## The forest folk Foresters

Most humans who live in the Adri make a living from fishing, trapping, hunting, and plant gathering. Thus, they are foresters rather than woodsmen. Most of the folk who make a living taking wood from the forest (for the manufacture of spears, bows, arrows, and ships) live outside the forest in farmsteads and small hamlets. These woodsmen grow more determined and callous in their cutting down of Adri wood because their lords demand it of them. The foresters react in different ways to this invasion and to the much more threatening incursions of other factions—bandits, humanoids, and militias. Some have reacted aggressively by setting lethal traps for those who come to their forest; others have retreated into the deeper woodlands or to the new, larger fortified settlements that have sprung up or grown larger over the past few years.

Decades ago, foresters lived alone or with their families in timbered huts, ex-

cept in areas where indigenous forest humanoids were anything other than a rare menace. Now, this is unusual. Groups of families live together, and ditches and palisade walls protect their dwellings. These settlements have been built (or are being built now) deeper into the forest—deeper than settlements into other forests.

The main threats to the foresters come from outside the forest rather than within.

The Adri foresters are a mix of alignments, but are predominantly chaotic. A forester whose family has a few chickens for eggs and a goat for milk is virtually self-sufficient, needing perhaps one trading trip a year to buy leather, cloth, cooking pans, and a few other finished items. They are tough folk (Constitution scores of 2d6+6). They also are suspicious of any outsiders, and with good reason.

Foresters' hamlets (any population of 30 or more) are patrolled day and night. The forest men favor leather armor, long or short bows, spears, and battle axes. But some have weapons taken from the bodies of militia from beyond the forest—long swords, heavy maces, and the like. They tend to band together in small groups to hunt, check traps, or collect berries and mushrooms. In many areas, the foresters have taken to smearing plant and berry extracts on their skins to disguise themselves in the woods. The DM should allow foresters a chance of *hiding in shadows* in woodlands, with this chance being 15%+2% per experience level. As a random determination for foresters, the DM may use a d100 roll for adult men and women:

## 1d100 roll Result

01-85	Normal man/woman
86-95	1st-level fighter
96-97	2nd-level fighter
98	3rd-level fighter
99	4th-level fighter
00	fighter of level 1d6+3

## Rangers

Since the Great Kingdom is not heavily populated with good-aligned folk, that there are few rangers in the Adri is no surprise. Moreover, there is a schism

within their ranks. Two powerful ranger lords compete for the spirit of the Adri rangers: one lawful, one chaotic.

From his base at Elversford, Parren Ludern constantly stresses the need to organize forces to defend the forest. He is charismatic, and has the blood of the House of Cranden in his veins, giving him some aristocratic kudos. Parren has had some notable successes, strengthening Elversford and negotiating with Captain-General Osmeran of Cordrend in Nyronnd. Osmeran instructs his elven mage Nukirien to *teleport* to Elversford, bringing small quantities of crafted weapons, potions, and the like in return for herbs and food that Osmeran badly needs. Osmeran and Parren also cooperate militarily. A joint venture by them recently employed foresters and rangers as a feint to lure away defenders from a military garrison outside Innspa some months ago, allowing Osmeran's men to attack those remaining in the camp, inflicting serious casualties and retrieving useful supplies.

Those rangers allied with Parren wear insignia to identify themselves and their relative rank. One small, lime-green stripe is worn on the right sleeve by rangers of levels 1-2; two stripes by those of levels 3-5; three stripes by those of levels 6-8; and three stripes with an inverted chevron above them by the handful who are of levels 9+. The alignments of these rangers, perhaps 80 in number throughout the forest, are lawful good: 50%, neutral good: 40%, and chaotic good: 10%.

There are those who do not like this militaristic organization. It is too similar to the regimented life that many of the Adri people fled from beyond the forest, and it is not without its dangers. After the Innspa raid, Aerdi militias did their best to retaliate with forays against the foresters to the west. They only killed a few, but next time the retaliation might be more powerful and cost many more lives.

Rangers not allied with Parren have more sympathy for the other best-known ranger of the forest, Prisstyne Carnhuis. Prisstyne's rangers form a very loose alliance, without rank or order, communicating on an ad hoc basis when necessary. They have no base similar to Elversford and travel widely throughout the Adri, not just patrolling the borders of the larger settlements as Parren's rangers tend to do. They also have better understandings with nonhuman forest dwellers, such as the wood elves, the sentinels, and the few faerie folk. Many speak one or more additional languages, such as elvish or a faerie tongue. The very few half-elven rangers of the forest are almost all among Prisstyne's followers. There are perhaps 60 rangers all told, and their alignments are neutral good: 30%, and lawful good: 70%.

These two groups are not antagonistic; they simply don't cooperate very much. They have different views on how the Adri is best defended, but their lack of cooperation may yet cost the forest dearly.

### Druids and nature priests

There are small numbers of several nature priesthoods within the Adri. A handful of priests of Beory, Atrou, and Phytou have taken refuge here over the years, but the most important priesthoods are those of Obad-hai and Ehlonna. Ehlonna's priests often term themselves "druids", in large part for the purpose of challenging the authority of Obad-hai's druids.

Obad-hai's priesthood is the most populous in the Adri. Archdruid Immonara has lived in the Adri for more than 80 years, some say, and for all that there are few signs of age on her face. Immonara has many affiliations, unusual for a druid of this reclusive faith. She talks to both Parren and Prisstyne, and is associated with the Brothers of the Bronze, the Nyronndese group of druids, rangers, and others who try to protect the Celadon and Gamboge forests in Nyronnd. Immonara is one of very few able to walk the deep forest in safety, and she has an unparalleled knowledge of forest lore. She knows the old mysteries and dangers of the forest, and the true tale of the Coldwood. Since Griffith Adarian's finding of an ancient relic close by (see the *City of Greyhawk: Folk, Feuds and Factions* book), Immonara warns her other druids to be wary of travel therein. Immonara's druids are forest wanderers, rarely staying long at any settlement. They do not seek confrontations with raiding militias or humanoids as Parren's rangers often do. Very often a druid of Obad-hai just happens to be on the spot at the time, using *entanglement*, *snares*, *spike growths* and the like to confound raiders.

The druids of Obad-hai also have friends among the wood elves, the few forest gnomes of the Adri, and other nonhuman-kind. They are a gentle priesthood, introverted, lacking in aggression, and they keep confidences to themselves. They are exceptionally skilled in herbalism, and any druid of Obad-hai of 3rd level or higher is able to prepare herbal draughts and remedies that can: a) cure 1d4 hp; b) have a 50% chance for curing disease (if a natural disease); and c) if administered within 10 minutes of a person or animal being poisoned, allow a second saving throw vs. poison and, if that saving throw is made, the herbal curative neutralizes the poison (though it will not undo any adverse effects that have already occurred). Druids of 7th and higher levels have an even more advanced natural pharmacopeia, though they do not reveal the secrets of their recipes.

Ehlonna's smaller priesthood is rather more outgoing, even aggressive. It has no leader of similar stature to Immonara, but Lisara Elmhern is a fiery and exceptionally astute priestess who often speaks for this group in conclaves with rangers and outsiders. A handful of these priests have organized into a martial faith, stressing the strength of the forest and the power of the life-force Ehlonna epitomizes.

(Ehlonna being, of course, the Huntress-Power). This group, calling itself the Warriors of the Huntress, specializes in combat and protection spells and actively organizes with Parren's rangers and forester-fighters to attack those who threaten the Adri. The famed warrior-bard Lukan the Boar is allied with the Warriors of the Huntress, and he is rumored to be Lisara's lover.

### Bandits

In addition to the forest's indigenous folk, at any time there are perhaps 2,000 or so bandits in the Adri. They are a varied lot. Some have been outlaws within the forest for many years, and have come to know the paths and ways of the forest. Others are army deserters or farm folk who fled to the forest during the wars or the months since. The most recent of these arrivals, knowing little if anything about survival in the forest, are as likely to die from eating poisonous fungi mistaken for edible mushrooms as from any other cause. Very few—only those who have lived here for several years or more—have any permanent, defended settlements. The majority of the forest's bandits are feral scavengers, raiding farmlands and farmsteads outside the forest for the most part. They tend to be poorly equipped and have wretched morale, although there are a handful of exceptions (see location entry for Sharpwall below).

### Other folk

Perhaps 1,000 orcs, half this number of gnolls, and a handful of bugbears are indigenous forest dwellers. Their numbers have been diminished to the northeast as Hastern has recruited them (usually at swordpoint) into his militias. They present little threat to the foresters, since they leave obvious signs of entering forest areas, and foresters usually are able to avoid them and anticipate any serious raiding attempts they might make from time to time. They have no major settlements and tend to roam in small bands of 5-20 or so, scavenging whatever they can.

There are few faerie creatures (dryads, pixies, nixies in the river, etc.) outside of the deep forest—save for brownies. Many a forester's hamlet has a brownie living nearby, and a few have a prized killmoulis somewhere among the ceiling beams. The foresters are very superstitious about these little folk, and always provide them saucers of milk, beer, and food. There is a common belief that the little people like candied sweets, which are made from fruit sugars. Brownies also are friendly to Prisstyne's rangers in particular, and often leave warning signs for them along their trails and paths if dangers lie ahead.

### The strategic picture

The Adri is raided from many directions, but its problems are more severe in particular areas.



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### Northeastern forest

Here the militias and axemen of Hastern of Naelax and his liegemen are constant raiders into the forest. Humanoids in Hastern's service make extended forays into the forest, venturing up to 50-60 miles from their bases outside it, hunting for slaves, food, or anything else they can scavenge and despoil. Many foresters have left the area, but as the forays go deeper and deeper into the forest, the time comes when the remaining foresters will be forced to defend at least the margins of deeper settlements.

### Southeastern forest

Strychan of Dustbridge has little interest in the Adri, and few of the other Naelax nobles to the south have Hastern's policy of systematic raiding. Their axemen and soldiers loot the margins of the Adri, but do not penetrate deeply into the forest. This area is thus defensible, and settlements have not retreated as far back into the forest as elsewhere.

### Southwestern forest

There are no organized military threats to this area, but the few creatures that enter the Adri from the wretched Almorian borderlands may be insanely powerful, intensely evil, or both. Thus, the few dangers that present themselves here are of exceptional strength. Defensive measures have been taken along the northern bank of the Harp just inside the forest here, and foresters who once lived south of that river have tended to retreat across the river to safer northern lands. The WORLD OF GREYHAWK setting's Gazetteer chapter on the Almorian lands gives extra details.

### Northwestern forest

In theory, the forces amassed on the chaotic margins of the forest could be overwhelming, but the soldiers and humanoids here expend much energy fighting each other rather than raiding the forest. This is why Pristyne currently is so angry with Parren. She is concerned that his cooperation with Osmeran threatens to turn the attentions of the disorganized factions against the forest and, if this happens, woe betide the forest.

### Alliance?

Many Adri folk secretly long for a union with Nyronnd. Indeed, many have relatives there. Now that Almor has fallen, they believe that only Nyronnd can preserve them from the evils of the Great Kingdom. Unfortunately, most Adri folk have little true idea of what is going on in the outside world. Most speak of the Great Kingdom as if it still existed as a single entity. Few can comprehend the state into which Nyronnd has fallen. They might hear news from outside (though not often), but they do not truly comprehend it. This is a naive people for the most part, too long isolated in their forest home to understand the momentous changes in the outside world.

### Locations

As noted, there are few permanent settlements of any size in this forest, and few dangerous ruins or magical areas outside the deep forest. The DM should feel free to add unusual sites to the brief list given here, though strongly magical and dangerous areas are perhaps best placed in the deep forest.

### Elversford

The fortified village of Elversford has nearly 1,000 people behind its wooden walls and network of flooded ditches. Built on the bank of the river, a shallow moat has been created around the village. The water is no more than four feet deep, deliberately to tempt any force attacking the village to try its luck wading through. The submerged metal-tipped spears beneath the moat's waters would then inflict most unpleasant injuries on those entering. The iron tips have rusted, of course; but that's all the better for inflicting blood poisoning on anyone suffering a wound from a spear. The village has a wooden gatehouse with a drawbridge that is lowered to allow access to Elversford from the land.

Elversford is the major trading post for the Adri. Of course, there is little trade now, but a precious trickle of armor, weapons, and a handful of minor magical items makes its way here by one means or another. A few brave souls from Nyronnd, who may have Adri relatives, risk the Harp River from points west of Innspa or head down the southern spur of the Flinty Hills. These latter visitors are rare, however, simply due to the severe threats such travel poses. Few try these routes, and considerably fewer survive. Only those with magical protections (*invisibility*, *10' radius* and the like) come more than once.

Elversford is well defended by Parren's ranger patrols, and the forest bowmen atop the wooden walls of the village are deadly shots (Dexterity scores of 1d6+12 for the 25 elite bowmen). There are two young mages (3rd and 5th level). At any time, their mentor Nukirien (a 10th-level mage) will be within the village. There also are a handful of priests of Ehlonna and other powers in the village, so that low-level spell defense is strong.

The people of Elversford are forced to forage into the forest for days at a time in search of food, simply because a settlement this size cannot support itself by fishing and keeping livestock. In a 20-mile radius east of the river, there are forester's huts along some of the most heavily traveled trails that are used by such foragers to rest and sleep. They always leave some food and water behind for those who come after them. Some of these huts have tiny, hidden chambers below the ground that have been laboriously dug out with trap doors, concealed beneath straw or matting. Some foresters sleep in these tiny, lightless chambers, hoping that any raiders who might happen by will open the

hut, see no one is there, and just take the food and depart. One or two lives have been saved this way, though the forest's orcs have become wise to the trick by now and know to look for such hidden doors. Anyone caught in a chamber is not necessarily an easy target, for there are usually crossbows beneath the trap doors which can be set to fire at anyone who opens the covering when a woodsman is asleep inside.

Elversford is the first place to visit for characters in search of important Adri NPCs. Parren is usually here, and he knows where others such as Pristyne, Lisara, and Lukan can be found if they are not actually in Elversford when characters visit. Any characters who bring weaponry or similarly prized goods will be very welcome in Elversford—though Parren and the village elders will want to know where any visitors come from and what their business is. Anyone approaching will be detected well before they get to the settlement.

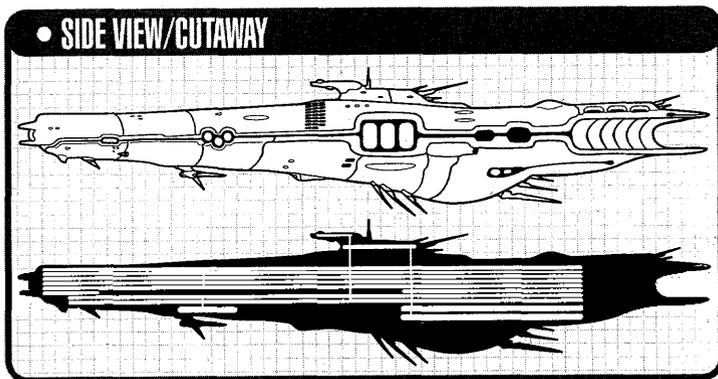
### Eriarrhel

The wood elves of the forest abandoned this ruined treehouse settlement long ago when the Coldwood came into being. The houses are long overgrown with trailing vines, creepers, and moss, and the elves left little behind them. Foresters and the humanoids of the Adri are very superstitious about this place, and neither will approach within several miles of Eriarrhel. They fear that elven or faerie enchantments will steal them from the mortal world, never to return.

Rangers and druids know better. Some faerie creatures live here, but none are hostile. The most notable permanent occupant is Elmenanibinaquen ("Elmen" to humans), a young elm treant (HD 9). By treant standards, Elmen is friendly and talkative, and he has an intrinsic ability to *know alignment* and avoids evil folk. In this way, Elmen is something of a sage among younger treants, and he possesses telepathic abilities. For example, he can use *ESP* at will, and Elmen knows of events in the deep forest before anyone else. Gywadiesin has traveled here, and Elmen speaks approvingly of him: "The only human I've ever met who understood that a conversation only begins to get interesting after the first two settings of the sun". Elmen's faerie, small animal, and bird friends have an excellent knowledge of what has been happening in their area, and will help good-aligned forest travelers and those actively seeking to defend the forest.

### Ettin's mound

The site of an ancient battle between the Flan and the Oeridians, Ettin's mound is a single hillock jutting out from the forest, an isolated extension of the forested western hills. Most unusually, a tribe of ettins dwells below the mound, perhaps 15 or so in a great extended family. A monstrous chieftain named Iron Grandfather (HD 16)



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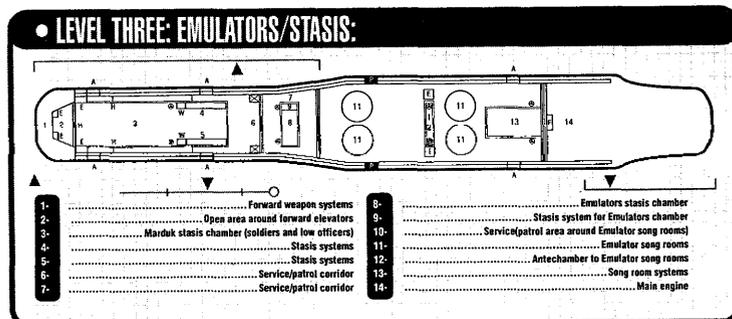
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leads these ettins, and they obey his dictates out of fear. The ettins have looted most of the items buried with the dead below the mound, though some items may remain. Iron Grandfather has a horn of fog that he uses in the ettins' battles and wears a wrought iron *brooch of shielding* that has the property of *hasting* the wearer once a week without any aging effect. His name acknowledges this artifact, as well as his vast strength and raw tyranny.

Foresters and rangers give the mound a wide berth. The ettins are a threat to any humans they find. Iron Grandfather particularly hates humanoids, and the ettins usually slay orcs, kobolds, and others. A spitted roast of ogre stuffed with orc or kobold is a prized delicacy. Why the old, huge ettin has this special hatred is unknown. Why the ettins tattoo their forearms with the motif of a lightning bolt that looks astonishingly similar to the holy symbol of Heironeous also is a mystery.

### Goldchasm

Along a 15-mile narrow stretch of forest, rocky chasms fall hundreds of feet below the forest floor. Cave complexes honeycomb some of these rifts. This is dangerous terrain, because the chasms appear to shift, closing and reforming, sometimes at a rate fast enough to be visible to the onlooker. It is said that powerful earth elementals—maybe *dao*—live far below these rifts, and some who have ventured here say the deeper caves show signs of *svirfneblin* activity. Some passageways may even lead to the Underdark.

Goldchasm is so named because there have been discoveries of veins of that metal here, and a few moonstone and chrysoberyl deposits as well. Few try to recover these valuables, however. Mining is impossible because of the shifting structure of the chasms and caves, and the dangers of entrapment underground are all too real. As a result, monsters and dangerous animals—even *worgs*—prowl the area, which is devoid of forester settlements.

### Sharpwall

Named after its palisade logs with their sharpened flint tops, Sharpwall boasts a strong central keep with a dozen wooden cabins. The Johrase bandit Kavern Egriassen, a 9th-level fighter, has set up camp here with some 25 equally vicious men from the Bandit Kingdoms, fleeing the forces of luz far to the northwest. Kavern and his men are well armed and equipped, and among their number is a bandit with a good knowledge of forest plants and preparations from his days in the Fellreev Forest. He brews paralyzing and disabling venoms that the bandits use on spears and arrows. They make regular patrols looking for foresters, whom they subdue with their venomous weapons and nets. These unfortunates are then sold as slaves in Edge Field.

Kavern is tolerated as an opportunist by

Hastern, because he brings a steady trickle of slaves into the city and offers no threat to Hastern's forces. Indeed, Kavern even sells them food when those forces enter the Adri, and sells information to the leader accompanying them.

### The deep forest

As shown on the map, there are three tracts of deep forest: the Coldwood and two other smaller tracts of tangled heavy woodland. The Coldwood is a special, fell place of great peril. The other two areas have their own dangers.

Throughout the deep forest, monsters such as ettercaps are a menace, and in one or two boggy places, will o' the wisps are likewise dangerous. More benign faeries live outside the Coldwood, but they shun human contact except for a few druids of Obad-hai whom they trust. These lands were once part of a much greater tract of deep forest, and the faeries blame humanity for the terrible fate that befell so much of their home.

The key to this hostility lies in the tale of the Coldwood, which reaches back into prehistory—the tale also known as Darnakurian's doom.

### Darnakurian's doom

At the heart of what is now the Coldwood, a great and majestic elven city once stood. Crafted from living woods, marble, silver, and even ice, the City of the Summer Stars was home to perhaps 2,000 gray elves. They were an introverted, studious, mystical people, and they sought no dominion outside their homeland. The spells and lore known to them are virtually beyond comprehension in the Flanaess now. By a wave of her hand, Queen Sharaferere could make winds ripple through all the endless miles of the great forest, and summon unicorns, treants, and the beasts and birds of the forest to her glittering palace.

The demise of this race is a dreadful tragedy that few alive today know of. Those who know the tale do not speak of it. Mordenkainen, Philidor, Gywdiesin, Calendryen of the Vesve, Immonara, and the Silverbow Sages of the Lendore Isles are among that rare few, and perhaps one or two others.

The City of the Summer Stars received emissaries from the Ur-Flannae. Those necromancers and wizards spoke honeyed words, but Sharaferere saw the lust for magical power in their hearts and sent them away. In their rage and desire to possess the magic of the elves, the Ur-Flannae brought their own magic to assault the city. Fire and acid rained down from the skies. Fiends stalked the forests. Bulettes, xorn, and other monsters erupted from the very earth to strike at the foundations of the city.

Sharaferere knew the city could withstand this assault, but the forest was screaming its agony at the defoliation and slaughter that covered thousands of square miles.

The undead and monsters of the invaders seemed countless; the elves slew thousands and still the Ur-Flannae mounted wave after wave of attack.

Sharaferere's eldest son, Darnakurian, could take no more. A peerless enchanter, he called on many sources of power, even those from across the planes. From corners of the void, voices came to him, seducing him with the promise of supreme power—power that could destroy the Ur-Flannae and save the city and the forest. Darnakurian grew gaunt and sleepless, barely ceasing his work to memorize more of the spells he needed in his race against time. Finally, he crafted the appalling sword the elves named *Hunger*. Marching to the throne room, he presented it in triumph to his mother as the instrument by which the elves could triumph and banish their evil foes.

Sharaferere was appalled. The weapon's evil was apparent to her, even hidden beneath the waves of magical power that emanated from it. She ordered him to destroy the malign sword, at which Darnakurian was aghast. Driven half-mad with bitter anger at what was happening to the forest and frustration at the thought that his work was valueless in his mother's eyes, he raised the sword and slew her in the Palace of the Heavens. As he looked down at her body, the enormity of his crime came over him, and the elf-prince was plunged into madness, his mind broken. He fled into the forest and came upon a conclave of necromancers. Then his doom came upon him in earnest.

Darnakurian slew thousands in a matter of hours. His sword cut a great swath of horrific deaths before him as he charged the Ur-Flannae and drove them in terror from the forest. Finally, the elf-prince took himself back to the city. So weak was he by now that the sword controlled him utterly, and it drove him to slay his own people in the hundreds. Every gray elf in the City of Summer Stars either fled never to return, or perished in that single day.

### The sentinels

At the heart of the Coldwood, the old City of the Summer Stars has simply disappeared. The magic of the elves has faded, and the city with it. Some say that its ruins lie within the Fading Grounds, but the portal to it within the Coldwood is unknown. All the city is gone from Oerth—save Darnakurian's own keep. The elves named this "Bitterness", a word with a more intense double meaning in elvish than in the Common tongue. It refers both to the dreadful tragedy of the prince, and also to the intensely bitter chill that gives the Coldwood its name. The Coldwood generally has temperatures below zero, but within five miles of Bitterness the temperature is virtually unbearable; all vegetation is frozen into stark, leafless forms—killed by the black permafrost that covers everything. Spells such as *control temperature*, *10' radius* and magical items

such as *boots of the north* are powerless to negate this bitter chill, or to protect characters from its effects.

No living man has ever entered Bitterness. Within it, Darnakurian is still alive—in some sense. A powerful *temporal stasis* spell, crafted by the last of the great gray elf wizards before they fled the city, imprisons him. He still holds *Hunger* on his lap as he sits frozen, staring out blindly into the great marbled hall of his home.

No living creature is going to get anywhere near Bitterness if the guardians who prowl the margins of the Coldwood have their way. These gray elves are known as the Sentinels. Twenty of them patrol around the Coldwood, each one a fighter/mage of great power (each has 20+ levels, split between the two classes). They have special magical defenses, with 80% magic resistance and complete immunity to illusions and disabling spells such as *hold*, *charm*, *domination* and the like. They possess formidable magical items, with many holding *rings of human control* to keep potential intruders at bay. Some Sentinels are gray elves from the old city itself, close to the limit of their years. When a Sentinel grows old and the time comes for him to pass from the world, another takes his place, usually sent by the Silverbow Sages of Lendore.

The Sentinels warn intruders not to enter the Coldwood, telling them of the dangers. Remorhaz and white puddings prowl the intensely cold area of permanent frost. Elementals, golems formed of ice as hard as steel, and many still more dangerous magical guardians stalk the wood. Great necrophidii (4-10 HD) are the most numerous. The Sentinels invariably know when anyone approaches within a mile of the Coldwood, and they can *teleport* instantly to any point on its margins to ward off such folk. Great owls spy the margins and talk to the Sentinels, but the frozen spider's webs around the Coldwood also are said to be a magical detection system alerting them to visitors.

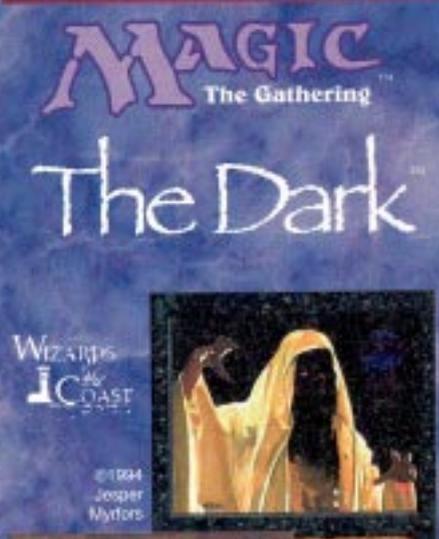
The Sentinels do not speak of themselves or of exactly what the Coldwood contains. They say simply that great evil and danger lurk within, and that the magical stasis containing that evil must not be disturbed. They will *not* permit entry. Their own enchantments make it impossible for anyone to enter by planar travel, *teleporting* and other magical means. If need be, the Sentinels will fight to prevent anyone from entering. They prefer to use disabling spells such as *charm*, *domination*, *hold*, and *wall of force* and their magical rings, but if there is no alternative, they will not hesitate to use lethal spells, devices, or weapons. If a Sentinel is seriously endangered, he will flee using his *teleport* ability. However, soon other Sentinels will arrive to join the fray.

#### Additional information

Player characters should not be seeking Darnakurian or his appalling sword! This

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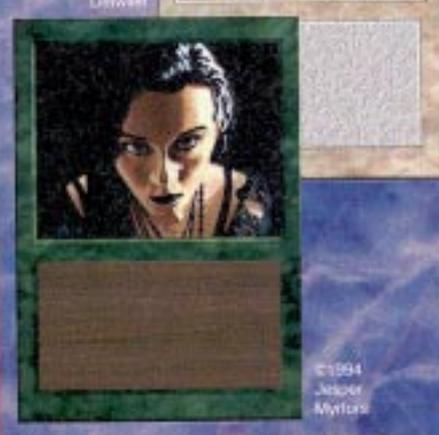
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is an intensely evil and very powerful artifact. Its powers are not specified here, and have waned little since Darnakurian first crafted the relic. The Sentinels say there are fates worse than death, and *Hunger* can bring them to those who seek it. In addition, any character holding *Hunger* has his alignment immediately shifted to that of the bastard sword (chaotic evil) and becomes a pawn of the sword. Not even a *wish* (nor indeed any number of *wishes*) can prevent this, or release a character from the control of the sword.

### **Innsa and the hills**

The forested hills of the Adri are a place of misfortune. Mines that were excavated in the past suffered flooding and gas explosions and yielded only subterranean monsters, not ores or minerals. Farmers who were attracted to the shallow, rolling hillsides found that their crops grew poorly and blights despoiled most growing seasons. Livestock often sickened and died from all manner of ailments. The trees of the thin woodlands here were often themselves stunted, yellow-leaved, and sickly. Some say the area is cursed. More reasoned souls consider that some mineral or metallic poison contaminates the soil and water table here, though the gasses from the mine certainly don't help either (see below). Whichever is true, very few intelligent creatures live either above or below ground.

Conversely, these woodlands abound with monsters. Groups of werewolves and wolfweres contend fiercely for territory, and the howls of their fighting can be heard on many moonlit nights. Burrow-dwelling ghouls and ghosts prowl the area, looking for lost travelers to rend. A small group of spriggans has been seen here, and a mated pair of wyverns of exceptional size (HD 9+9). These monsters are in some ways a blessing, for they cut off humanoids from easy passage south through the hilly forest to Nyron.

### **Yellowretch**

There is one site of special note: the old gnomish mine Yellowretch (as the gnomes now name it). A handful of rubies as large as a plover's egg were found here by gnomes centuries ago, and the miners recklessly dug deeper and deeper in search of more prized items. They found no more gems, but they burrowed into a large cavern with peculiar stone walls that resembled shriveled and yellowed paper. From that cavern, a seemingly endless cloud of yellow, stinking gas rose inexorably upward through the mine and forced the gnomes to abandon it. Periodically, whenever the weather is calm and there are no prevailing winds, this gas creeps out of the old mineworks and rolls down over the hills, affecting up to 10d20 square miles. The gas is nauseating, so that any creature breathing it must make a saving throw vs. poison each round. A failed saving throw means that the creature

loses two points each of Strength and Constitution as long as she stays within the affected area. Undead are unaffected, and the ghouls and ghosts of the hills often use the opaque yellow cloud as cover for ambush and trailing their quarry (visibility in the cloud is one-quarter normal range).

Yellowretch simply would be a good place to avoid, were it not for the fact that the gnomes definitely detected alteration and evocation/invocation magic emanating strongly from the cavern. They will not enter it again now, feeling ashamed that perhaps their forefathers brought the curse down which seems to lie on the hills. Thus, any magical secrets and treasures that Yellowretch held are probably still within the mines.

### **Innsa**

Innsa is a unique city in Aerdy. It has been part of Nyron, Almor, and North Province in its history. For the past 35 years or so, it has become virtually the personal fief of Prince Corazell of the House of Garasteth. His house had bought Innsa from the Crandens centuries ago, when the city was but a small mining village, and turned it into a trade city, dealing in ores from the Flinty Hills, food from Nyron, timber from the Adri, and fish from the river. During changes of nation, Innsa has stayed much the same, a cosmopolitan city where all races and alignments intermingled.

Corazell died without issue, and while one or two of his male brothers and cousins have turned up to take possession of the city, they have met their match in the fierce Countess Karasin, Corazell's widow. She is cunning and crafty. Since Corazell died in the wars, she says that she holds this city in a form of royal trust in his memory. Disregarding the fact that Prince Corazell died from a brain hemorrhage brought on by ingesting staggering amounts of brandy, Karasin proclaims him a war hero and will not give up his lands. Indeed, she has proclaimed ownership of a swath of land stretching from the eastern bank of the small western Harp tributary as far northward as the point where the river enters the southern Griff Mountains.

Of course, Karasin has little control over these lands. Those to the north are overrun by humanoids. She has a pact of sorts with the Bone March orcs, and proclaims them administrators of the northern lands beyond the forested hills. She has little choice, but this pact discourages Hastern from setting his covetous eyes in that direction. Her western lands are mostly prowled by disorganized defectors of the Aerdi armies involved in the sack of Almor. Many deserted from that campaign, and many were driven blind, deranged, or forced to run shrieking in fear when fiends bestrode the plains of that land. Remnants of ragtag armies wander those lands, sometimes crossing the Harp's small tributary to enter northern Almor.

All this leaves Karasin in control of Inn-

spa and just enough surrounding land to keep the 10,500 people of the city from starvation, subsisting on the fish of the Harp and some grain from outlying farms, almost all of which have a garrison of Karasin's troops stationed in their barns. Trade is rare now; the Flinty Hills' gnomes and miners have long gone, and little Adri produce flows through Innsa—although from time to time some goods come along the forest trail from Elversford. This trade route might carry more cargo, which would benefit both Innsa and Elversford, if only Karasin would ally with the Adri folk. However, she foolishly lays formal claim to the lands around Elversford and all Adri lands west of the Harp River, so that alliance is stillborn.

Innsa would appear a natural place for some noble intriguer or petty warlord to overrun. There are two good reasons why Karasin holds onto her power here. First, she is known to be on excellent terms with Prince Strychan of Dustbridge, sharing his black sense of humor and exquisitely debauched pleasures. Strychan is not a man many would oppose. Secondly, Karasin is herself a sinister and dangerous woman.

Karasin's family (minor landholders south of Atirr) has been rumored for centuries to have vampires and necromancers among their number, and to have magicks available to them which slow even the appearance of the passage of years. She is known to possess many magical scrying items, some of which can penetrate even powerful magical defenses (such as *mind blank* spells, *amulets of protection against detection and location*, and more). Karasin knows too much about too many powerful people for them to take a chance on having her assassinated and failing.

So, Karasin remains in control, for the time being. She seeks alliances, however, and her friendship with Strychan reveals her basically opportunistic nature. She allies with whoever she thinks will come out on top. Her own military leaders include the formidable General Levalien, a commander of the army that decimated Almor. He will never forgive Ivid for the pointless destruction of Chathold. ("By the Powers, I could have looted *millions* of gold if that fool of an overking had let me besiege the place!") Levalien favors Strychan's claim to the malachite throne. Karasin and Levalien currently are trying to negotiate an alliance between Strychan and Montand of Delaric, with Karasin hoping to sell the deal to the eastern Garasteth nobles. In this way, Naelax would keep the throne, but Garasteth would benefit as well, perhaps displacing Darmen as the second house of the lands. Needless to say, the House of Darmen is well aware of this, and they have spies and agents within Innsa and even in Karasin's court.

Finally, while Innsa is not a walled city, the old town is walled with the rest of the

city built around it. Most houses are stone, and many reveal the handiwork of dwarven or gnomish stonemasons—though demihumans are very rare here now. The old town houses about 2,500 people, and contains Karasin's palace, the barracks of Levalien's Innspa Regiment, and the richer, skilled workers and petty aristocracy of the city. Goods are expensive (cost multiplier 180%) and often in short supply.

Innsa has two exceptional features. One is the series of stone aqueducts of gnomish design that bring fresh water from the Flinty Hills. The other is the splendidly ornate public baths with their idiosyncratic bill of fare: a quick swim and bath in the "tepid water" baths costs but 1 cp. For the aristocracy, 2 gp buys a foaming hot water bath with herbal infusions and allegedly medicinal mineral salts together with all the hot towels and soap one can use. They were built in CY 322 by an eccentric wizard obsessed with personal hygiene, and the fire elemental he bound to heat the waters is still at work here.

### Characters

#### Immonara, Archdruid of the Adri:

16th-level priestess of Obad-hai (Dex 15 or 16 with *gauntlets*, Con 15, Wis 18, Cha 18). AC -2 (*leather armor* +5, *cloak of protection* +3, *gauntlets of dexterity*, shield not used), hp 76, AL N. Immonara is nearly 90

years old but, with her resistance to aging, appears to be in her mid-30s. She has long blonde hair, plaited down her back, and pale blue eyes. At 6'3", she is an imposing figure, and Flan blood is strong in her.

Immonara works quietly to avoid conflicts between those who seek to protect the forest. She talks with both ranger factions and makes quiet overtures to Ehlonna's priesthood, often appearing in changed form (using the skill of a 16th-level druid) to take on a form pleasing to those she speaks with. Immonara also takes an interest in events in other great forests; the Celadon, Gamboge, Grandwood, and farther afield. She is pacifistic, hoping for better times to come, and tries to persuade people to use passive resistance to the raiders and marauders from Aerdy.

Immonara has many magical items. Most notably, she owns a *staff of the woodlands* +3, a *ring of spell turning*, and an ornately decorated and polished chunk of oakstone (a mineral that has the appearance of oak bark), which is a powerful *stone controlling earth elementals* that always summons an earth elemental of at least 16 HD and has a 50% chance for conjuring an elemental with 1d4+20 HD.

**Karasin, Countess of the House of Garasteth:** 9th-level mage (Con 15, Int 18, Cha 16). AC 6 (*ring of protection* +4), hp

33, AL NE. Karasin is 47 years old, but even without magical aids she looks a decade younger. She has red-blond hair and deep green eyes, and stands 5'1" tall. She is self-conscious about her height, so she wears shoes with raised heels and wears her long hair bound into a topknot and circled with a silver tiara. The effect is certainly dramatic; the countess is a fierce and temperamental woman.

Karasin is determined to hold onto her lands and sees herself as a power broker within the remains of the Great Kingdom. She has no love for Strychan of Dustbridge, but she fantasizes about being his queen. She is confident he is the best human candidate for the malachite throne. But she shudders at the thought of an animus-overking replacing Ivid. Insightful about people and highly observant, Karasin is nonetheless a vicious individual with an especially bleak and cruel sense of humor. Except for General Levalien, who is too smart and powerful for her to play games with, Karasin specializes in tormenting her advisers and leaving them uncertain of how they stand with her.

**General Levalien:** 13th-level fighter (Str 17, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 17, Cha 15). AC -2 (*plate mail* +3, shield not used), hp 100, AL LE. Commander of the Innspa Regiment, Levalien is 44 years old. He is not built especially powerfully, but he

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looks his full 6'3" in his typical upright, stiff posture. The man always seems to be standing at attention. He has light brown hair and hazel eyes; his left eye is partially scarred from a duel. Levalien has a heavy *lance* +3 that he uses to great effect when charging on his massive warhorse (that has *chain barding* +2) and his *bastard sword* +2, *nine lives stealer* (five life stealings remaining) is an even more powerful weapon since it can create *fear* in all opponents within a 30' radius once a day for one turn (saving throw vs. wands negates the effect).

Levalien managed to evade a summons to Rauxes, which he is sure would have resulted in his being turned into an animus. Having seen what this revivification has done to other generals, Levalien counts himself lucky. He backs Prince Strychan's claim to the malachite throne, and keeps his troops in a state of readiness for battle. Still, he preserves their numbers and strength by avoiding skirmishes with the Bone March humanoids prowling the lands northeast of the Flinty Hills. Levalien is not a politician, and he trusts Karasin in such matters. He dislikes her self-indulgent nature, but he has regard for her shrewd brain and knows she is not famous for backing losers.

**Lisara Elmhern:** 10th-level priestess of Ehlonna (Dex 15, Wis 16, Cha 17). AC 1 (*elfin chain mail* +3, shield not used), hp 42, AL CG. Lisara is 30 years old, 5'6" tall, with dark brown hair and mismatched eyes; her left eye is emerald green, the right is hazel brown. She owns a *long sword* +3 and a *longbow* +2 with a quiver of 18 *sheaf arrows* +1. Her chaotic nature is best reflected in her occasional fits of temper. She doesn't often lose her temper, but when she does the effect is pyrotechnic.

Lisara is rather torn between affiliations. She favors an aggressive defense of the Adri, sniffing out planned invasions and heading them off. However, this is a view shared by Parren (who is lawful) but not by Prisstyne (who is chaotic) among the rangers whom Lisara regards as her best allies. She tries hard to persuade Prisstyne to be more forceful and aggressive, without great success. On the other hand, she chafes at the militaristic organization in and around Elversford. She prefers to prowl border areas with junior priests and a handful of rangers and foresters with superior fighting talents who form the backbone of the Warriors of the Huntress.

**Lukan the Boar:** 10th-level bard (Str 19, Con 16, Int 15, Cha 17). AC -1 (*chain mail* +5, *boots of striding and springing*, shield not used), hp 69, AL NG. The 37-year old Lukan is huge; 6'4", 285 lbs., and looks like a crazed barbarian. Red-brown hair seems to grow all over him; he has a huge bushy beard, a mane of head hair, and thick, almost furry body hair. Lukan's natural Strength is 18, but he possesses a

magical ring that adds +1 to Strength and also has the combined properties of a *ring of jumping* and a *ring of the ram*. One of Lukan's best-rehearsed combat maneuvers involves using the *jumping* function to crash into an opponent, attacking him with his *long sword* +3 and the *ramming* attack, and then leaping back with his magical boots before his enemy has a chance of replying.

Lukan has a huge zest for life. He eats like a horse, and his capacity for ale is legendary. He is especially proud of the rounded belly he has acquired from pouring endless gallons of it down his throat, and he likes to sit by the fire with his hands crossed over his stomach, patting it contentedly from time to time. He's vain, of course, and he has an eye for a fine silk shirt or blouson. If he has any lapse of aesthetic sense, it is that one with a stomach so large should not really wear leather britches *quite* so tight-fitting.

Lukan is a warrior-bard. He doesn't sing romantic ballads or lament the tragedy of the human condition. His superb baritone voice is used to declaim stirring epic tales of might, valor, and the triumphs of the good and great. Likewise, Lukan doesn't use magic for show. He uses *ice storms*, *lightning bolts*, *fireballs*, and *magic missiles* (though he will not use spells within the forest that might harm it, especially fire-based spells). So far as the history of magical or special items is concerned, Lukan has only half the normal chance to know something about such items if they are not directly combat-related (25% chance). He has a 75% chance for knowing something if the item is a weapon or is combat-related (such as a specially crafted *wand of lightning*).

Lukan thus might be expected to be among an army, but he loves the Adri and its people, and he is happy at Elversford given Parras' building of its defenses and militias. Lukan also travels to outlying villages and hamlets, steeling the morale and resolve of folk with his singing and powerful poetic recitations. He knows the forest as well as any ranger, and most people admire, trust, and value this larger-than-life character.

**Parren Ludern:** 12th-level ranger (Str 16, Dex 16, Con 16, Wis 16, Cha 15). AC 1 (*leather armor* +3, *cloak of protection* +2, shield not used), hp 80, AL LG. Parren fights two-handed with a *long sword* +3 and a *dagger* +4, and uses his *composite longbow* +2 when necessary. He is 5'11", wiry and slim, with dark brown hair and gray eyes. He looks slightly older than his 31 years; his skin is weathered and he has crow's feet around his eyes. Parren owns a prized three-person *carpet of flying*. His own followers include a nosy and friendly black bear, Hector; the pixie Shillifandi, who spies around Elversford; four human fighters (levels 2, 3, 4, 5); and two human rangers (3rd and 4th level). Elversford is his stronghold.

Parren is a decent man who seeks alliance with Nyron and any other LG or NG allies. However, he dislikes and distrusts people of chaotic alignments, though Lisara is generally considered an ally. He trains the forerster militia in camouflage and ambushes, and drills the burgeoning ranks of Elversford's defenders. He is especially proud of the bowmen there, whom he trains individually.

**Prisstyne Carnhuis:** 11th-level ranger (Dex 17, Con 16, Wis 16, Cha 17). AC 2 (*leather armor* +2, *cloak of displacement*, shield not used), hp 77, AL CG. Prisstyne fights with her *spear* +3, +6 vs. *lawful evil creatures*, and she has three *daggers of throwing* and a *short bow* +4 for ranged attacks. Prisstyne is 29 years old, 6' tall, and willowy to the point of thinness. Her light brown hair is cropped short on top and at the sides, and she has a long, lustrous pony tail. Prisstyne's bright green eyes are almost startling at first sight, as are her hands—very large for a woman, with long fingers and almond-shaped nails.

Prisstyne wears rings of *free action* and *sustenance*, and also *boots of the north*. Her small tree-house lair is hidden deep in the forest, and some of her followers always guard it. She regards her followers as companions, and they are free to come and go as they wish, though they are deeply loyal to her. Two human male rangers (levels 2 and 5) maintain the tree houses, and two brownie brothers (who constantly argue with each other) prowl the forest. Prisstyne's huge wolf, Harquan (HD 5+5, hp 45) usually accompanies her on her roaming. Finally, a reclusive young wood-elf priest (4th level) of Rillifane Lalathil is an exceptional member of her entourage, a very rare exile from the wood-elf homelands. He is young, shy, and speaks seldom to anyone other than Prisstyne.

Prisstyne has faith that the factions beyond the Adri will tear themselves apart, and the forest people will be left on their own. She fights when she must, but she doesn't look for trouble and she fears that organized, aggressive action by the forest folk will create more problems than it will solve. She is fiercely independent and respects the free will of all sentient creatures. Among her followers is a pegasus who offered service, but she did not wish to see such a creature tied to her circle. The pegasus visits periodically to see if Prisstyne needs his help, and sometimes she soars on his back above the forest to spy on movements beyond her forest home. Ω

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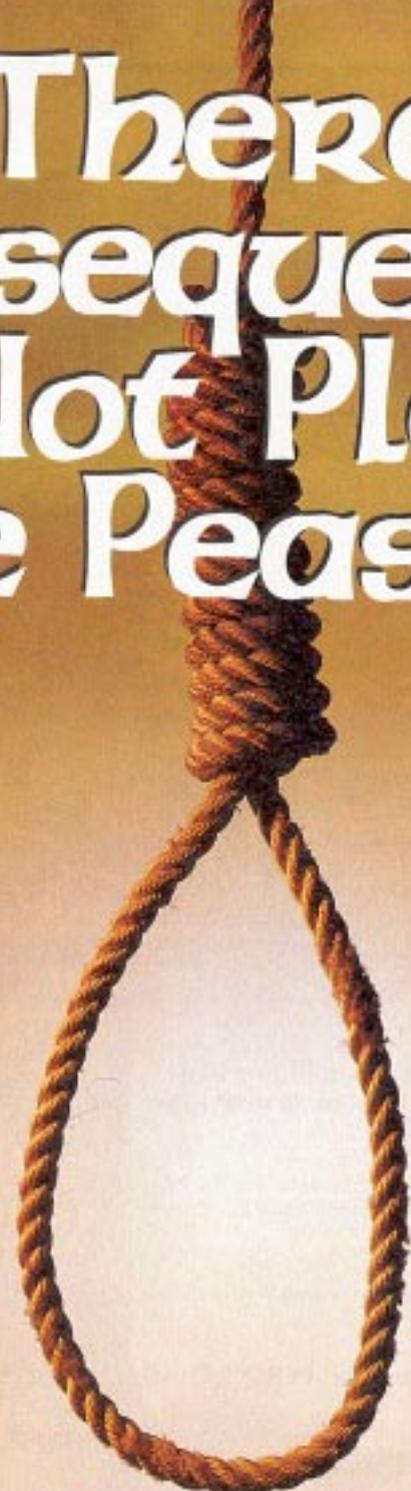
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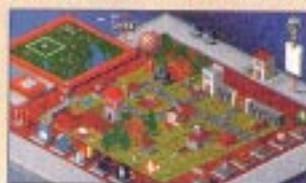
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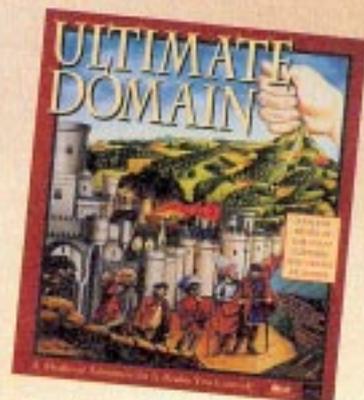


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## ■ Are cartridge games role-playing?

Not long ago, I received a letter from a DRAGON® Magazine reader. This particular woman attacked the whole concept of cartridge-based role-playing games very vigorously, claiming that games such as *Zelda* are not role-playing at all. Presumably, she thinks they are arcade games.

*Zelda* has some features of the classic arcade game: combat is direct. Each push of the button results in one swing of the sword, which if it connects, harms or kills an enemy. In standard computer role-playing games, at least until recently, combat is more abstract. Naturally, as computer games have traditionally mimicked tabletop role-playing, in which combat is necessarily highly abstract, the standard computer role-playing games, at least until recently, also have had abstract combat. In the early *Ultima* games, your chance to hit an enemy in combat was figured by your stats, not whether you hit a button at the right time or not. Ditto for games like *Phantasy* or *Wizardry*.

But all that is changing. In the seminal *Dungeonmaster*, you had to pick the right time to swing your sword, or you'd likely miss. Not only that, but you had to choose the *type* of blow you were launching. *Ultima VIII* requires you not only to control your character's every move in combat, but also his dodging of enemy blows, whether he kicks or stabs, etc. On the other hand, in both these games, once your blow is launched, your chance to hit is still based on percentages figured from your stats, skills, etc. You end up with a mixture of the arcade and classic abstract role-playing styles.

The two forms of play: "arcade" and "role-playing" seem to be mixing more and more in computer and cartridge games. We'll see how far this trend goes, but I suspect there will always be a place for a game which is totally cerebral in combat, instead of relying on reflexes. For every *Zelda*, or *Secret of Mana*, there'll be a *Final Fantasy II* or *Lufia*.

### Reviews

#### SECRET OF MANA

SuperNintendo

\*\*\*\*\*

SquareSoft

*Secret of Mana* is an exceedingly *Zelda*-like game for the SuperNintendo. But it also has many features of conventional role-playing games. For one thing, you

#### Computer games' ratings

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



# EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1994 by Sandy Petersen



*Secret of Mana* (SquareSoft)

have a party of adventurers, not just a lone hero. In addition, your characters have statistics (Strength, Intelligence, and so forth).

I've not reviewed a SquareSoft game in these pages before, and I felt a little trepidation about the quality of *Secret of Mana*. Fortunately, it proved to be a fine game. A close friend of mine, who dislikes most cartridge role-playing games (he detested *Final Fantasy II*, for instance), is absolutely crazed about *Mana*. He bought three copies for his friends, and even splurged on the admittedly impressive-looking hint manual (it's full color, 8½" x 11", and a few

hundred pages thick). In essence, SquareSoft has what may be a classic here.

*Mana* is pretty much a role-playing game in the classic style. Initially your character is alone, but as the game progresses, he acquires a pair of companions. One is a girl, presumably a romantic interest, though she pays more attention to an NPC boyfriend throughout much of the game. The other companion is a rather androgynous sprite. You can switch between the characters, choosing different ones to be your "leader". Your two companions generally follow you, though they can get "stuck" and force you to wiggle around the

leader in order to get your pals around corners. Once, I managed somehow to get myself paralyzed, a situation in which my companion was stuck in a nook from which he could not leave, and I could not return to save him, for I was stuck in such a nook myself. I had to reboot the game. It only happened once, though.

You have a limited artificial intelligence (AI) you can assign to your companions. This basically determines how aggressively they'll enter combat. However, they won't cast spells without your express command.

The game has the same look as *Zelda*, at least at first. However, differences soon abound. Like *Zelda*, you battle monsters, solve puzzles, and seek out treasures. Unlike *Zelda*, the puzzles are more puzzling, you are led by the nose less, and you have a much greater variety of opponents. Your companions have access to spells, and you eventually acquire eight different weapons, each with slightly different qualities. The bow, for instance, is useful at range, while the whip can be used to cross obstacles. Sometimes, as your weapons gradually increase in quality and get exchanged for other, purportedly superior, weapons, they gain magical properties. The "Imp's Fork", for instance, attaches a balloon to monsters you hit, and renders them immobile for a period of time, during which you can thwack them to your heart's content, possibly attaching another balloon.

The game has more "Boss" monsters than any other game I've ever seen. In fact, one of the very first monsters you encounter is a Boss (fortunately, the game doesn't let you lose this first battle). On occasion, you must face two or three Bosses in rapid succession, so even if you beat the first one, the others make quick work of you. The Bosses don't seem to have been balanced very well. Sometimes I'd encounter a Boss that seemed extremely difficult, only to find that the next one was embarrassingly easy to overcome. One slight problem is that you rarely can predict when a Boss is about to appear (unlike other similar games), so you are thrust into mortal combat (from which you cannot flee) with little or no preparation. On the other hand, even the hardest bosses don't seem to be as difficult to destroy as in *Zelda* or *Final Fantasy*.

The game has a sly sense of humor, and the good sense not to rub the players' nose in it. For example, there is a village in the jungle inhabited by intelligent mushroom people. This village is named Matango, a name that only a few people will recognize—in the 1960s, an exceedingly bad horror film called *Matango*, *Fungus of Terror* came from Japan. In this ludicrous movie, people were transformed into ambulatory chattering toadstools. Some of the game's monsters are highly humorous, too, such as the militant death ducks in Nazi helmets, or the dread attack technique of "Moogling", which has to be seen to be believed. The way the sprite wobbles



*Secret of Mana* (Squaresoft)

and hops around the screen gave me a bit of a giggle.

*Secret of Mana*'s easy enough to start out, but you may initially find yourself boggled at the controls, which are much more complex than most cartridge role-playing games. I advise reading the rules before getting too deeply into the game, and the rules themselves aren't that clear, so try out the various options (such as putting on armor) before leaving the start town.

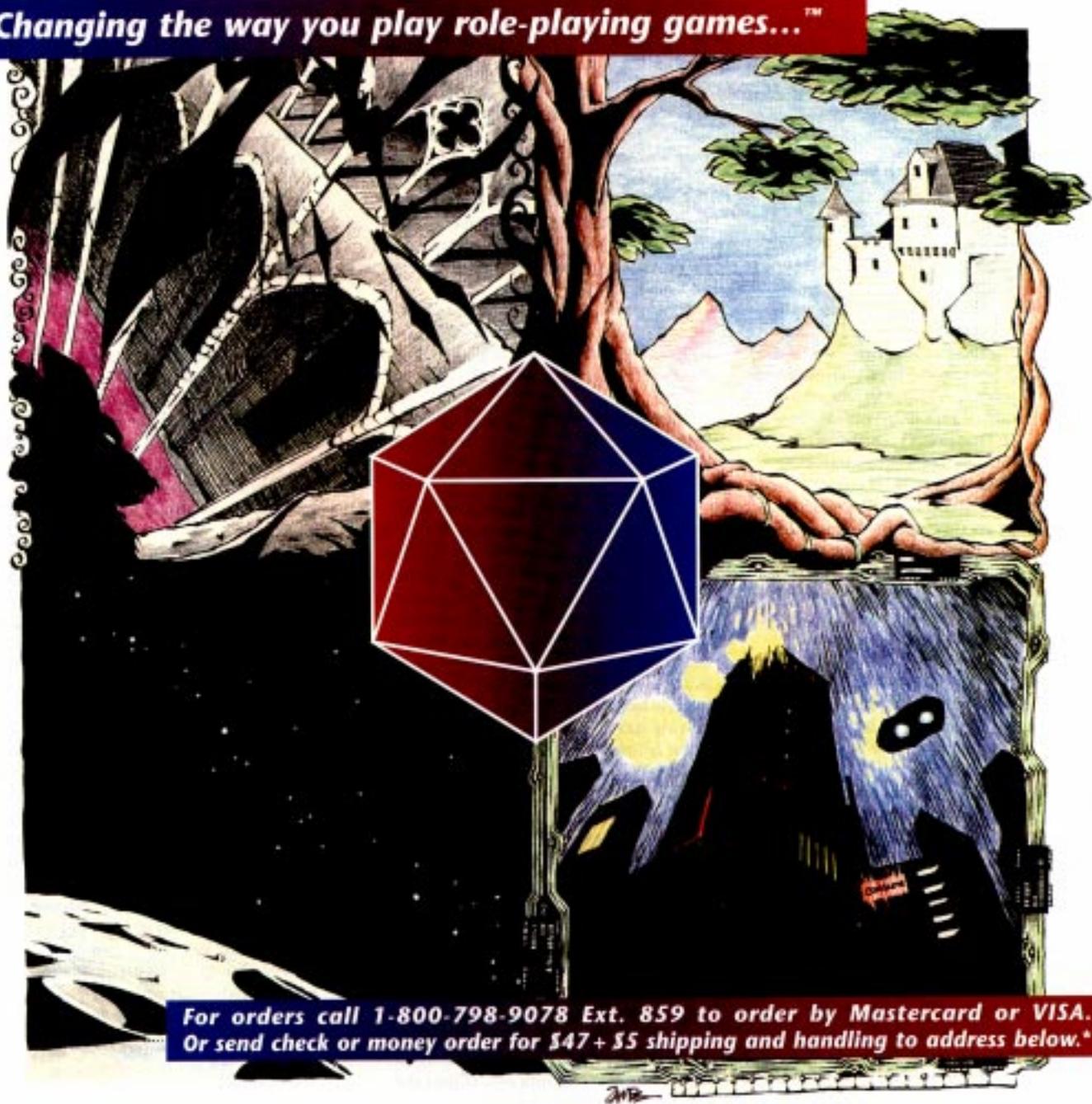
When you press the right button, a "Ring" appears around you. Depending on what you want to do, these rings act as menus. For instance, if you select the Ring Command for weapons, then a circular display of all the weapons you have available appears around you, and you can circle around it to find the weapon you're most desirous of using on a particular occasion. Ditto for weapons and magic, and almost everything else, such as buying or selling goods at a store. The bad part about this is that when a discussion box appears (Buy this? Yes or No?), it generally blocks part of your Ring, so that you can't see all the options at that moment. Of

course, a bit of short-term memory solves this particular problem, but it would have been nice to site the discussion box somewhere else. In addition, at first it is hard to get used to the many things the Rings can do, and I found myself leaving most of the options in disuse for the first hours of play, to my detriment.

This game is capable of multi-person play. If you have two or three controllers, simply press Start on the second controller to join in. This can give you a slight edge in an extremely difficult situation, but also naturally leads to "direction fights". You know, "Go left!" "No, let's go right."

The magic is rather quirky. To cast your spells, you must encounter one of the game's Elementals (eight in number). These Elementals provides two or three spells to the magic-using companions. These spells are different for each companion. In general, the female companion has healing or benign spells, while the sprite has attack magics. The magic has the disadvantage that the complex sprites used in casting take quite a bit of time to produce, and the whole screen freezes at one point. This is quite irritating, especial-

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ly when the enemies are casting such magics, and you have to wait again and again before it's your turn. Also, many of the enemy's attack spells have an irksome result, such as causing you to fall asleep or be immobilized, which isn't really that much fun when you're trying to play an action game.

The combat also works a little funny. When you smack an enemy, their hit points go bouncing off and sometimes they are stunned for a little while. This is fine, except that when you hit an enemy several times in rapid succession, the game "saves up" the hits, so that you can walk up to some hapless blob, bop it four or five times, and then stride away, while it goes through several different "stunned" animations, each accompanied by an appropriate sound effect (i.e., you can hear the "Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!" of your attacks). It's almost like a little time loop, and looks rather silly. Also, if one of your blows actually manages to kill the poor thing, it won't go through its death animation immediately—first it has to suffer through all the various impacts it suffered up to the death instant. In essence, combat can look a little funny, but after you get used to it, it plays okay, if not perfectly smooth. Another problem is that if you're not perfectly lined up on a monster, you miss, and so you can waste your blows. This is a serious problem in *Mana*, because after you swing, you actually have to wait a little while before your weapon's ready to swing again. If you swing too soon, you'll do minimal damage (usually 0). This waiting can get frustrating, and it is certainly contrary to the great majority of games, in which you try to wallop the bad guy as often as possible.

This is one of the very best role-playing games available for the SuperNintendo. It has flaws, but I feel they are minor. The game's play and rules don't fit together as seamlessly as *Zelda*, the standard for cartridge-based systems, but on the other hand *Mana* was a much larger game than *Zelda*, with many more types of monsters, character options, and fortresses to explore.

### Game tips

1. I gave my companions missile weapons. This proved effective, as they didn't have to waste their limited computer-chip brains on attempts to close with the enemy and get in my way. Instead, they sat back and harpooned my enemies for me.

2. Switch weapons from time to time. Don't just stick to a single weapon. Otherwise, you'll end up with high skills in just one or two weapons, and crappy abilities in all the rest. This applies even more so to magic. When your magicians get a new power, you should cast it whenever possible, so as to make them expert in it. Unfortunately, this can lead to tedious "practice" sessions. But at least when you're called upon to Burst some enemies with the Dryad's magic, you'll be able to dish out

some heavy damage.

3. Go heavy on the Analyze spell. The girl companion gets it once she acquires Sylphid's spells. You should Analyze a new enemy every chance you get. Not only will you learn the guy's hit points, spell points, and gold carried, but if he has a weakness, that will be exposed, too. Then you can slam him hard.

4. When fighting the Boss monsters, I found that in most cases magic did the most damage by far. Keep the sprite loaded up on magic points, using the walnuts, and blast away.

5. In general, the sprite is the most vulnerable to damage, and gets killed the most. Keep your eye on it and heal it when the creature is close to death.

**ULTIMA: The False Prophet** \* \* \*  
SuperNintendo FCI (originally by  
Origin Systems)

In *ULTIMA: The False Prophet*, you wander around the landscape talking to people, getting in an occasional combat, and trying to solve the mystery of the game by going on a number of quests. Sometimes you must go through dread underground dungeons. In between adventures, you talk to folks for clues and purchase new equipment in shops. If this sounds like the archetypal computer role-playing game, there's a reason for it—this game is the archetypal computer role-playing game—at least the *Ultima* series is.

This is the Nintendo version of *Ultima VI*. It is moderately faithful to the original game, but in many ways is not nearly as good. In general, computer role-playing games that have been converted wholesale to the cartridge systems have not been nearly as good or as fun as games designed especially for cartridges. I'm not sure why this is, but it might be because the cartridges put a premium on memory, which is pretty cheap for computers. The resulting compromises harm the game when converted. Another problem, perhaps even more significant, is that the computer role-playing game can have an extremely complex interface—you have a whole keyboard to play around with. Even comparatively simple action computer games such as *Doom* use the function keys and number keys for a variety of actions. But a cartridge game only has a few buttons to work with. The problems involved with adapting a full computer game to this pretty crude interface is evidently insoluble to most folks doing conversions.

Also, since a conversion is, almost by definition, to a lower-profit system, there is less money and a smaller team associated with the conversion project. Of course, a smaller team is usually all that's needed, but still ...

And there's another problem with most conversions of computer to cartridge, or even cartridge to a different cartridge: namely, conversions aren't usually very much fun to program or draw for—you

aren't doing anything creative, just trying to alter somebody else's code into a usable format. "So?" you ask. Ah, now we get into human relations. Because most conversions aren't fun, the high-ranking technical folk in a company strive to be assigned to original projects. This means that lower-ranking people, or newcomers, are assigned to conversions. There are exceptions, of course. I know of one top-notch programmer who preferred to do conversions. But eventually even he decided he'd like to try an original game. But it was too late; he was so good at conversions that the company wouldn't let him switch. (So he quit, and is now on original projects at another company. A lesson to middle managers everywhere.)

Anyway, for all these reasons, conversions are often not the worlds best thought-out projects, and *Ultima* shows the effects. It comes from one of the most famous computer role-playing games known, but is only a second-rate cartridge game.

FCI has released a number of Origin Systems' *Ultima* series as cartridge-based products. I haven't tried the earlier *Ultimas* in the series, but I suspect they might have survived the transition to the cartridge more easily, since they were designed back when times were simpler (and animations were, too).

The game is rather slow-moving, probably because of the much less powerful SuperNintendo system (as compared to a computer). In addition, combat is slow and frustrating, and using items you've bought or found is quite hard, especially because sometimes several different items—such as different keys—all look exactly the same on the screen. So you are reduced to trying each of a series of keys before finding the one that fits.

Even though I like many of the *Ultima* series, I didn't care for this game. You might feel differently, or be a bigger fan of Origin Systems. If so, enjoy.

**AL-QADIM™: The Genie's Curse** \* \* \* \*  
IBM Cyberlore Studios, for SSI  
Game design: Herb Perez  
Producer: Lester Humphreys  
Lead programmer: Ken Grey  
Art: Garrett McCarthy, Herb Perez  
SSI producer: Bret Berry

Wow! Was this game fun! This is a terrific game for the home computer. It's pretty strenuous for your computer, requiring a bunch of memory, both RAM and hard drive (35 megs!).

Some of you may remember the review I gave the DARK SUN™ game, also from SSI. *The Genie's Curse* uses a very similar game system, so I looked on reviewing this game with quite a bit of trepidation. But it sold me almost at once.

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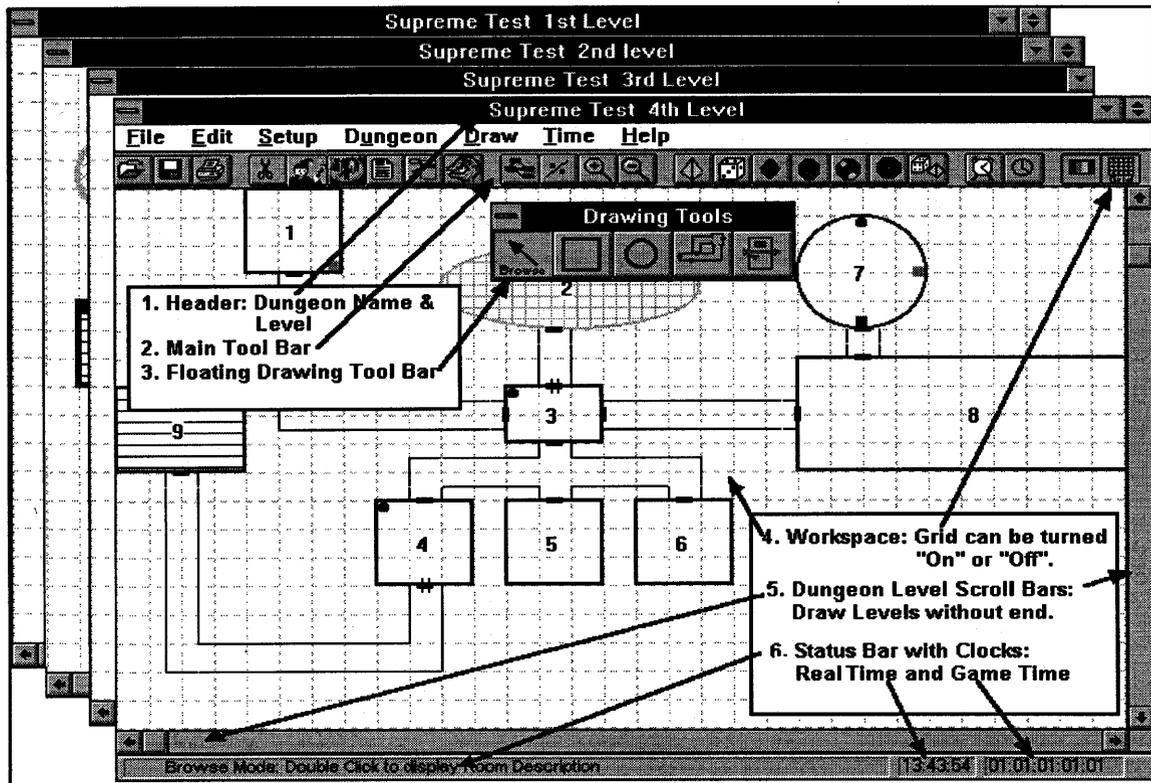
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and even execution. Unlike most games of this nature, you get to meet your family, your mom, dad, and sister (with whom you squabble, as is only right), and this helps inspire you to work on their behalf. As you wander across the Arabian-style landscape of the game, the plot keeps getting thicker and thicker.

More importantly, the game's interface is easy and fun to use. It is relatively quick-moving, combat is easy and fast, and the monsters are neat-looking. To pick up stuff, you just move up to it and click. To talk to folks, you move up to them and click. To attack monsters, you walk toward them and click (or click a different button if you're firing an arrow at them). The landscape and props aren't quite as complex and amazing as in the DARK SUN game, but you don't have to move at a snails pace either.

You get to go into some neat places, too: a haunted ship, for instance. At the game's start, you are trained in maneuvering your character by having to race through a dungeon hallway filled with traps. It took me several tries to make it through—not because I was killed, but because a rapidly-advancing teleportation cloud chases you through, so you can't dawdle. This proved to be a very effective way to learn how to use the game controls.

You see your character in a sort of three-quarters view. You look down on the landscape, but your hero and the monsters are all seen in a side view as they wander around. When your hero swings his scimitar, there is a satisfying swish and the blade whizzes through the air. There are dungeons with complex controls. Levers to push, rising and lowering platforms, moving stones, spikes that try to impale you, etc.

*The Genie's Curse* follows the AD&D® game rules, so to increase your corsair's experience, you must kill monsters. The first monsters you meet are pretty wimpy, but later on you meet hordes of hideous beings that are almost impossible to conquer. Your only hope is to kill one or two of them, flee and get healed, and return later for more. While I don't like this kind of activity (it smacks of having to "earn" your fun), it's hard to fault *The Genie's Curse* too much, because so many computer games follow this exact same technique.

AL-QADIM: *The Genie's Curse* is heaps of fun in an interesting and exotic environment. I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

### ULTIMA VIII: PAGAN

IBM

Origin Systems

Producer: Richard Garriott

Director: Mike McShaffry

Game designers: Andrew P. Morris, John Watson

Lead programmer: Tony Zurovec

The *Ultima* series of games have been getting mightier and mightier over the years—not so much in game quality, as in the size of the machine required to run

the dang things. *Ultima VIII: Pagan* continues the trend. If you don't have a reasonably fast 486, a sound card, and a fast graphics card (and 35 megs of memory), forget it. Buy something else instead.

If you're still reading, you presumably have a fast enough machine to handle this puppy. Well, I have bad news for you. *Ultima VIII: Pagan* may be the latest in the *Ultima* series, but it's certainly not the greatest. For some reason, the games seem to have gone downhill in quality for the last three episodes (not counting the *Ultima Underground* games, which I recommend). *Ultima VIII* continues this unwelcome trend, and is simply not very fun to play.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, unlike all the other *Ultima* games, you are plunged into the middle of the game without a clue as to what you are supposed to do. I don't mind this sort of starting position in a game if it means that I have lots of options, but *Ultima VIII* is nearly as linear as the other *Ultimas*, it's just that it doesn't tell you what you're to do. Even the most primitive bits of information aren't handed out. For instance, I found out pretty early that I should talk to the old hermit on the north plateau. But the game at no point (not even on the crude map) tells you which way is "north".

Another unwelcome new feature of *Ultima VIII* is that it plays much more like an arcade game. You must leap to get the avatar over crevasses, and you have to walk carefully to keep from falling down a steep cliffside in places. Every single swing you take with your sword or dagger must be activated by a click of your blade. You also can dodge or duck sideways. But it's all under your personal command—the guy won't do anything by himself. This kind of arcade control is fine in semi-role-playing games like *Doom* or *Zelda*, but it's out of place in *Ultima*.

If you fall into a pool of water, you die. No instant resurrection, as featured in some of the *Ultima* games. There are places where, in order to progress, you must leap across rising and sinking pillars of stone set in a lake. You guessed it—if you miss a leap, or land on a pillar when it's sinking, you hit the water and drown. This particular sequence took me many tries to beat, and wasn't fun at all, because the pillars were so small, I needed pixel-perfect aim to land just right. Blech. *Mario Brothers* this ain't.

I hope that in future *Ultima* games, Lord British reverses this trend towards onerous controls and arcadelike action. Maybe then *Ultima* will become fun to play again.

### GOD OF THUNDER

IBM

Software Creations

Programmers: Ron Davis, Jason

Blochowiak

Graphics: Gary Sirois

Level design: Adam Pedersen

Music: Ron Davis

This is a neat little shareware game a little reminiscent of the early *Zelda* or puzzle games. You play Thor, Norse god of thunder, portrayed correctly with a red beard (despite the inaccurate Marvel Comics version who mysteriously has blond hair and no beard). You also have a hammer you can hurl across the stage.

Your quest is to destroy the villainous Jormangund. As you wander across the simply-portrayed landscape, you are presented with little puzzles to solve. Some puzzles are quite trivial, while others take some thinking. Each puzzle gets you a little closer to ultimate victory.

You are opposed by trolls, giants, elves, and some less-than-authentic-Norse menaces, including one-eyed worms that shoot fire and red bouncy things. As you progress, you gain magic powers (such as the Golden Apple, which lets you heal yourself), and thus improve.

You can get killed moderately easy, but you get a new life instantly, and there is no limit to the number of lives you can have. It was a cute game that I rather enjoyed, and I recommend it to all shareware players.

### RAPTOR

IBM Cygnus Studios (published by Apogee)

Programming: Scott Host

Art: Rich Fleider, Tim Neveus

Design: Jim Molinets

*Raptor* is another shareware game, also fun and worth putting on your hard drive. Though *Raptor* is primarily a top-scrolling shooter—you are supposedly a mercenary pilot in a future era, paid by your kill.

There are a large number of weapons you can buy or capture from the enemy, and all are fun to use. The central conceit of *Raptor*, that I thought worked rather well, is that every time you kill an enemy ship or ground target, you get money, which you can use between missions to buy more stuff. Thus, blowing up stuff has an immediate and useful purpose, unlike so many scrolling games in which all you get is a higher score. It makes you feel much better when you destroy a big tank of gas or a truck—"Wow! I got paid for that!" Quite comforting.

It's very smooth-scrolling and fun. Even though it has little to do with either fantasy or role-playing, I recommend it as a fun change of pace.

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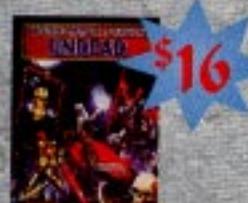
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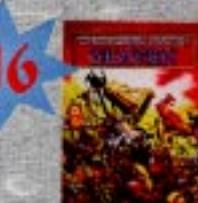
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# Defend the Realms!

Try these variant rules in your SPELLFIRE™ games

by Allen Varney

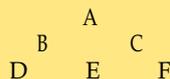
Not every game makes you the absolute ruler of up to half a dozen realms in six different game worlds. In the SPELLFIRE™ card game though, ruling these worlds is as easy as playing them from your hand of cards—but that isn't easy! Against the onslaught of champions, allies, spells, items, and events from your opponents' hands, use these optional rules to protect your realms in new and different ways.

## Layouts

In the standard SPELLFIRE game you build your realms in a three-layer pyramid

(Figure 1). Each realm card protects the two cards behind it in the next layer down. Each realm may have one holding, which must come from the same world. For example, the DARK SUN® realm card of Balic can have the "Ogo's Cannibals" holding, another DARK SUN card, but a GREYHAWK® realm could not have the Ogo's holding.

**Figure 1: Standard card layout**



In this variant, each player uses a different layout of realm cards. Each layout has a unique power to protect its realms, and some layouts assign holdings in different ways. As in the standard SPELLFIRE game, the letters in the accompanying diagrams indicate the order of cards played to that layout, A (first) through F (last).

Before play begins, each player picks one of the following layouts, or chooses one randomly. In games with up to six players, no two players should have the same layout. In games with more than six

players, no layout should occur more than twice.

## Circle

**Figure 2: Circle layout**



**Protection:** No realm is protected in the Circle layout. However, after the winner in an attack round is determined, the defending Circle player may retroactively declare the attack to have been made on the realm across the circle from the original realm. For instance, if an opponent attacks your realm C, then after victory is decided, you can say the attack was instead on realm D, directly opposite C.

If the attacker could not have made a legal attack on the new realm, the attacker loses that combat round. In the example above, if the attacker had used a hero as the champion in attacking C, and realm D is immune to attacks by heroes, then the attacker loses as soon as you move the attack to D.

**Holdings:** Each opposing pair of realms in the Circle (A-B, C-D, and E-F) may have only one holding. That is, if A has a holding, then B cannot, and vice versa. If both realms of a pair belong to the same world, the holding protects both of them. If they

are different worlds, the holding protects only the realm in its own world.

If the shared holding leads to a conflict or paradox, disregard this rule; the holding then applies to only one member of the pair. However, the other member of the pair still cannot have its own holding.

## Twin line

**Figure 3: Twin line layout**



**Protection:** Each realm protects the one(s) directly behind it. In the diagram, A protects B and C, and B protects C.

If a realm in the Twin Line layout is razed, it is instantly discarded and every other realm in the layout moves up one "slot"—that is, if A is razed, then B moves to A's position, C moves to B's, D moves to C's, and so on.

**Holdings:** When a realm is razed, instead of discarding its holding, you may elect to re-assign the holding to the next unrazed realm in the same world. You cannot skip over a slot occupied by an eligible realm; the holding either must go to the next eligible realm in line or be discarded. If that realm already has a holding, it too either is knocked back to the next eligible slot or discarded.

## Triple line

**Figure 4: Triple line layout**



**Protection:** A protects B, C protects D, and E protects F. There are no other protections.

**Holdings:** In each pair of realms (A-B, C-D, and E-F) that belong to the same world, the holding on each realm applies to both realms in the pair. For instance, if both C and D are GREYHAWK realms and both have holdings, then both holdings apply to C, and both also apply to D.

As in the Circle layout above, if a shared holding leads to a conflict or paradox,

## SPELLFIRE™ game rules

The following is a brief list of the most frequently asked questions about the new SPELLFIRE game. We at DRAGON® Magazine hope this helps clarify any problems you may have encountered.

### 1. Spell-casting and magical

**items:** Magical items, some artifacts, and spells cast by wizards and priests have a small code in parentheses following the description of the card's effect. There is a number that indicates in which phase the spell or item can be used, and an offensive or defensive classification. There is a misconception that this classification dictates whether the spell or item can be used in attack or defense. The nature of the spell or item is listed only to determine whether other cards are immune to the effects of that card (as some items and champions are immune to offensive spells or magical items). Unless otherwise indicated in the text of the card, any spell or magical item can be used in attacking and defending.

**2. Pools:** A player with no realm cards in play cannot have a pool of champions. A realm that has been razed but not removed from the table still is capable of supporting a pool.

**3. In play:** This term refers to any cards on the table in a player's pool, in realm formation, or in battle. Even if the card is face down (to indicate a razed realm) it is considered in play. Cards in a player's hand, draw pile, or discard pile are not in play.

**4. Event cards:** This rule was accidentally omitted from the first printing of the rule book. Once played, an event card never can be returned to the player's hand by any means. Once an event card is played, it should not be

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disregard this rule; the holding then applies only to its own realm, not the paired realm.

## Column

**Figure 5: Column layout**

F  
E  
D  
C  
B  
A

**Protection:** Each realm protects all the realms without holdings behind it. Furthermore, each realm may defend as a hero with a level equal to 2 plus the num-

ber of unrazed realms *without holdings* behind it. For instance, if realms A, B, and C in the diagram were unrazed and had no holdings, realm D could defend as a level 5 hero.

**Holdings:** In the Column layout, realms with holdings are never protected! They do not count toward the level totals of realms above them. However, in Step #2 of your own turn you may discard one of your holdings in play, or you may move one of your holdings in play from one realm to another unrazed realm in the same world. You may do this in addition to placing the one new holding you are allowed in Step #2.

## Cluster

**Figure 6: Cluster layout**

A  
B C  
D E  
F

**Protection:** The Cluster resembles the Circle layout, but its realms form a tight central group, with B touching C, and with D touching E. Each realm protects all the realms in rows below it. A protects B through F, and B and C both protect D through F.

The two pairs, B-C and D-E, are so closely tied that if one member of the pair

is razed, the other is also automatically razed at the same time. However, this does not increase the number of cards the victor may draw as spoils of combat.

**Holdings:** Only in the Cluster layout can a realm enjoy the benefits of a holding from a different world. In the two pairs, B-C and D-E, if one member of the pair has a holding, the other also enjoys the benefit of that holding, if and only if the other belongs to a different world! If both members of the pair belong to the same world, the holding applies only to its own realm.

The realm's own power, if any, does not carry over to the other member of the pair. Only holdings carry over (as above).

As in the other layouts, if a shared holding leads to a conflict or paradox, disregard this rule.

## Cross

**Figure 7: Cross layout**

A  
B C E D  
F

**Protection:** In the Cross layout the B and C realms touch each other, and the D and E realms also touch each other. A gap separates the two pairs. A protects B and D. B protects C, and D protects E; however, if both B and C are razed, E is unprotected, and if both D and E are razed, C is unprotected. There are no other protections.

## clarifications

placed in the discard pile; remove it from play entirely.

**5. Realm cards:** A realm retains its position in the formation even if other realms have been razed or discarded. A realm played in position B, for example, remains in position B even if the realm in position A has been razed or destroyed and removed from the game.

**6. Special powers:** Many realms, champions, and allies have special combat powers. These take effect only when those cards are involved in a round of battle. Realm powers take effect only when that realm is the target of an attack. Exceptions are specifically stated on the cards. For example, the GREYHAWK® Ruins card states that all of the player's GREYHAWK champions gain +2 levels, in which case that card would be active at all times until it is razed or destroyed.

**7. Draws:** If a card in play prevents a champion from attacking (e.g., a nonflying champion is blocked by a wall spell), that champion is defeated but returns to its pool, and the battle ends. A defending champion defeated in this manner likewise returns to its pool, but the attacking player may continue battle with a new champion. The defending player cannot use the just-defeated champion again in that battle.

**8. Optional rules:** Some of the optional rules in the rule book are more optional than others. It is strongly suggested that the following optional rules be used once you learn the game: Aiding the Attacker or Defender, World Bonuses, The Rule of the Cosmos, Clerics vs. Undead, and Fear of Undead. The use of these rules makes the value of certain cards much more apparent. Have fun!

**Holdings:** During Step #2 of your turn, in addition to all normal actions, you may shift any or all of your second-row holdings in play (that is, holdings of realms B through E) freely among realms in the second row. Holdings can be assigned only to realms of the same world.

### Treasuries

A well-funded kingdom wages war better than a poor one. This optional rule introduces an economy of sorts to the SPELLFIRE game.

To represent the wealth used in this variant, use poker chips. White chips represent copper pieces, reds stand for silver pieces, and blue chips are gold pieces. If no poker chips are available, use coins such as pennies, dimes, and quarters. However, no money actually changes hands, so players must keep track of their coins and recover them after the game ends.

**Placing counters:** Each realm and champion may keep a treasury, represented by chips placed on its card.

In Step #2 of your turn, if you don't place a new realm or rebuild or replace an existing one, you may instead place a treasury chip on one unrazed realm in play. You may place a copper piece on a realm without a treasury, or replace a copper piece in play with a silver piece, or replace a silver piece with a gold piece.

In Step #3 of your turn, in addition to all other actions, you may place one chip on any champion in any player's pool. As with realms, you may place a copper piece, exchange a copper for a silver, or exchange a silver for a gold. Only champion cards can have treasuries.

**Treasuries in combat:** Realms use their treasuries only to defend. A realm that is not under attack cannot spend from its treasury. Champions use their treasuries to attack or defend. A champion who enters combat from a hand instead of a pool, or who does not participate in combat, cannot use a treasury.

The card's controlling player may spend any or all chips in its treasury to increase her side's level in combat. Spent chips are discarded.

A copper piece adds 1 to its side's level for that round, a silver piece adds 3, and a gold piece adds 6.

### Protectors of the realm

A kingdom can hire or inspire fighters of less than champion status. On Step #3 of your turn, in addition to all other actions, you may assign one ally card permanently to one unrazed realm in play. This *protector* adds its bonus to any defense of that realm, with these conditions:

1. When an attack is announced against the realm, either the realm's own unmodi-

fied fortification (if it has no champion) must be larger than the protector's bonus, or the controlling player must choose a champion whose unmodified level exceeds the protector's bonus. Otherwise the protector departs in disgust, and the card is discarded before the battle begins.

2. If the realm is razed, the protector is discarded.

3. The protector cannot participate in any attack.

If you use the layout rules above, a protector cannot be shifted even if a layout permits shifting of holdings.

### Closing thoughts

SPELLFIRE games bear out the long-held doctrine that the best defense is a good offense.

Of course, to last several rounds, you need more than a good offense; you need an opponent who won't fall instantly. Too bad that's the same opponent who can put up a better fight than you'd really prefer!

Each SPELLFIRE game is a series of delicate decisions about whom to attack. If you adopt the rules in this article, you can improve your defenses greatly—but that makes you a more tempting target for an opponent looking for a long slugfest. The best defense may be a good offense, but in the SPELLFIRE game, the best defense attracts a good offense. Be ready.

Ω

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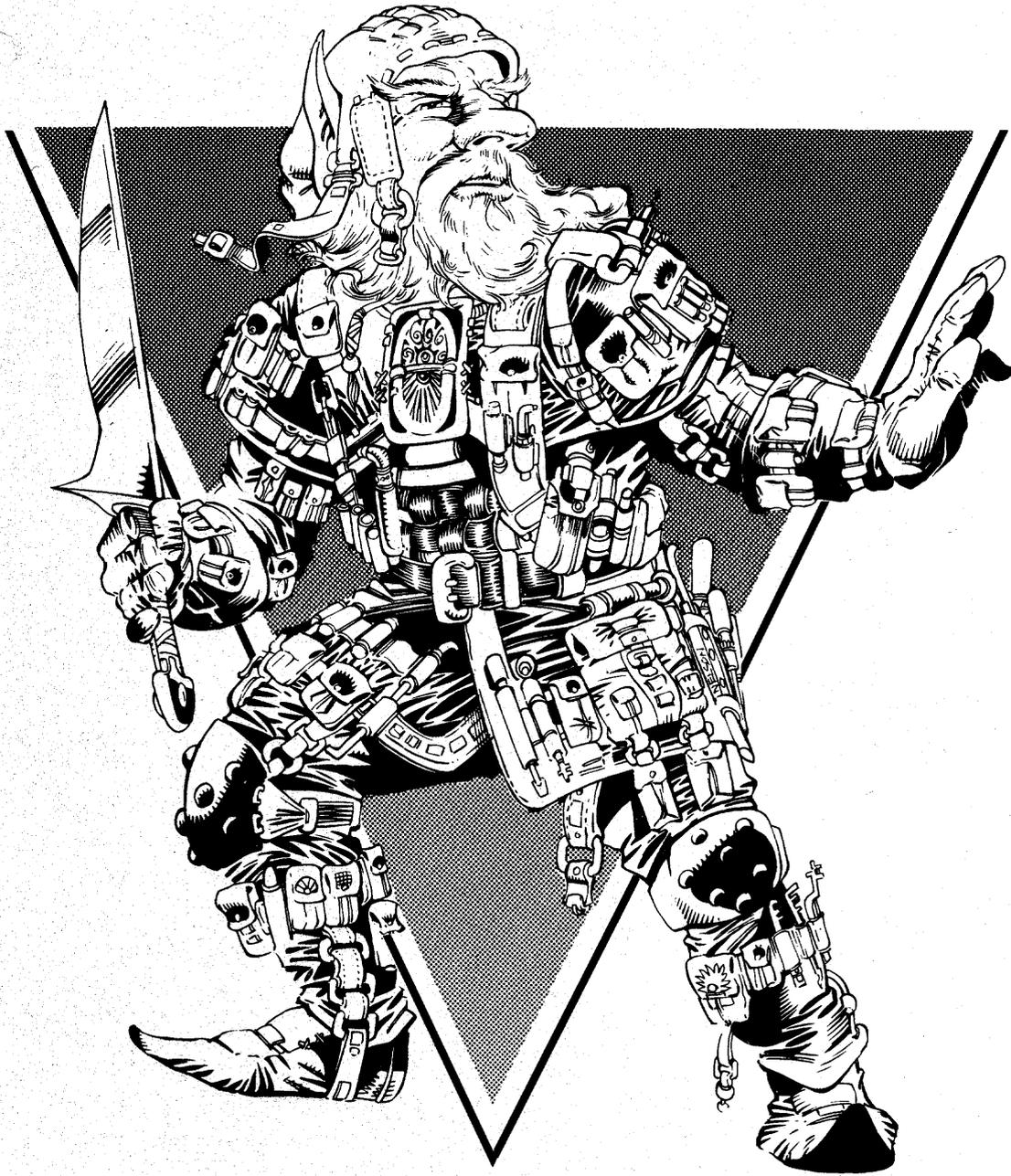
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# European 94 GEN CON® Game Fair Gaming Around the World

The 1994 European GEN CON® Game Fair

by David Wise

*For my part, I travel not to go  
anywhere, but to go.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

Actually, the boss told me I had to go. Convention duties are part of the life of a TSR staffer, meaning that I periodically must abandon making games, travel to various cities, and play games instead—a tough job, but I've come to accept it. So when I was ordered to pack my bags and head for England, I put on a stiff upper lip and get to work.

For the record, I came, I saw, I played at one of the best conventions this side of Istanbul.

In fact, the only thing missing from this year's European GEN CON Game Fair was a few more Americans to round out the ranks of international gamers. Not that "Yanks" make or break the party, mind you—it's just that a chance to roll dice with the world doesn't often come along in the States, and some of you ought to see what you're missing. The GEN CON Game Fair in Milwaukee, Wis., may be the biggest and best convention on terra firma, but any event organized by the company that brings you the AD&D® game is sure to be a good time, and "GEN CON U.K." is just a little bit special. I expect most folks won't require much arm twisting when I recommend traveling overseas and attending this gig, but some of them may not have thought about taking so ambitious a vacation, and those that have may be wondering if it's worth the trip.

In a word: yes.

Experience certainly is the best teacher, and traveling can be an excellent experience. And if you're a gamer, GEN CON

U.K. is a great way to double the adventure. Incidentally, I was a guest of this convention along with TSR Director of PR&D (fearless leader) Tim Brown, FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting guru Karen Boomgarden, TSR cover artists Dana Knutson and Robb Ruppel, author Joe Dever, and FASA representative Tom Dowd. Speaking for the TSR crowd, I'd wager each could regale you with tales that tell why they'd love to accept that *honour* again (and as soon as possible), but here are my top 10 reasons to shoot for European GEN CON Game Fair next May.

## 1. The convention

From a purely gaming point of view, this convention is one of the best. It flows with all the mellow intimacy of a small con, yet it's large enough (about 1,200 attendees this year, and the number's growing) to accommodate a large selection of role-playing games and many other escapades. There are RPGA™ Network events, a wide variety of popular and obscure games running all day and evening, demonstrations, special events, seminars, a small-but-nicely appointed dealer's room, and simply fascinating guests, of course.

For many, the high point of the weekend is Saturday night's charity auction, which benefits a different cause each year (this year's proceeds were designated for aid to autistic children). The evening begins with some fairly attractive items: a complete, full-sized, foam-rubber warrior-monster

suit, complete with armor, shield, sword, mace, mask, and spiny reptilian tail; a black-bordered set of MAGIC\* cards; one of four existing 3-D *Lady of Pain* icons, hand sculpted and painted by the artists who created the Lady for the PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting; a collection of signed and numbered Elmore prints; and the obligatory plenitude of gaming materials. Eventually, though, the bidding gives way to more esoteric commodities: the bathroom break; the boss's shirt (fully lived in); a cap belonging to someone in the bathroom, generously and spontaneously donated by his "friends"; perhaps even the right to be King of the Convention (which every attendee fully respects, so it's worth the investment). The crowd is enthusiastic and vocal, while the auctioneers are obnoxious and in a great mood. No matter how outrageous the item on the block—often *because of* the outrageous item on the block—the bids are generous and boisterous.

The good folks at TSR Ltd., of Cambridge, England are your enthusiastic convention hosts. Denise Randall, Sandy Douglas, and the rest of the U.K. staff are tireless in their efforts to keep things running smoothly. Good show, mates.

## 2. The gamers

European gamers are cool. They are spirited pleasure-seekers who have no doubts about the agenda: enjoying themselves and each other. They're masterful players, too. They adapt readily to a new DM's style of play, fully and immediate

integrating with party members they've never met before, role-playing with gusto, and never sweating the small stuff. I'm more a player than a DM, myself, but these conventioners obliterated my fear of adjudicative inadequacy before the first roll of the dice. Meanwhile, the attendees at seminars break into spontaneous and friendly discussions that practically put the panelists in the back of the room, and they really know what they're talking about. Hey, even the pale-faced, black-lensed vampires are affable. (By the way, I'd like to apologize to Snoopy, whose name I laughed at until he told me it was actually on his birth certificate.)

### 3. The locale

Pontins Holiday Center, Camber Sands in Sussex is one of those places that you can describe so as to frighten someone who's going there for the first time. Imagine several dozen two-story concrete blocks a hundred feet long, lying in a mazelike formation and all painted identically. These are living quarters, and if you don't make a point to memorize the exact route to your room, you may never find it again. Now picture barbed-wire fences surrounding you on all sides, and a counter-weighted iron bar blocking the only way in or out—this is, or at least was, the English notion of a holiday camp, a vacation spot, and it leaves you with an odd sensation of noble captivity; suffice it to say that we're thinking of naming a RAVENLOFT®

setting domain after it. (By the way, unless you cherish waxed paper, bring along your own pack of Charmin.)

Actually, the "luxury chalets" are quite cozy, thank you, and they're equipped with fully-stocked kitchenettes (cookware, silverware, etc.) for those who want to buy their own groceries and save a few "quid" (the British equivalent of "bucks"). The camp's main structure, the "Amenity Building", houses a general store and places to eat, drink, and of course, play lots of games. As for the barbed wire and the barricade, I must be optimistic and assume that they're trying to keep people out.

### 4. Rye

Less than 10 minutes away by taxi lies the ambient, cobble-stoned, erstwhile smuggler's port of Rye. There are signs on buildings in this town that say "Rebuilt 1648". On a sunny day, you can climb to the top of the steep hill on which the town is built, scale the tower of ancient St. Mary's church, and look south across the English Channel, where France lies at the edge of sight. Then eat a leisurely lunch on one of the comfortable wooden benches in the cemetery below, surrounded by headstones so old that their names and epitaphs have been worn away by the salty winds.

This burg is where I headed to eat between gaming events, as it's where you find authentic British victuals. Some people claim that "English cuisine" is an oxy-

moron, but I disagree. I am particularly fond of pub fare such as steak and kidney pie (an English pot pie), fish and chips, cornish pasties (meat-and-potato-stuffed pastry), and other tasty morsels. (Sure, there are dishes for the health conscious, too, but these are my top 10 reasons.) Of course, tea is appropriate at any time of day or night, but the over-21 crowd can also sample the hand-pumped beer, room temperature and full of fiber.

The less-adventurous diners need not worry, either. Pizza—the international gamers' M.R.E.—and other American standbys can be found anywhere, and most of your favorite fast-food restaurants have taken their bright and shining neon places among those wonderful eateries of antiquity.

### 5. Breakfast

England invented the notion of a breakfast that makes up for all the chow time you missed while you slept. Savvy travelers often stay at English "Bed & Breakfast" establishments, knowing they'll only need to eat once per day that way. Many hotels put out a breakfast buffet, too, and invite you to stuff yourself until you're ready for a nap. Cholesterol-phobes beware: The standard breakfast served in the Pontins cafeteria consists of a fried egg, a thick sausage, a strip of "bacon" (more like a slab of fatty ham), and a slice of deep-fried bread—all of it smothered in baked beans. Yikes!

### 6. The weather

Not what most people travel to Britain for, but the point's worth mentioning because they used to hold the convention in November, when freezing rain falls endlessly and sunset comes at 4 P.M. May, on the other hand, is one of the most pleasant months in England. Don't leave your cold-weather coat at home, but don't expect to wear it too often, either.

### 7. England

As long as you're there for the convention, try to stay a few extra days at least. England is the land of kings and queens, of Stonehenge and Carfax Abbey, of Arthur and Merlin, of towers and dungeons, of holy quests and noble knights. When you look over the lush and rugged countryside, you get the feeling you're in the Forgotten Realms.

Do you like castles? Britain's crawling with them, from stately Castle Arun on the south coast to bombarded Urquhart Keep on Loch Ness, and most of them love visitors, including those that currently maintain royal apartments. After all, one of the king's historic duties is to impress emissaries from abroad. Hampton Court (just outside London), home to Henry VIII, William and Mary, and George II, is worth the trip alone.

Speaking of London, it's difficult to visit England from America without at least passing through my favorite big city in the

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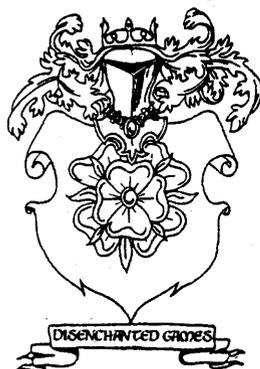
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world. Both familiar and foreign at the same time, one of the best things about London is that you can spend several days searching out famous sites and artwork for the cost of a couple all-day subway passes. Most museums offer free admittance to the public, and there's at least as much excitement on the open pavement as there is in the theaters and tourist traps. I love to prowl through the city like a thief, learning its twisted, narrow streets, walking among both tiny and grand structures that have stood for 500 and more years. The new buildings are a wonder, too—standing side by side with their ancient counterparts, they are monuments to World War II, for they're often built on bomb sites. Americans have never looked into the skies above their homes and seen enemy planes, have never heard the deadly whistle of falling shells overhead, but London bears the scars of that experience, which touches something deep inside a reflective mind.

### 8. The people

Oh, but they are excruciatingly polite! A Briton might find you thoroughly offensive, and he won't hesitate to express that opinion, but he'll do so with a gentility that'll leave you gratified by the abuse. These people are eloquent as a matter of course, fascinating to listen to, and most of them speak a language you can under-

stand, though there are more English accents than there are hit points in a great wyrm. (Craning your neck forward and squinting will not help you understand, either.) The British inflection's contagious, too: Tim Brown was repeatedly uttering "iay?" (one syllable, meaning "What did you say?") before the convention was two days old. The language just seems to sound better when it's spoken their way. I guess that's why they call it "English."

### 9. America

There's no cure for cynicism like a trip abroad. We Yanks live in a country devoid of troubles and inconveniences that much of the world takes for granted. Natives are justifiably proud of their country, but there's no place like America, and many Europeans will tell you as much if you can't figure it out for yourself. Do we live in the greatest country in the world? Maybe, but a trip overseas is almost sure to make you think so, and that's a feeling worth leaving home for.

### 10. The adventure

Hey, don't just sit there at the table and roll dice! Travel opens your mind, broadens your intellect, enhances your perspective, bolsters your confidence, and it's just plain fun. You have to see the world to believe it, and fantasy is all the richer for the reality. This kind of adventure doesn't

come cheaply, I know, but it doesn't have to bankrupt the royal treasury, either. Your local travel agent knows the least expensive route to England, and reasonably priced Bed & Breakfasts positively riddle the island nation. Campgrounds are plentiful, too, which are even easier on the pocket. Pub and restaurant meals are comparatively economical—the tastiest fish and chips I found in London cost me £3 (a bit less than \$5 at current exchange rates), and you can eat even cheaper than that.

If Robert Louis Stevenson's remark, which began this article, resonates in your heart as it does in mine—if it's part of the reason you role-play and embark in search of the fantastic—then the European GEN CON game fair is worthy of your consideration. Think about it now, while there's plenty of time to plan, and remember that it costs nothing to check out the logistics of taking such a trip. I hope to see you there!

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# Convention Calendar

## Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) 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.).

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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 also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

### GAMEFEST XV, Aug. 10-14 CA

This convention will be held at Old Towne in San Diego, Cal. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include trivia and figure-painting contests. Registration: \$20 before July 30; \$30 on site. Write to: GAMEFEST, 3954 Harney St, San Diego CA 92110.

### DALLASCON '94, Aug. 19-21 TX

This convention will be held at Sheraton Grand Hotel in Irving, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, auctions, videos, and seminars. Write to: DALLASCON, P.O. Box 867623, Plano TX 75086.

### BUBONICON '94, Aug. 26-28 NM

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson East in Albuquerque, N.M. Guests include Mike Stackpole, Liz Danforth, and Simon Hawke. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, an art show, readings, films, and a masquerade. Registration: \$21 before Aug. 10; \$25 on site. Write to: NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque NM 87176.

### DEMICON 5, Aug. 26-28 MD

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Conference Hotel in Towson, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, a games auction, dealers, and a painted-miniatures contest. Registration: \$20 before June 30; \$25 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Harford Adventure Soc., c/o The Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Rd., Bel Air MD 21014.

### OMEGACON 2, Aug. 26-28 FL

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Universal Tower in Orlando, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an artists' workshop, dealers, videos, and door prizes. Registration: \$5 preregistered; \$10 on site. Send an SASE to: John Martello, OMEGACON 2, 3415 Silverwood Dr., Pine Hills FL 32808-2847.

### SIoux CITY CON IX, Sep. 2-4 IA

This convention will be held at the Hilton in Sioux City, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$10. Write to: M.A.G.E., 820 N. Dakota Ave., Sioux Falls, IA 57104.

### TEXICON '94, Sep. 2-5 TX

This convention will be held at the Westchase Hilton in Houston Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, open gaming, and an auction. Registration: \$20 before Aug. 13; \$25 thereafter. Write to: TEXICON, P.O. Box 631462, Houston TX 77263-1462.

### WAR!ZONE NORTH '94, Sep. 2-5 FL

This convention will be held at the Embassy Suites at Baymeadows in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered; \$19/weekend or \$7/day on site. Write to: WAR!ZONE NORTH, c/o Wolf Ent., P.O. Box 1256, DeLand FL 32721-1256.

### LEGENDS-GAINESVILLE, Sep. 3-4 GA

This convention will be held inside Lakeshore Mall in Gainesville, Ga. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and movies. Registration: \$2. Write to: Legends Ent. Group Inc., 514 Broad St., Rome GA 30161.

### STAR DREAM I, Sep. 8-11

This *Star Trek* convention will be held in the Congress Centre Rosengarten in Mannheim, Germany. Highlights include 16 stars of the series, videos, exhibitions, and filking. Write to: *Star Trek* Fan Club-Enterprise, c/o S. Strybus, Hans Sachs Ring 17, 68199 Mannheim-Niederfeld, GERMANY

### NORMAN CONQUEST 5, Sep. 9-11 OK

This convention will be held at the O. U. Student Union in Norman, Okla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$5 preregistered before Aug. 31; \$9/weekend or \$4/day on site. Write to: Room 215-A, OMU, 900 Asp Ave., Norman OK 73019.

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

**SHORECON '94, Sep. 9-11 NJ**

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Eatontown Hotel and Conference Center in Eatontown, N.J. Guests include Jim Hlavaty, Len Kaminski, and Jeff Menges. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a game auction, a charity raffle, dances, seminars, signings, and movies. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$20 on site. Write to: Multigenre Inc., 142 South St., Unit 9C, Red Bank NJ 07701-2502; or e-mail at: acd@hotmail.att.com.

**MAELSTROM 1.75, Sep. 10 NE**

This convention will be held at the City Campus Building in Lincoln, Nebr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5. Write to: MAELSTROM 1.75, c/o Chris Dekalb, 6015 Huntington, Lincoln NE 68507.

**MAGIC\* TOURNAMENT '94, Sep. 10 MA**

This tournament will be held at the Workers' Assistance Center in Cambridge, Mass. Events include games, trading, and a card auction. Registration: \$5. Write to: Brian Reddington-Wilde, 46 Highland St., Reading MA 01867.

**ANDCON '94, Sep. 15-18 OH**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Independence in Independence, Ohio. Guests include Jean Rabe and Darwin Bromley. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, computer gaming, and an auction. Registration: \$19.95/weekend. Daily and visitor passes available. Write to: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 3100, Kent OH 44240.

**TACTICON '94, Sep. 16-18 CO**

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

**WOLF-CON IV, Sep. 16-18 MS**

This convention will be held on University of Miss-Starkville campus. Guests include Simon Hawke. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show, and movies. Registration: \$25. Write to: WOLF-CON IV, P.O. Box 5342, MSU, MS 39762-5342.

**AMERICON '94, Sep. 17-18 NJ**

This convention will be held at the Clayton American Legion Hall in Clayton, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, an auction, and a charity tournament. Registration: \$11 preregistered before Aug. 15; \$12 on site. Most game fees are \$2. Dealers and GMs are welcome. Write to: AMERICON, c/o Carl "Thunder", P.O. Box 125, Mullica Hill, NJ 08062.

**GAMEQUEST '94, Sep. 17 OH**

This convention will be held at the Stevenson Center on the campus of Ohio University-Chillicothe. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include the introduction of two new games, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$5. Send an SASE to: Lonnie Hall, 25315 Moccasin Rd., Amanda OH 43102.

**GATEWAY 14, Sep. 22-25 CA**

This convention will be held at Los Angeles Airport Hyatt Hotel. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include flea markets, an auction, and dealers. Registration: \$25 preregistered; \$30 on site. Write to: STRATEGICON, P.O. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849.

**COGCON II, Sep. 23-25 MO**

This convention will be held at the Miner Rec. Building on the campus of the University of Missouri in Rolla, Mo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ events and a miniatures-painting contest. GMs are welcome. Registration: \$8 before Sep. 1; \$10 thereafter. Write to: GEAR, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla MO 65401; or e-mail: gear@albert.nuc.umn.edu.

**FOX CON '94, Sep. 23-25 IL**

This convention will be held at the Larsen Middle School in Elgin, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, Japanimation, and a silent auction. Send an SASE to: Mike Woodward, 636 Center St., Elgin IL 60120.

**KALIEDOSCOPE '94, Sep. 23-25 VA**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Lynchburg, Vir. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15 before Sep. 7; \$20 on site. Write to: LSFA, 300 Harrison St., Lynchburg VA 24504.

**KENNEL CON '94, Sep. 24-25 HI**

This convention will be held at the U.S.O. at Fort DeRussy, Waikiki, Hawaii. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games.

Other activities include Japanimation. Registration: \$3, plus small game fees. Write to: KENNEL CON, c/o Eric Kline, P.O. Box 90182, Honolulu HI 96835-0182.

**LEGENDS-ATLANTA, Sep. 24 GA**

This convention will be held at Days Inn North in Marietta, Ga. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration: \$2. Write to: Legends Ent. Group Inc., 514 Broad St., Rome GA 30161.

**WHITE SHIELD '94, Sep. 24 ID**

This convention will be held at the Basque Center in Boise, Idaho. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an auction, and war gaming. Registration: \$6 before Sep. 1; \$8 thereafter. Write to: WHITE SHIELD GAME CON, P.O. Box 8955, Boise ID 83707.

**DIRE CONSEQUENCES II Sep. 30-Oct. 2 CT**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson in Plainville, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$15, plus \$2 per game. Write to: DIRE CONSEQUENCES, P.O. Box 251, Bristol CT 06011-0251.

**LEGENDS-CHATTANOOGA, Oct. 1 TN**

This SF/gaming/comics convention will be held at the Holiday Inn-Chattanooga. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration: \$2. Write to: Legends Ent. Group Inc., 514 Broad St., Rome GA 30161.

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**ORGANIZED KAHN-FUSION '94****Oct. 1-2****PA**

This board-game convention (formerly called P.E.W. KAHN U) will be held at the West Enola Fire Hall in Enola, Pa. Events include board, war, and miniatures games. Other activities include many train games, a regional Ancients tournament, dealers, and open gaming. Registration fees vary. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070.

**QUAD CON '94, Oct. 7-9****IA**

This convention will be held at the Palmer Alumni Auditorium in Davenport, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, and an auction. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$20 on site. Send a long SASE (with two stamps) to: QUAD CON, The Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Ave., Moline IL 61265.

**SUPERIOR CON II, Oct. 8-9****MI**

This convention will be held at the Cisler Center of Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. Guests include Dr. James T. Moody. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies, contests, and card games. Registration: \$5/day or \$8/weekend preregistered; \$8/day or \$16/weekend, plus \$2/game on site. Dealers and GMs welcome. Write to: SUPERIOR CON, c/o Lee Allen, 400 Cedar St. #6, S.S. Marie MI 49783.

**CONTACT 12, Oct. 14-16****IN**

This SF&F/gaming convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Evansville, Ind. Guests in-

clude Dr. Bill Breuer, Ray Van Tilburg, and Tom Prusa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show, a hospitality suite, and panels. Registration: \$17 before Sep. 1; \$22 thereafter. Write to: CONTACT 12, P.O. Box 3894 Evansville IN 47737.

**ICON 19, Oct. 14-16****IA**

This SF convention will be held at the Best Western Westfield Inn in Coralville, Iowa. Guests include Gregory Frost and Joe Haldeman. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a masquerade, panels, and an art show. Registration: \$25 before Sep. 30; \$30 on site. One-day rates and children's rates available. Write to: ICON, P.O. Box 525, Iowa City IA 52244-0525.

**NECRONOMICON XIII, Oct. 14-16****FL**

This convention will be held at the Airport Holiday Inn in Tampa, Fla. Guests include George R. R. Martin and Timothy Zahn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, videos, workshops, a charity auction, and an art show and auction. Registration: \$25/weekend or \$10/day. Write to: NECRONOMICON XIII, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.

**TACTICONN '94, Oct. 14-16****CT**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Crown Plaza in Stamford, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include numerous tournaments. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$20 on site. Send an SASE to: Gaming Guild, c/o Jim Wiley, 100 Hoyt St. #2C, Stamford CT 06905.

**TOTALLY TUBULAR CON II****Oct. 14-16****CA**

This convention will be held at the Days Inn in Fullerton, Cal. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$20; preregistration will be very limited. Write to: TOTALLY TUBULAR CON, P.O. Box 18791, Anaheim Hills CA 92817-18791; or e-mail at: partdragon@aol.com.

**SIBCON '94, Oct. 15****PA**

This convention will be held at Lutheran Youth & Family Services in Zelenpole, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events and dealers. Registration: \$5 before Sep. 30; \$7 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003.

**BAY GAMES '94, Oct. 21-23****MD**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in College Park, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered; \$20/weekend or \$15/day on site. Write to: BAY GAMES, P.O. Box 91, Beltsville MD 20704-0091.

**Wizards' Gathering V, Oct. 21-23****MA**

This convention will be held at the Days Inn in Fall River, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$20/weekend. One- and two-day rates available. Early-bird and group discounts also are available. Write to: SMAGS, P.O. Box 6295, Fall River MA 02724.

**KETTERING GAME CON XI****Oct. 22-23****OH**

This convention will be held at the Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer games and a game auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429.

**GRANDE MASQUERADE '94, Oct. 28-30****GA**

This horror convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Central in Atlanta, Ga. Events include role-playing games, literary guests, dealers, films, and an art show and auction. Registration: \$25 before Aug. 30; \$30 on site. Write (and make checks payable) to: Night Owl Prod., 4598 Stonegate Industrial Blvd., Stone Mountain GA 30083.

**NUKECON IV, Oct. 28-29****NE**

This convention will be held at the Midlands Community Center in Papillion, Nebr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include several tournaments. Registration: \$7 preregistered; \$12 on site. Write to: NUKECON, c/o Stephanie Murphy, 13115 Josephine Circle, Omaha NE 68138.

**GRAVAL CON '94, Oct. 29-30****MI**

This convention will be held at Grand Valley State University's Kirkhof Center in Allendale, Mich. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include costume and painted-miniatures contests. Registration: \$3/day or \$5/weekend; free to GMs and students with valid IDs. Write to: Grand Valley State Univ., GRAVAL CON, 221 Johnson, L.C.1, Allendale MI 49401.

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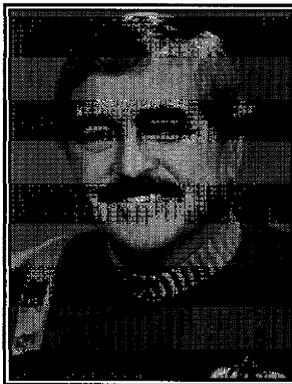
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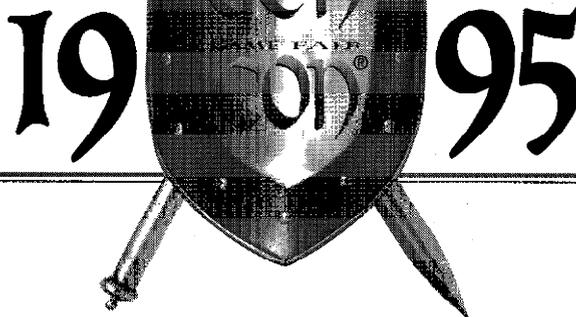
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The great wyrm banked again, arcing high and wide for several minutes, and then turned in a stoop, just a black speck on the misty southern horizon, but flying fast... Mugwigen peered into his "highlooker"... This gnomish periscope also features several slots wherein magnifying lenses could be inserted, but Mugwigen needed no amplification now, not with the specter of the dragon fast growing on the horizon.

—Excerpted from *Dragon's Dagger*

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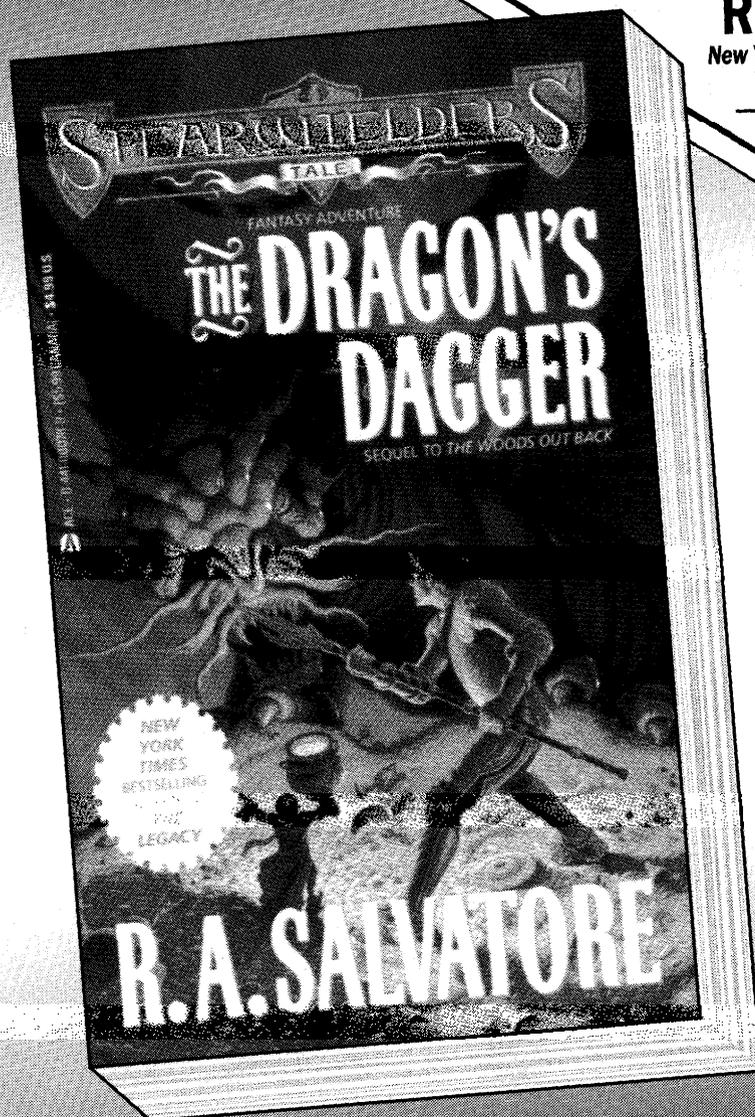
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I would like to raise the much maligned issue of critical hits. There was a DRAGON Magazine article many years ago called, "Good Hits and Bad Misses" [Editor's Note: DRAGON issue #39], which included a table for such hits and fumbles. As a DM, I use a modified version of that table for my own critical hits and fumbles optional rules. I stress optional, because my version of critical hits is discussed with any group I play with, and we all decide whether to use these tables. The reasons for not using critical hit or location tables are compelling, and some have been detailed in the DMG. I would like to put forward two good reasons for their inclusion: suspense and humor.

First, suspense. When a character has 30+ hit points and is going toe-to-toe with a standard orc, he isn't going to be too worried; the odds are in his favor. Throw in a random chance of a critical hit, and this encounter becomes more interesting. On the fumble table, if the character slips or breaks a weapon, the orc may have a temporary advantage, which can add excitement to such an encounter, without presenting overwhelming odds against the party. A low-level party forced into combat with a tough monster can be saved with a critical hit. In one game I ran, a badly wounded party was saved by the female wizard scoring a critical hit with her staff, breaking the monster's nose and stunning it. The party used the time gained to flee. It was the kind of stuff that legends are made of, and was a regularly referred-to event, both in and out of the game. In

reverse, when a powerful monster fumbles, the party may have a temporary advantage in combat, or may have a chance to flee.

Second, humor. During combat a fumble can be dangerous, but also can have a funny side; the imagined situations are endless. I particularly enjoyed seeing a low-level, snobby paladin draw his sword and charge to attack, only to slip at the crucial moment. His orc opponent took the opportunity to boot him down a flight of stairs. It was quite a while before Sir Rupert lived that one down.

Critical hits and fumbles should be rare, actually happening only once or twice per game session (or maybe not happen at all). However, the possibility of their occurrence has added much to my games. With my modified tables, rolling a natural 20 on the attack die indicates the possibility of a critical hit, and the players' faces show their excitement (if they are hitting) or fear (if they are being hit). A natural 1 on the attack die indicates the possibility of a fumble, but you should see the concern or delight (depending on who is rolling) on the faces of the players. On a possible critical hit, the attacker rolls the attack die again after getting the 20; another hit result indicates the hit was critical, a miss indicates the 20 was just a normal hit. For fumbles, after a 1 is rolled a Dexterity check is made; a successful check indicates no fumble. In addition, a successful critical hit is not an automatic kill, although there is about a 10 percent chance of that happening. Other possibilities include stunning, limbs incapacitated, loss of charisma (due to facial injury), and unconsciousness.

Fumble options are weapon broken/tangled/stuck/lost, loss of balance, twist ankle, and hit friend/self. If you are against instant kills, make up tables that omit them. I heartily recommend the use of critical hits and fumble tables, but I would like to reiterate: use them to benefit the game, and keep a close check on the consequences; discard or modify the tables if the campaign suffers.

Rick Underwood  
Australia

First off, let me say that I have been an avid reader of DRAGON Magazine for many years, since I picked up my first copy (an issue numbered somewhere in the early 90s). As a gamer who has gravi-

tated to and from the AD&D® game to several other systems, including the *Marvel Superheroes* game, DRAGON, in my opinion, has maintained a strong and healthy integrity that has lasted to modern times, and with hope, into the future.

After reading issue #197, I had felt that I must voice my point of view on several topics that had caught my attention.

First, Allen Reeves' letter in the letters column: I, myself, have not had the Norman Rockwell *Saturday Evening Post* style childhood. In my youth, I was what some have nowadays termed "emotionally challenged" and I was transferred from mainstream school to the BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) program of my home state.

During my high-school years in this program, I was fortunate to participate in, with the other exceptional students of my grade, an original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game adventure created by my then science teacher, Mr. Davenport. This game, new to my experience, taught me the value of teamwork, fraternity, strategy, and, most importantly, imagination. I have had no bad experiences with the game, just with bad GMs.

The only option that I can provide to fellow readers and players is this: if one does bring in a new player, have that person sit in and observe a few games; then, perhaps, allow that person to participate in the next campaign. Know what you're getting into *beforehand*; test the waters. Last time I checked, *common sense* was still something of a commonality.

Second, the "Eye of the Monitor" article written by Sandy Petersen: I feel that several interesting notes have been left out (not on purpose) about the game of *Wolfenstein 3D*. I have played this highly amusing game. Where else can one vicariously slay members of the Third Reich and feel not one pang of guilt? The most challenging mode/level ("I Am Death Incarnate!") was not mentioned. This is not for the squeamish; let's leave it at that. I do, however, have only two words for those-who-know: *GOD Mode*.

I am awaiting a future article/review of the sequel to *Wolfenstein*, *Spear of Destiny*.

Again, let me say that I have enjoyed your magazine immensely over the years. Here's to many more years of quality.

J. W. Rommell  
Copiague NY



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As this is the first time I have written to DRAGON Magazine, I must tell you first that I have greatly enjoyed the magazine since I was introduced to the AD&D game two years ago. I have been meaning to write in for some time, but was finally spurred to do so after reading the letters of issue #196.

I have noticed from comments people have made in the past that they were under the impression that female gamers are a rare species! Although I have noticed that, proportionately, there are fewer of us than male gamers, this does not mean in any way that we are few in number. However, I do think that there are not as many of us as there should be. I must ask male gamers out there, though: do you talk about role-playing to your female friends? Is the problem due to the fact they just don't know enough about the game to want to join?

Maybe they would be more willing to try role-playing if you asked them to find another female friend who also might be interested in role-playing to come along to an introductory session. The presence of another female novice there, whom they know and can talk to, might help them relax and enjoy the game. If this is not possible, the experience could be quite intimidating to her, especially if there are many people in the group that she doesn't know. All of us show more of our true selves than maybe we would normally when we play a character (this was something I noticed when I became our group's DM, but which I hadn't realized when I was a player), and very few people are happy about showing that much about themselves to people they don't know.

Also, think back to the time when you were introduced to gaming. Would you have been so willing to join if the role-playing group had been all or mostly female, and role-playing itself had been seen in society as something many women, but not many men, enjoyed?

It will be easier if the whole group meets the new player socially before you bring her into your campaign, so that all the misconceptions can be cleared up, and of course, so that everyone will be more comfortable as a group. It is simply not enough for her to accept the role-players; what is more important, the others in your group must accept her.

Second, I do not agree with Mr. La-palme's comment in issue #196, "How can you involve a person in a magical setting if she does not know about Merlin or Gandalf?" However, I did like his other ideas, especially about rules (it is far better to learn each one as the situation presents itself, but not before). You can't say that just because someone is not familiar with fantasy or science fiction, they never will like it. If they are not comfortable with the ideas involved at first, ask them instead to play a character they can relate to and understand (maybe a fighter or a thief, for example). After all, this is what all of us

eventually find ourselves doing! They will soon be curious about the spell-casting abilities of other members of your party, and may later want to try it out for themselves. It is worth the effort.

Serena Ng  
Edinburgh, Scotland

It seems to me that stout halflings have Gnomish blood, not Dwarvish, as the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessory suggests. I have several good reasons for this speculation.

First, though dwarves "cheerfully tolerate" them, gnomes "like halflings best."

Second, the stout halfling infravision, when of pure blood (one gnome parent), is identical to that of gnomes.

But third, and most interesting: of the two abilities inherited from their non-halfling parent, determining grades and slopes and determining direction underground, you might note that only gnomes have both of these abilities, and their ability to determine direction underground is exactly the same percentage chance as the stout halfling inherits. Dwarves have no idea where they're going underground unless they post signs.

Marle McCabe  
No address given

I am writing in response to Clarissa Fowler's letter, issue #197, in which Ms. Fowler points out some ways to get more females involved with RPGs. I agree with many of Ms. Fowler's ideas and points made throughout her letter, but, as a male gamer myself, I dislike the reference to male gamers liking (excuse me, I mean tending toward) "Shallow, combat-oriented characters who look for power and money". As a player I enjoy adventures that try my mind more than my character's brawn. As a DM I reflect that same enjoyment in the adventures I write, by adding mysteries and heavy plots as well as combat, and also by enforcing the importance of role-playing, all of which add color and background to my campaign. In short, I would hope that Ms. Fowler or anyone else will not judge the male gender by a few examples (granted, Ms. Fowler did give a generalization warning).

I might add, Ms. Fowler, that I did play a female character once. Now that took a bit of *role-playing!*

Daman Robison  
Oroville CA

I feel compelled to respond to the comments made by Paul Bleiweis regarding his uneasiness to admit that he, as an "adult," enjoys role-playing games. I am 30 years old. I earned a master's degree in 1987, and became a doctor in 1991. I am happily married, play golf, work out daily, and have a strong belief in God. I also enjoy role-playing games.

I have not "grown out" of heavy metal music, nor do I expect to stop playing the AD&D game. For those people who chide

your delight in "becoming someone else" for an evening, perhaps it would be of benefit to show them how role-playing is quite simply the best hobby around. Role-playing develops math skills, imagination (heavens!), leadership, social interactions, strategy, and problem-solving. How many hobbies or games can boast all of this?

The D&D® game has been around for only 20 years, so the gaming population is just now starting to age into adulthood. Can you imagine 50 years from now—we'll all have something fun to do in our retirement!

I would advise Mr. Bleiweis not to let others' opinion of role-playing games make him feel uneasy. It's their loss. Generally, I find that people seem a little envious when they see the enthusiasm on my face as I explain why I spend time playing a game of casting spells and battling monsters.

Mike Olgren, M.D.  
Dearborn MI  
Ω



## First Quest

Continued from page 8

while these guys didn't hunt bees with rubber bands, I had been waiting for them to announce quarterstaff practice on the TSR roof since my first day on the job.

"Okay, Jim. Looks like you're going to be Poland", noted Steve Winter as we sat down to play.

"Is that a good starting position?" I asked, though I knew enough about European history to guess the answer myself.

"Well", Steve said, trying to sound encouraging, "it can be. Depends on what you make of it."

I glanced at the board with all its strange little markers and obscure tables. The whole thing reminded me of that first GAMMA WORLD character sheet, and I still hadn't learned to decipher stereo instructions written in Japanese. Oh, well. At least I knew what to expect. Make the best of it, right?

I smiled and picked up my first event card: famine in half my empire. My capital goes into open revolt.

Hoo-ha. Thrown to the weasels again.

Ω

\* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.

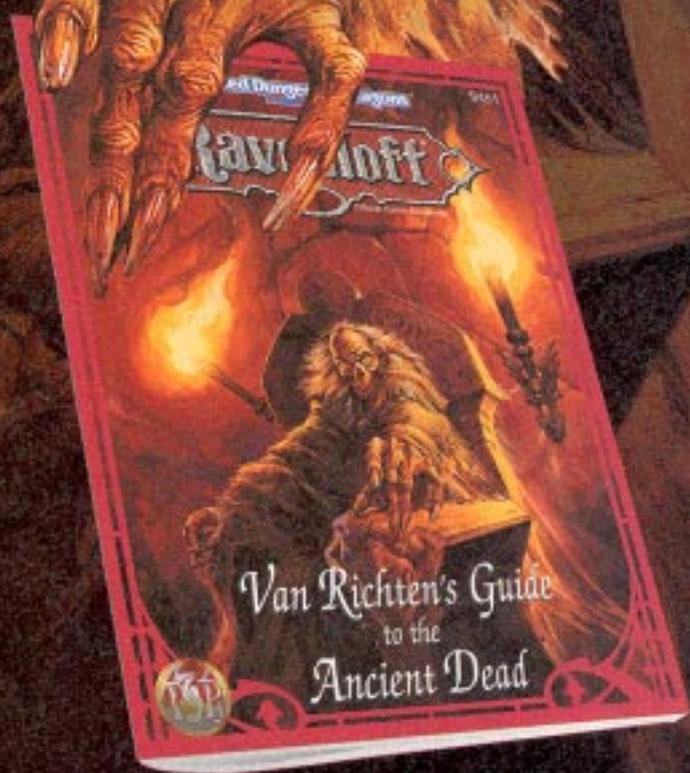


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# The Game Wizards



## Magic numbers

Three is a magic number for most western peoples, but if you go far enough east, it's eight that shows up most often. Almost every civilization uses a base ten counting system (our number of fingers and toes probably helped decide that one). Twenty-five and fifty are the great numbers for wedding anniversaries. When it comes to publishing periodicals, there's no magic number more significant than 100.

POLYHEDRON® Newszine celebrates its 100th issue this October, so if you aren't already receiving it as a ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ASSOCIATION™ member, now's the time to join. This milestone issue showcases a wide variety of the sorts of features you'll receive every month as an RPGA® Network member, and that's not to mention the excellent monthly columns you'll find nowhere else! You can't find this on the newsstands—the only way to get POLYHEDRON Newszine is to join the Network.

In order to celebrate the many gaming worlds that have provided so many wonderful adventures, characters, magical items, and spells for the newszine, issue #100 will include features from a wide variety of role-playing game settings. AD&D® game players will be happy to see that almost all the popular TSR settings are represented, and players of the FASA's SHADOWRUN\*, I.C.E.'s CHAMPIONS\*, and West End Games' INDIANA JONES\*,

BLOODSHADOWS\*, SHATTERZONE\*, PARANOIA\*, and STAR WARS\* games won't be disappointed either! POLYHEDRON Newszine #100 will include articles from some of the biggest names in gaming, professionals and talented fans alike, and all of them members of the RPGA Network.

### Features

So what exactly will you find in issue #100? Let's start with a brand-new DRAGONLANCE® saga story by Margaret Weis. We thought that might get your attention.

Margaret's story and all the articles in this issue are brand new and will appear nowhere else (except one article/which has never appeared anywhere else in English). The only way you can get them is by joining the largest gaming organization in the world: the RPGA Network.

If you're one of the many players of this year's hot AD&D game PLANESCAPE™ setting, you'll love the setting's designer Zeb Cook's travelogue of the planes. If it's medieval high fantasy you prefer, TSR's Bruce Heard will give you a "Squid's Eye View of Mystara", the newest—and oldest—of TSR's fantasy game settings. Veteran game designer Bill Slavicsek will bring us an insight into the changes taking place in the world of Athas, while TSR's Wolf Baur supplies a new organization for

use with his *Kromosome* setting for the AMAZING ENGINE® game. Two of the most talented and prolific writers of RPGA tournaments (not to mention a few freelance game products), Nicky Rea and Tom Prusa, contribute their own visions to the AL-QADIM® and SPELLJAMMER® settings.

Care for a little run through the shadows? If so, you may want to consider one of the two new SHADOWRUN\* archetypes from one of the creators of the game, Tom Dowd. Or if superheroics are more your style, then TSR's Monte Cook has a new CHAMPIONS\* character for you to include in your campaign. West End Games provides terrific new adventure ideas for your INDIANA JONES\* campaign and two deadly villains to face your characters in the BLOODSHADOWS\* game. All players of the PARANOIA\* game will want to take the Troubleshooter's Exam.

### Columns

So this is a typical issue of POLYHEDRON Newszine, right? Not at all! These sorts of special features make up about one third of a typical issue of the Newszine. What you'll usually find are two or three articles, an adventure, and then several excellent regular features.

Roger E. Moore's "The Living Galaxy" science-fiction column is one of the most interesting, fun-to-read, and useful columns in any gaming magazine. This TSR veteran's commentary on SF campaigns applies just as well to fantasy, horror, superhero, or any other genre of role-playing games. Whatever game you play, Roger's advice, anecdotes, and examples will help you make it better.

Are you a fan of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting? If so, you're missing out on some of the most interesting locations in Faerun if you're not reading Ed Greenwood's "Everwinking Eye". Not only is Ed one of the best-known Network members, but he's also one of the most frequent contributors to the newszine. Ed already has reported on the Vast and Turmish, and soon he'll guide POLYHEDRON readers to even more fascinating regions of the Realms.

Films like *Ladyhawke*, *Star Wars*, and *Dracula* provide countless ideas for players and game masters alike, but what other films on video should you see to inspire your gaming muse? Author, editor, and film buff Jim Lowder advises members every month on just which videos to

*Continued on page 96*

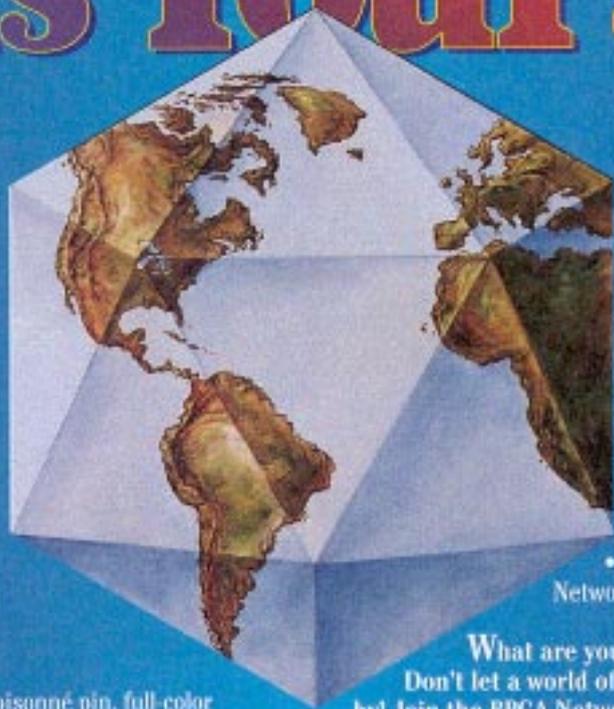
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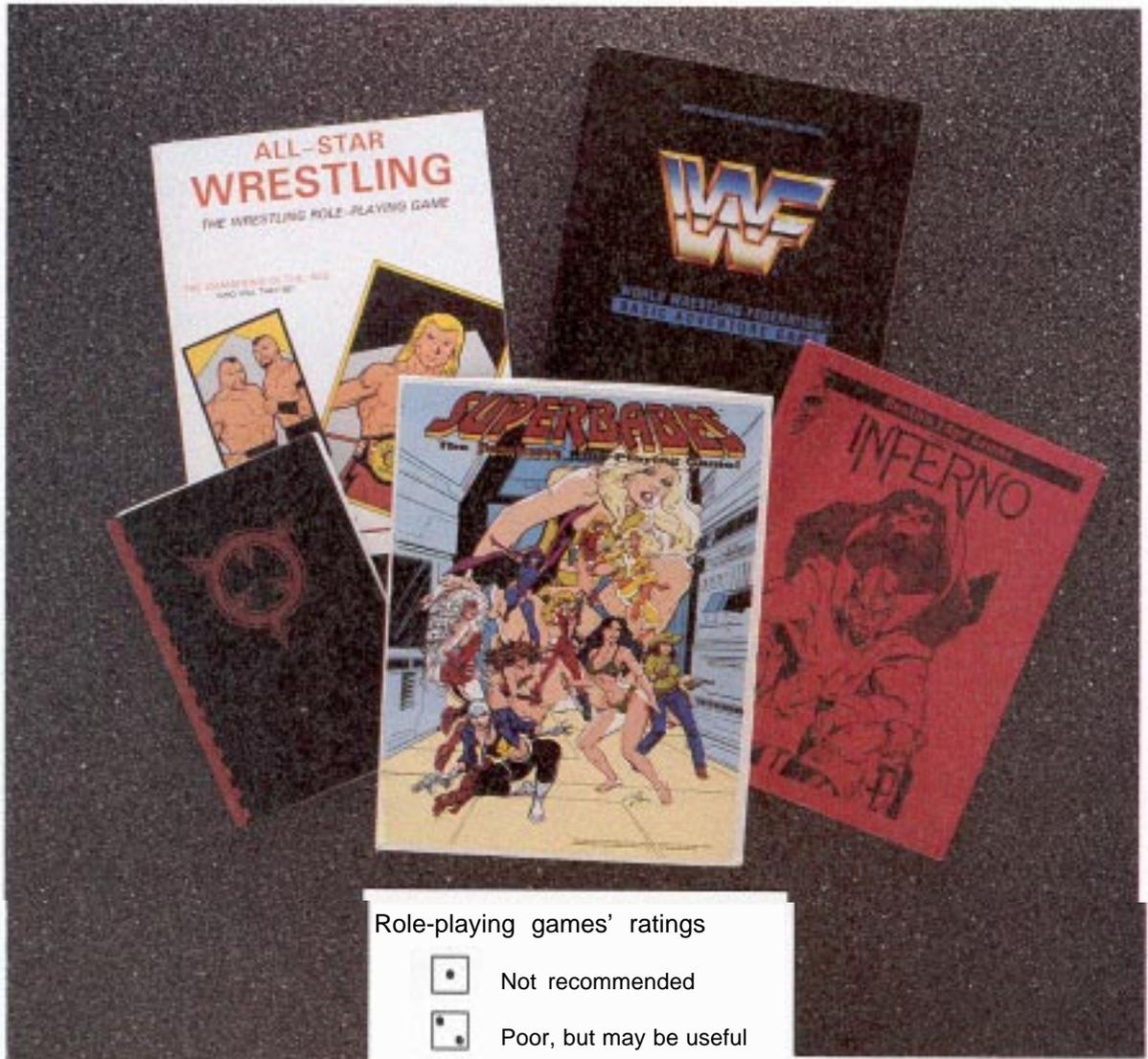
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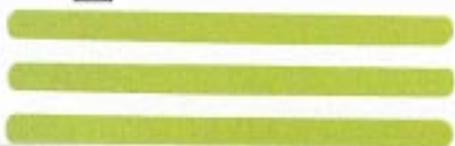
# ROLE-PLAYING reviews

©1994 by Lester Smith  
Photography by Charles Kohl



## Role-playing games' ratings

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



# Quirky games

I love writing reviews.

There are several reasons for that passion. For one thing, the collector in me is always thrilled to discover new products and peruse them. I find myself reading games—especially role-playing games—as if they were novels, enjoying the drama of their settings, the character possibilities, and the plots they allow for (it is especially nice if there are any sample adventures included).

For another thing, my designer side takes delight in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of a game, from concept, to mechanics, to presentation. Any theories I have concerning what makes a good game are either confirmed or challenged during that analysis. And I thoroughly enjoy making and testing theories.

My writer side gains satisfaction in actually writing the reviews, explaining and justifying the opinions I come away from a product with. For a writer, what better pleasure is there in life than to write your views about a topic you love?

Add to all this the vicarious pleasure of promoting some small-press gems that truly deserve attention . . . or warning people away from the occasional real turkey. There is a certain satisfaction in drawing attention to people who deserve it, whether good or bad.

Of course, the reviewing gig also pays, helping to support my gaming addiction. Being a married fellow, that's important.

Naturally, considering how much I enjoy reviewing games, I have some strong opinions about how the job ought to be done. For one thing, I think reviewers ought to play a game before writing about it. All too often, articles claim to be reviews, when in fact they are merely a summation of what a product covers, or a thinly disguised advertisement. While there isn't anything absolutely wrong with such articles, they shouldn't claim to be reviews. A review ought to have some honest analysis to it, and a reasonable analysis can only be done by actually playing the game.

Playing a game before reviewing it takes time, of course. (I see this as another benefit of writing reviews: It justifies taking time away from other things in order to play even more games!) To my mind, a game reviewer who writes reviews just from reading the product is like a movie reviewer who doesn't actually view films, but merely reads the scripts. Imagine someone claiming to judge foods based on merely reading the recipes. Sure, experience might give the critic some idea of how a thing will taste, but the proof is in the pudding, as they say.

In writing review articles, then, I make every effort to play the games covered. That should be obvious from the com-

ments made—references to how my gaming group reacted to a setting or mechanic, for instance. Items covered in the *Short and sweet* section are sometimes an exception. That section is intended as an announcement and general impression of new products, not in-depth reviews of them. But even then, the bulk of the games included there are chosen because I've played them and found them interesting in one way or another.

Next time, I'll talk a bit about my thoughts for the shape of a game review. But now it's time to turn to the quirky collection of RPGs covered this month.

## WHISPERING VAULT\* game

"Black Book" edition 88-page, 5½" x 8½", spiral-bound book

Pariah Press

\$10.00

Design: Mike Nystul

Illustrations: Joel Biske, Steve Bryant, Pat Coleman, Daniel Gelson, Jeff Laubenstein, Jim Nelson, Mike Nielsen



The "Black Book" edition of this game is a pre-release version sold only at conventions. By the time this article sees print, a full version of the game should be available through normal distribution channels.

This mysterious little book is intriguing from the very start. For one thing, it has no title on its outside cover—just a strange, spiky, red rune. On the title and legal pages, we learn that the product is the "Whispering Vault" (an ominous title, for certain), and that the producer is Pariah Press (an evocative company name, if ever I heard one). The pages inside are a somber, grainy gray in color, with bizarre, sometimes horrifying illustrations. Visually, then, the product works to set a mood of horror and mystery.

An initial reading of the game reveals that it has a powerful new mythology as to how reality and the supernatural operate. Player characters (PCs) are persons who have transcended their own mortality to dwell as Stalkers in the realm of the Unseen. They serve as otherworldly guardians of reality, tracking down rogue gods who have invaded the mortal realms, repairing the breach made, and hauling the rogues back outside of time to be cast into the Whispering Vault (hence the game's name).

Players design Stalkers with an eye toward attitude and imagery. When not on duty, Stalkers exist as Avatars, evidencing their essential natures both in their chosen form and the realm they create as a hideaway. (For example, one of my players envisioned his character as a Victorian sorcerer who had died in a confrontation with some great evil, only to find himself existing as an Avatar in the afterlife. Consequently, his Avatar is a corpse-pale fig-

ure in Victorian garb, dwelling in a crypt at the center of a misty cemetery, the crypt's interior being decorated like a cross between a Victorian parlor and an alchemist's lab.) When Stalkers reenter the realm of flesh on their missions, they manifest as nearly human versions of their spiritual selves. These are called Vessels, and their attributes can be recrafted from mission to mission, allowing the character's abilities to vary widely.

The game invents quite a lot of new vocabulary for such a small book, but it is all evocative of the mythology being created. This helps to get players in the mood for adventures, as does the ritualistic nature of calling the hunt, summoning weavers to fashion the PCs' vessels, summoning a living bridge to the realm of flesh, and, after investigating the adventure's plot and confronting the rogue god, binding that god and hauling it back for punishment. A strong atmosphere of brooding horror and heroic action is conveyed by the text, from vocabulary created, to creatures described, to setting depicted.

Game mechanics center around the roll of multiple d6s, the exact number being set by a character's applicable skill. As in the YAHTZEE\* game, players are looking for matched sets of dice, which they add for a degree of success. By spending a point of karma, a player can reroll any number of those dice, again reminiscent of the YAHTZEE game. As an RPG mechanic, this works surprisingly well, allowing for a range of results from truly pathetic to incredible, with a hefty bit of influence by the player. Also satisfying is the fact that damage is divided by a target's resistance (Fortitude). Again, with a modest range of numbers, creatures can be created that range from incredibly wimpy to absolutely awesome, in terms of the amount of damage they can withstand. Add to this the fact that mortals have die caps against supernatural creatures (sixes are ignored on their dice), and the action is pushed to even more heroic (or horrific) heights.

There are some things missing in this edition of the game, however. For example, the description of the shape-changing skill has been left out. More significantly, a central concept—the keys of humanity, which give the character a reason to care about the real world—are not explained at all. This leaves some players to flounder, wondering why their characters don't just "waste" any mortal who gets in their way. The designer has promised that the full edition of the game will take care of these problems.

From the taste given in this black book edition, I definitely recommend this game for anyone who likes heroic horror. It is one of the most inventive treatments of the subject I have yet encountered.

## WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION\* BASIC ADVENTURE\*

### game

176-page, 8½" x 11" perfect-bound book  
Whit Publications \$19.95  
P.O. Box 1397  
Murray KY 43071

(or call 1-800-GAME-WWF 9-5 CST)

Author: M. David Clark

Editors: Jeff Arnett, Midge Bacon, Bill Littlepage, & Chris Wilkey

Illustrations: Photos by TitanSports, Inc.,  
title belt illustrations by B. Nelson  
Baggett

Here, at last, is a game that begs the question, "How many role-players are just dying to play the role of a professional wrestler, and how many wrestling fans are just dying to learn to role-play?"

When I first learned that this game was in the works, I wondered how it could be considered role-playing. The concept of playing wrestler versus wrestler in the ring seemed more like a combat game, and I had been assured that the product would not take characters outside that arena. Upon reading through the game, I came to recognize that the theatrics involved in pro wrestling certainly qualify as role-playing, whether it be mugging for the crowd or acting out a particular wrestler's personality flaws, such as compulsive lying or gullibility.

The WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION BASIC ADVENTURE game lets players design a wide range of wrestling characters, including not only wrestlers themselves, but also managers, announcers, and referees. Characters are distinguished not only by their attributes (Brute Strength, Technical Ability, Brawling, Martial Arts, Aerial Tactics, Perception, Stamina, Constitution, and Business Skill for rolled attributes, and Power Bonus, Movement Rate, Recover, and Stun Points for figured attributes), but also by their favorite maneuver, special advantages, special disadvantages, fan view and support, money, and equipment. Through most of character creation, players can choose to roll randomly for results or use points to purchase what they wish.

"Combat" is relatively straightforward in the game. The wrestler with the best fan view and support begins with the initiative and chooses a maneuver, the opponent chooses a counter maneuver, and then both players roll percentile dice against one attribute or another to find who succeeds. Critical successes and failures are possible, and a chart determines what happens if both wrestlers succeed, both fail, one succeeds while the other fails, one critically succeeds or critically fails, and so on. On this chart, the wrestler with initiative always has the advantage. (This means that the term "counter maneuver" is a bit misleading, as the maneuvers don't really affect each other.) When a maneuver succeeds, it causes stun damage to its

target, as a number of d6s, often with a bonus for one or both wrestlers' weight, the attacker's strength, and relative positions. As a wrestler suffers an accumulation of stun points, his attributes drop by stages (I to IV). What's more, maneuvers are categorized by stage as well, meaning that you have to drive an opponent to lower stages before you can use the more time-consuming and devastating maneuvers on him. Typically, wrestlers try to pin their opponents, once they have been weakened sufficiently. But it is possible to do physical damage to them instead (though a good guy is penalized for such things), and, of course, it is always possible for someone to be counted out while outside the ring or suffer a disqualification for using illegal maneuvers (assuming the referee notices).

There are some admirable things about the game design. For one thing, "heroes" and "villains" have some clearly divided abilities, such as the "comeback" for good guys and "cheap shots" for the bad, and these are affected by just how well loved or hated a character is. Also, the fact that maneuvers are ranked by an opponent's stun ranking lends a nice feel to matches, giving them a progression similar to those in the "real world". One of the best things about the game is the use of stun points. Characters typically spend a few to position their opponents, then burn the rest showing off to the fans. Points spent showing off convert directly to points of fan support.

But the game has some marked problems as well. Most significantly, the writing is terrible. Like a bad freshman paper, rather than stating things precisely, the book repeats ideas multiple times, relying upon the reader to compare the various statements and figure out what it all means. This makes it very difficult to find a particular rule during the heat of play, assuming a reader has waded through the morass of text to begin with. That is especially sad, considering how many people are listed as editors. Also, play depends so heavily upon page after page of maneuver tables—with some of the most obtuse footnotes imaginable—that matches can crawl along as painfully as a snail with a broken back. As if that weren't enough, there is an *Advanced Sourcebook* in the works, as well as a *Maneuver Handbook*.

Still, the campaign material allows for long-running play, and the game includes ratings for sample wrestlers from the WWF, such as THE UNDERTAKER\*, MACHO MAN RANDY SAVAGE\*, and DOINK THE CLOWN\*, for those interested. The maneuver descriptions themselves are quite entertaining. In all, the game's good features slightly outweigh its flaws. My biggest complaint is that it serves as a poor example of role-playing to neophytes who might buy it because of the WWF license.

## ALL-STAR WRESTLING\* game

96-page, 8½" x 11" perfect-bound book  
Afterthought Images \$n/a  
P.O. Box 3096  
Richland WA 99352  
Author: Paul Schulze  
Editor: Richard May, with Stacy Schulze  
Illustrations: Paul Schulze

Here, at last, is a game that begs the question, "How many role-players are just dying to play the role of a professional wrestler, and how many wrestling fans are just dying to learn to role-play?" (Oh, sorry. I did that bit once already.)

Guess what the ALL-STAR WRESTLING (ASW) game allows you to do? You got it: It lets players design professional wrestlers and have them duke it out in the ring. Considering that it tackles in 96 pages what the WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION BASIC ADVENTURE game uses 176 for, it isn't surprising that I rate ASW higher. What's more, ASW does its job with style, belying my usual theory that writers shouldn't draw, and artists shouldn't write. In this product, Paul Schulze handles both quite nicely. The writing is clean, with an open, engaging style, and so are the illustrations.

Character creation centers primarily around spending from pools of creation points. But there is a bit of randomness thrown in here and there, for flavor. First, players purchase basic attributes—Power, Agility, Quickness, Technical Ability, and Endurance—with one pool. Then they determine secondary attributes such as Damage Bonus, Recovery, Attack Value, Defense Value, and the like from those basic abilities. The number of actions a character can perform each turn is determined now, as well. As in the I.C.E./Hero Games CHAMPIONS\* and SJG's CAR WARS\* games, a flow chart determines in which phases a wrestler may act, based upon his number of actions.

Next, players determine their wrestlers' backgrounds: federations wrestled in, titles held, and resulting age, for example. Backgrounds not only allow for play of characters with personal histories, it also allows chances for extra creation points to be spent on skills and maneuvers later. Those points can be further increased by purchase of drawbacks, like "Old Injury" or "Egotist". Maneuvers are divided between strikes and holds, with a few concise charts to indicate minimum Technical Ability (strikes) or Power (holds), damage done, endurance spent, whether the attacker's damage bonus applies, how hard a hold is to break, whether an Irish Whip (flinging an opponent into the ropes) can be combined with a strike, and the creation point cost to purchase a level of skill in the maneuver. "Submission" holds are clearly identified, as are "finishing" strikes and illegal maneuvers. A handful of special skills are identified as well, such as "Break Hold" and "Distract Ref."

Combat is simple and easy. To begin, players determine which wrestler is acting first, based upon the phase chart (with relative Quickness breaking ties). Next, the acting wrestler decides on an action, whether it be a hold, a strike, an attempt to escape a hold, or even a moment of rest and recovery. For attacks, the acting wrestler adds his attack value to his skill level with the maneuver, and then subtracts the opponent's defense value. He must roll equal to or below the resultant number on 1d20 in order to succeed. (Note that wrestlers can attempt maneuvers they have no skill for, at a negative modifier.) If successful, the attacker rolls a number of d6s for damage, based upon the maneuver performed, possibly with a damage bonus for his size. After subtracting his Body rating, the opponent suffers the rest as damage to his Body points. Once they reach zero, further damage applies to his Endurance. Zero Endurance and/or Body Points result in negative modifiers to Defensive Value, thus making the wrestler easier to pin or to force into submission. Naturally, there are options for disqualification, being counted out when out of the ring, tag-team play, and suchlike.

After the combat section, rules are provided for campaign play. There also are physical descriptions for most of the maneuvers listed in the book, followed by 14 sample characters, and various blank record sheets.

One of the nicest things about the book is that the chapters are interspersed with short essays and articles portraying fictitious wrestling federations and characters. That keeps the overall impact light and enjoyable.

Complaints are hard to come by concerning this game. About the worst is that for the sample wrestlers, the designer forgot to list Damage Bonuses, Damage Points, Recovery, Body Points, and phases of action. But that is easy enough for a player to fix. It is worth noting, however, that the game focuses so much on the wrestlers themselves that it pretty much ignores the reaction of the crowds. (Personally, for my own play, I plan to adapt to this game the WWFBA game's rules for positioning opponents and showing off for the crowds). In all, though, this is an admirable product.

### **SUPERBABES\* game**



Boxed set containing 142-page rule book, GM screen, fold-up character figures, color poster, character sheets, Florida mapsheet, Orlando mapsheet, and two comic books

Selex, Inc. \$17.50

302 S. Center St. Eustis FL 32726

Author: Marc Schezzini and Cameron Verkaik

Illustrations: Brad Gorby (cover) and AC Comics

The SUPERBABES game is based on the characters and universe of the FEM-

FORCE\* comic-book series. Prior to reviewing the game, I had never heard of the comics (though several of my artist friends had). For those, like me, not familiar with the comic series, the game box includes a special "compact comic" that explains the origins of the superheroines who make up the Femforce, an all female, supercommando team created at the suggestion of Eleanor Roosevelt sometime around 1943. That mini-comic is accompanied by a random issue of the FEMFORCE series itself, giving a taste of what the ladies are up to nowadays.

The SUPERBABES game sets out to recreate the world of the FEMFORCE, allowing players to take on the roles of MS. VICTORY\*, MISS VICTORY\*, NIGHTVEIL\*, STARDUST\*, SHE-CAT\*, SYNNA\*, TARA\*, BUCKAROO BETTY\*, and GARGANTA\*, or to design brand-new characters of their own for that universe. Reading through the sample comics and the game rules reveals that universe to retain many trappings of the Golden Age of comics, when good was good, evil was evil, men were men, and women were . . . well endowed with super powers. The FEMFORCE universe has not fallen prey to the grit and darkness so prevalent in the fare of more well-known comics companies. And married to its Golden Age lightness is a gentle, tongue-in-cheek attitude toward the sex appeal of superheroines. It isn't camp, nor sarcasm, nor high farce; rather, it is the sort of thing Marilyn Monroe might have starred in if a FEMFORCE movie had been made during her heyday.

Like pretty much every other superhero RPG, the SUPERBABES game gives players a pool of creation points with which to build their characters. First an origin is purchased, from such options as Adventuress, Artificial Being, Supernatural Accident, and the like. Next comes primary statistics—Muscles, Health, Moves, Looks, Brains, Will, and Personality—from which the secondary stats of Power Points and HTK (hits to kill) are figured. Though they come during play, rather than during character creation, Fame, XP (experience points), and Character Level also are considered secondary statistics, as are Bimbo Points. ("What?" I hear someone ask. "A level-based supers game?" Wait a tick, and all will be revealed. Yes, even Bimbo Points.) After that, players purchase a superpower or two, or more, for their characters, saving some points for skills, of course, and possibly gizmos (you know, things like glider capes, powered armor, blaster rods and such). With those things done, all that is left is visualization and description of the character, and a new superheroine is launched upon the world. (Players can design superheroes instead, but that sort of misses the point.)

Combat and damage form an extensive portion of the book, of course. After all, this is comic-book adventure. Finally, roughly 20 pages are spent on GM advice, followed by a short adventure and sample

characters from the FEMFORCE. The book is heavily illustrated by artwork from the comic books, always well chosen to match the topics it accompanies in the text. (Interestingly enough, the art of the comic series is no more or less "curvaceous" in its portrayal of women than most mainstream comics are.)

The writing throughout the game is light and entertaining, with friendly editorial comments inserted here and there for illumination or amusement. The system seems to hold together nicely, accommodating a wide range of abilities and power levels. Most impressively, the rules cover their subject with relative simplicity—this in an easy game to play. Most rolls are made on 1d20, seeking a result less than or equal to one stat or another. Some few skills are rolled on percentile dice, when multiple attributes are added. Initiative in combat is rolled on 1d10, with a bonus based on Moves score. Strangely enough, rolls to hit an opponent are based upon a chart which cross-references attacker's level with target's Hitability (something like armor class). This is highly unusual for a supers game. Some players might complain that experience is level-based, meaning that characters improve in stages, rather than a detail at a time, but it works. And considering the idea's history, a lot of people are used to it by now.

Overall, the SUPERBABES game mechanics work to promote story development rather than dictate it. A few cases in point are the use of Do It Twice in combat, the maneuvers Love Tap and Attack to Off Balance, and the purchase of Bimbo Points. The first allows a character to make twice the normal attacks during her initiative phase, provided that she passes a roll versus her Moves stat. Love Tap allows a character to knock an Average Joe unconscious without crushing his skull, and without having to worry much that she might hit him too softly for any effect. Attack to Off Balance lets one character engage an opponent's attention and set up that opponent for a more devastating attack by a teammate. But the Bimbo Point rule is a true shining point in the game. Basically, by accruing one Bimbo Point, a character can declare that her superpower will work at maximum effect, without any random roll. By taking on two Bimbo Points, the character can accomplish things normally impossible with the power, basically stretching the power to its theoretical limits. This lets players simulate the wahoo actions and *deus ex machina* resolutions common to comic-book adventures. But there is a limit: a character can only take on three Bimbo Points total during an adventure.

As adventures pass, a character will naturally accrue multiple Bimbo Points. That's where the second story-telling use of the points come into play. At the beginning of each adventure, the GM secretly rolls a d20 against each character's Bimbo Point rating. If the roll is less than or equal

to the number of points, the points are wiped away, and a Bimbo Event occurs to the character at some point during the adventure. A two-page chart of sample Bimbo Events allows the GM to randomly roll one, and serves as examples of others that could be invented. Sample Bimbo Events include "One of the character's powers becomes temporarily unreliable due to freak phenomenon (sunspots, etc.)", "Government decides that character is a threat to national security", "Character gains 10 pounds—and everybody notices", and the dreaded "Character's costume destroyed during battle in public".

Granted, there are some troublesome things about the game. For one thing, the physical components are a bit cheap. The rule book has a thin, blank, paper cover, for instance, relying upon the wrap-around GM screen for durability and color. And the fold-up figures are printed on such thin stock that I'm afraid they might collapse under their own weight. Certainly the slightest sneeze will blow them yards away. But considering the modest price, I'm not complaining. It should be noted that the use of power points as "fatigue" in combat slows things down a bit, though this is not a major flaw. Some combat maneuvers require multiple actions to perform, which makes them extremely difficult for low-level characters to succeed at.

I suspect, however, that the SUPER-BABES game's biggest problem will be overcoming people's tendency to brand it as sexist and sneer at it as "politically incorrect". My mail over the next several weeks will likely demonstrate that.

### INFERNO\* game

136-page, 8½" x 11" perfect-bound book  
Deaths Edge Games \$13.00  
3906 Grace Ellen Dr.  
Colombia MO 65202-1739

Author: Gabe Ivan

Editor: Casey C. Clark

Illustrations: Thom Thurman and Sean Parrack, with The Clark Clan and Gabe Ivan

Some games go out of their way to be shocking. With a "bad boy" image, they can seize more attention in a crowded market. And by taking a defiant posture, they entice the rebel in each of us, making them particularly appealing to young people striving for independence from parents, teachers, and bosses. In some cases, when defiance is all they have going for them, such games almost parody themselves. Their rebellion is empty, a mere childish posturing. On the other hand, when designers are talented and put some thought into their creation, games such as these can be both fun and instructive. Their radical settings lead to cathartic, "wahoo" action, while also coaxing us to confront and examine our personal values. That claim may seem audacious, but the INFERNO game serves as an illustration.

On the face of things, the INFERNO game seems designed to offend. Its cover is done in a fiendish black on red, and the front bears an illustration of a definitely devilish figure on a throne decorated with fanged skulls. Worse, the back cover begins with a line supremely insensitive to religious qualms: "Christ died for our sins. Now it is your turn." On the other hand, the back copy continues with an appeal to "Challenge Evil in its truest form . . ." and two of the four character types described are decidedly heroic. Players can be priests searching the netherworld to rescue abducted innocents, or damned spirits struggling to achieve redemption. Unfortunately, the other two character types are necromancers and demons seeking to conquer Hell, which rather flies in the face of heroic play. But as a whole, the back copy certainly conveys the dichotomy of playing styles possible with the game. More about this later.

The text inside the book is satisfactorily written and edited. There are no confusing glitches, and the tone overall is engaging. The interior artwork ranges from "sorta cheesy" to respectable, with an occasional piece rising to the level of applaudable. Most importantly, it is unified, evoking a common vision of hellish creatures and their brutality. (It should come as no surprise that female demons wear little in these illustrations.) Also evident in the artwork is the Dantean nature of the game's setting.

The game system itself is quite good. Character creation is a combination of "template" and skill choice—as is common in games nowadays—allowing characters to be created quickly, but also distinctly. Players choose a race (mortal, shade, hellspawn, or imp) and randomly roll attributes, with modifications for race. Next, they choose a class (priest, layman, or necromancer for mortals and shades; demon for hellspawn and imps) and determine skills (some assigned by class, others purchased with creation points). Class also determines faith status (Faithful, Doubtful, or Infernal) and equipment availability. Finally, players invent a name, background, and motivation for their characters.

Skills and attributes are ranked on a scale of roughly 1 to 20, and a d20 is used for event resolution. Attacks have a base damage rating, depending upon the weapon type, and for every two points by which an attack roll succeeds, an additional point of damage is done. By combining the roll to hit and to do damage in this way, combat is kept quick and exciting.

The game contains two different listings of magic: divine (for priests) and sorcery (for necromancers). Following that material is an extensive listing of infernal creatures and realms. Interestingly, the creatures' statistics are not given with their descriptive text, but rather in a separate chapter. Not only does this allow players to read the creature descriptions without seeing important game stats, it

also makes the stats a bit easier for the GM to use.

The game's problems are few, but readily evident. Most troublesome, of course, is that many people will be so offended by the premise, artwork, and cover copy that many distributors and retailers will be leery of carrying the game. Least troublesome, though a bit jarring, is the fact that the game assumes a medieval Earth, but nowhere states that. It is primarily through the weapons list that the reader learns the fact for certain. Prior to encountering that list, I kept expecting to be able to design modern characters.

But there is one other significant problem for the game to survive, and that is that it seeks to straddle the fence in terms of heroism and senseless brutality. On the one hand, it clearly supports themes of mercy, faithfulness, and redemption in play. And given the darkness of the setting, heroic acts shine forth *tremendously*, making players feel great about themselves. If this were the one goal of the game, I could heartily recommend it.

Unfortunately, however, the game just as clearly panders to hack-and-slash play. And again, the darkness of the setting intensifies the impact of the cruelty and selfishness inherent in that style. Ultimately, I fear, players who opt for this style of play will eventually grow bored with having their characters torment less powerful creatures, and will become frustrated when their own characters suffer at the hands of creatures more powerful than they. But because the game doesn't actually *promote* heroism over brutality, these players aren't encouraged to give heroic play a try, so they won't learn just how deeply satisfying it is in this setting. More likely, they will just toss the book and go back to their combat video games,

### Short & sweet

*Cemetery Plots* by Kathleen Williams and Joe Williams (Marquee Press, Inc., 14314 SW Allen Blvd. Suite 400, Beaverton OR 97005, \$14.95).

This 128-page sourcebook for the LOST SOULS\* game is packed full of excellent material for GMs and players alike. The book expands the LOST SOULS game's occupations and ghost types, and lists additional supernatural NPCs. But more importantly, it explains places other than Limbo for ghosts to hang out in (from "focuses" for individual haunters, to "realms" for group hauntings on Earth, to "outer planes" for whole other worlds of ghostly existence), with many adventure suggestions. Also included is "Night of the Headless Biker", a full adventure to supplement your LOST SOULS campaign.

SHADIS\* Magazine (Alderac Entertainment Group, 17880 Graystone Avenue #203, Chino Hills CA 91709, \$3.50 single issue, \$21 bimonthly, annual subscription in the U.S.).

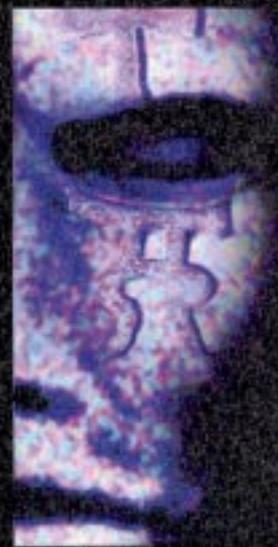
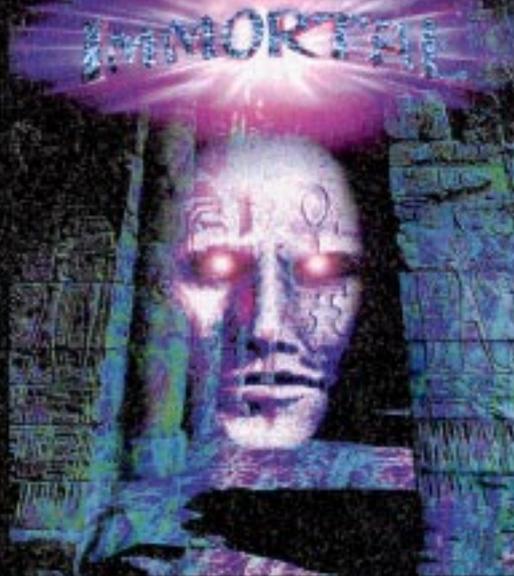
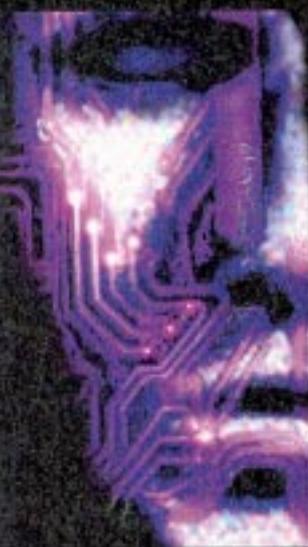
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range of topics in the gaming hobby, and always entertains. Inside each issue are general use articles (such as graffiti-driven magic for dark-future campaigns), generic adventures, adventure hooks, news and rumors, and three of the best comic strips in the industry: the BRIGHT FUTURE\* adventure comic, the newly resurrected FINIEOUS FINGERS\* strip, and the KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE\* strip. The magazine also regularly publishes lists of fanzines in existence. What's not to like?

*Lester Smith is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc., and has worked on projects for various other game companies in the past. He makes something of a hobby of collecting new, small-press products, particularly quirky role-playing games, which explains the focus of his periodic review articles in this magazine.*

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## Game Wizards

Continued on page 88

seek out and which to avoid at all costs in his "Into the Dark" column.

For those who like the games that cry out for the attitude, "Don't just run well; trip your neighbor", then you'll want to learn the sneakiest tricks for "Weasel Games" from the grand weasel himself, TSR designer and editor Lester Smith.

What else? Notes from Network HQ, convention announcements, contests, letters from members, contests, classified advertisements (free to any Network member), contests, and sometimes an article that turns the focus back on you, the Network member (did I mention contests?).

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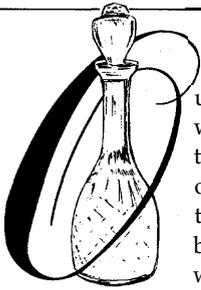
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Outside, I feel the bottle tumble in the waves. If I had a body, I would be sick to my stomach. Instead, I form an eye out of the dust and watch the black turn to gray to sparkling blue. The bottle comes to rest on the sand, and I wait.

I've lost track of the years since my bottle was last washed ashore. All I remember is the emptiness of those years. Counting them seems pointless. Instead, I try to remember the palace of the caliph of Baghdad or the glittering wonders of the Cave of Winds. I paint them in detail in my mind's eye and live in those places while I wait to be found once again.

Now I have my chance, and time seems to be moving slower than when I was under the waves. I wonder what it will be like to see actual sky and land again, to talk to somebody besides myself again. I just hope I'm not found by some fool who uses all his wishes in three minutes and banishes me back here.

So I wait and feel the bottle grow hot under the sun. I poke a bit of my energies at the seal, but the Binding of Solomon holds fast. I feel like sighing, but it's not worth the effort of forming lips and lungs to do it. I just hope that someone comes along before high tide returns to claim me and deny me this chance.

I sense the light becoming brighter through the glass and can feel the heat increase. It must be close to midday. Surely someone will find me soon. Or have I washed up on a deserted isle? By Solomon's ring, that would be my fate.

I try not to think of that, but instead remember the last time I was let loose. His name had been Omar, a poor fisherman. (But then, weren't they all?) He dragged my prison up from the depths in his nets. He pulled out the stopper and stood in awe as I formed myself from the mists and dust.

But in the end he had been as boring as the rest. "I want a ton of gold", he said. "I want the most beautiful woman in the world", he said. "I want a boat to sail the seven seas", he said. At least that last part had been somewhat original. But after I had granted his wishes, it was back into the bottle to be washed overboard during a storm. Occasionally, I wonder what happened to Omar.

Now I feel a slight tremor through the glass. I create an ear and press it up to the side of the bottle. I'm almost sure I hear footsteps. I dissolve the ear and whirl my energies near the stopper. I plan to impress whoever opens it.

I wait at the mouth of the bottle and I can't believe how long it takes. The centuries at the sea bottom never seemed as long as this.

Finally, I feel the bottle rise as someone lifts it. I press against the Binding, and the stopper starts to move. The Binding starts to bend, then it is gone, and I know the hole is there. I burst out in a swirl of energy and light.

I soar into the sky, feeling the heat of the sun, the green energies of plants, the cool blues of the ocean behind me, and I swirl in tune to it all. Then I feel the power of the Binding close in upon me, and I reach out a tendril to the mind of the person who found me—a young man—to see what he wants me to be.

# Time in A Bottle

by P. Andrew Miller

*Illustrations by David O. Miller*

With that image in mind, I gather what I need from the air about me, pulling in dust and moisture, finding the elements I need to form a whole body!

I start with the head, and hair black as the ocean's bottom. Then I build my face and shoulders that slide into round breasts. I swirl about and create a flat stomach and narrow waist. Finally, I pull in enough dust to give me curved legs that end in small, dainty feet.

From the outer air, I pull in sparkling motes to form my blue eyes. Then I open them and see the awestricken stare on the lad's face. I almost smile, then realize I forgot my teeth and tongue. Oh, it has been too long. Once my face is complete, I do smile down at him.

"Greetings to the Master of the Bottle, from Nijtal, of the Sixth Tier of the Third House of Djinn. By the power of the Binding of Solomon the Wise, King of Kings, I am yours to command for three tasks."

I fall silent and wait for his response. Please, O Lords of Air and Fire, don't let him be too quick about it.

I don't think I have to worry about this one, though. I stare at him through my new eyes, and he stares back at me with eyes the color of tea. He has black wavy hair and the dark skin of the men of this region. He wears a loose shirt and baggy pantaloons. His feet are strapped in by sandals. His hands are smooth, and though he is muscular, he does not have the heavy muscles of a working man. This is no poor fisherman, thank Ormazd for that.

"A djinni?" he says.

I keep smiling and nod.

"I don't believe it", he says, shaking his head.

"I could prove it to you, but that would take one of your wishes. Isn't it enough that I appeared when you opened the bottle, and now stand on the air before you?"

He doesn't say anything, but turns his gaze to the bottle in his hand.

"I've heard the old stories, of course, such as the tale of Omar the fisherman, but I . . ." He looks up at me again.

"So what should I wish for?" he asks.

"You know your mind better than I", I answer.

"Yes, I guess I do." He finally returns my smile, and I wonder where I will find a ton of gold to bring to him.

"I guess it's traditional to ask for gold or gems at this point?"

I nod my head, relishing the feel of that gesture again. "Most people do."

"Yes, I guess most would."

"Is that what you'd like?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "No, I don't think so. Not yet. First, take me someplace no other man has ever seen before."

I blink. That's the first time in all my centuries of servitude that I've been asked that one.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

I try to think of where to take him. The Cave of Winds crosses my mind, because I've not been there for nearly a millennium, but I know that at least one man has been there. The Well at the World's Edge has also been visited before. There is only one place I can think of.

"Prepare yourself", I say, and call forth more particles from the air to increase my size. I let my bottom half grow

fuzzy as my arms and hands grow. Then I reach down and pick him up.

"What?" he starts to say, but I wrap him in a bubble of air and then dive into the sea. I swim out past the point where the shelf drops off into the depths of the ocean. I carry him down past fishes that flash like little jewels in the sun, past sharks that look at us with hungry eyes. I carry him from the blue to the gray to the black, where the sun does not probe with its golden fingers.

Finally I stand on the bottom and place him next to me, keeping a tight hold on the air that surrounds him. Then I hold up my hand and release some of my own energies as light.

I hear him gasp as the monstrous bulk of the kraken is revealed to him. A white mountain of flesh, it raises one chalky tentacle the size of a cedar tree, and fish with big eyes and glowing balls dangling from their heads swim out of the way. It reaches toward us, and I snuff the light and grab the man. I shoot toward the surface and break the waves in a spout of water. Then I carry him back to the shore and place him where he stood before.

He blinks a few times, staring down at his feet, then looks up at me. "Thank you," he says.

"You have two more wishes," I say, "and be glad I am not a malicious efril, or I could have taken you there without air or left you for the kraken."

His face turns gray, like paper after it is burnt.

"I'll remember to be more careful."

I feel the Binding reaching out for me. "What is your second wish, O Master?"

He shakes his head. "I don't think I'm ready for that yet. And my name is Mustaph."

"Yes, Master," I answer.

"Well, let's go back to my cottage and I'll think about this."

I smile at him. This may turn out to be a good experience yet. But I still feel the Binding upon me, pulling me back.

"I must go back into the bottle," I say. "But you can summon me once more when we reach our destination."

"Do you have to?" he asks and now I know I like him.

"Yes, I have to," I say.

He sighs. "Very well." He holds the bottle up toward me, and I close my eyes. Then I relax my concentration and let my fires swirl, casting the dust and mist back into the air. Finally nothing is left but my true energies and the Binding sucks me back into captivity.

Inside, I can still feel the heat of the day, and I realize that Mustaph has not put the stopper back in. I pull in some matter and form an eye to stare up at him. He is attractive with the way his hair brushes against his neck as he walks. And he is definitely not a fisherman. No fisherman had ever wished for what he did. I wonder what he does for a living.

The walk is not a long one, or at least not to me. It's so nice to stare at something that doesn't have scales. But we finally reach his house and enter. Mustaph is no longer framed by blue sky but by tan walls. He puts the bottle down somewhere and walks off. I wish that he would come back, because I find the ceiling boring to look at. I almost dissolve the eye, but he comes back.

He looks down into the bottle and his brown eye widens as he peers into mine. Then he leans back, coughs, and says, "Er, I summon thee, O djinni of the bottle."

The Binding loosens at those words, and I can once more force my way through into the air. Quickly, I pull what I need from the surroundings to form a body, though this time it is much smaller, and I stand on the table in front of him. In this form, I can resist the Binding a little longer.

"Have you decided on a second wish yet, O Master of the Bottle?" I ask.

He folds his arms on the table top and looks into my face.

"No, not really. I would like you to talk to me though. Does that count as a wish?"

I'm not sure how to answer him. No one ever wanted to talk to me beyond telling me to fetch their gold or make them king.

"I guess not," I answer.

"Good," he nods.

I nod back and we lapse into silence. He drums on the table with his fingers. I cock my head to the side and gaze into his eyes.

"Well?" he said.

"Yes?" I reply.

"Aren't you going to talk?"

I feel a faint heat rise to my cheeks and realize that I'm blushing. I can't remember if I've ever done that before. That realization makes it worse.

"I'm sorry," he says, "I didn't mean to embarrass you".

I finally get control of my emotions and look back at him. "What would you like me to talk about?"

"I don't know. What's it like being a djinni?"

I stare at him. What's it like? It's horrible. Trapped in a bottle for eons. No one to talk to. Nothing to see but shades of light through dark glass. Wanting to be free and combining your energies with those of the sun and the land and the water.

"It's boring and lonely," I answer.

I can tell he expected a different answer. "Oh," he says, and once more we lapse into silence.

Something he said earlier nags at the back of my mind, and I finally have to ask him.

"Master? You said you knew the story of Omar the Fisherman. Can you tell it to me?"

He blinks and leans back. "You want me to tell you a story?" I nod.

"Well, the story goes that Omar found a djinni in a bottle much like I found you. He released the djinni and asked for a ton of gold. The djinni brought it to him. Then he asked for the most beautiful woman in the world. And the djinni flew off and then brought back the most beautiful woman in the world to be his wife. Then he asked for a wondrous boat to sail the seven seas, and the djinni built him a boat. Then the djinni returned to its bottle after fulfilling the three wishes. However, Omar kept the bottle, thinking one day he might be able to call upon the djinni again. Then he had all his gold put on his boat, and he took his new wife and set sail. However, he did not ask the djinni to make the woman love him. In

truth, she despised Omar and fought with him on the boat. He finally abandoned her on a small island. Then he sailed off again, but a terrible storm blew up. The boat would have done fine except that it sat low in the water because of all the gold aboard. Finally, it took on so much water that it sank, and Omar and the boat vanished beneath the waves."

He stops his tale, and I shake myself out of my reverie when I realize he has stopped speaking.

"So that's what happened."

His eyes grow wider. "That was you?" he asks.

I nod.

"I guess I better watch what I wish for."

I feel the old fires surge forward, and I hold them in check. "I didn't know what would happen to him," I said.

Mustaph leans closer. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply that you had anything to do with it."

I let the fires subside and nod once. I don't want to make him angry at me. I enjoy this freedom.

Mustaph moves even closer. "I bet you know a lot of stories as well," he says. "Even more than are in my books." He waves his hand behind him, and I notice the leather-bound volumes on the shelves. So he is a scholar.

"I suppose," I answer.

"Good. Then I now want my second wish."

A lump appears in my chest, and I think about dissolving my heart. I don't, though. I just nod again.

"Then, O Nijtal of the bottle, tell me all the stories you know."

This time my eyes grow wide. *All* the stories? Does he know how long that will take? My energies sing within me. This is wonderful.

"When would you like me to start, Master?"

"Wait a minute," he says. He leaves the table and comes back with a quill pen and some parchment. "You can start now, but speak slowly so I can get it all."

I stand near his hand and start in on the first battle between Ahriman and Ormazd. He writes as I talk, putting my words into loops and squiggles I don't recognize. I am glad I kept my heart for I am happy.

I finish my last story. It took Mustaph longer than usual to write these last few down. The arthritis in his hands kept him from writing faster. But finally he scrolls the last word from my mouth and puts his quill down. Then he stretches and yawns.

"Well, Nijtal, I'll have to get more parchment before we begin again. But I'm sure these stories will bring an even better price than the others."

I walk across the table top and place a wrinkled hand on his. (I decided long ago to make my body reflect his.)

"There will be no need, old friend. That was the last of my stories."

He blinks wrinkled lids over those eyes that now look like strong coffee. They brim over with surprise.

"The last?"

I nod.

"My second wish is finished?"

"Yes," I say.

"Oh," is his only reply.

I too feel the sadness. But even I knew that one day my

stories would come to end. I knew one day that I would have to return to my bottle. The binding has long been denied and grows stronger each day. Mustaph's wish and love for me has given me the strength to resist. But it won't last much longer.

I squeeze his hand. "It's time to make your third and last wish, my master."

Mustaph stares out the window and strokes his gray beard. "I don't want you to go, Nij."

"I don't want to go. But I must."

A silver tear slides down his cheek, and I feel like crying myself.

"Think of all these years we've had together. I thank you for them, Mustaph. I have never been free for this long and I have you to thank for that. These memories will keep me sane for centuries once I am back in my bottle."

He still stares out at the horizon.

"Mustaph?"

Finally, he looks down at me. "I know my third wish, Nijtal of the Djinn."

I back away. He hasn't been this formal in decades.

"What is your wish, O Master?"

He smiles and leans closer to me. "I wish to spend eternity with you in your bottle."

At his statement, not only does my jaw drop, it dis-

solves with a large part of my body. I recover and pull the dust back to me.

"I don't know if it can be done," I say.

"It is my wish."

"But . . ." I don't know how to finish. Can it be done? Can I bring him into the bottle with me? There is only one way to find out.

I cast away my physical form and let my energies swirl free. Then I reach out a thin tendril, searching for Mustaph's own fires. I don't have far to search before I see his own energies pulsing red and blue and yellow like my own. I reach for them and touch them. I feel a tingle and then I feel *Mustaph*. I pull his fires into my own. We merge, become one. Then I surge out, pulling him with me.

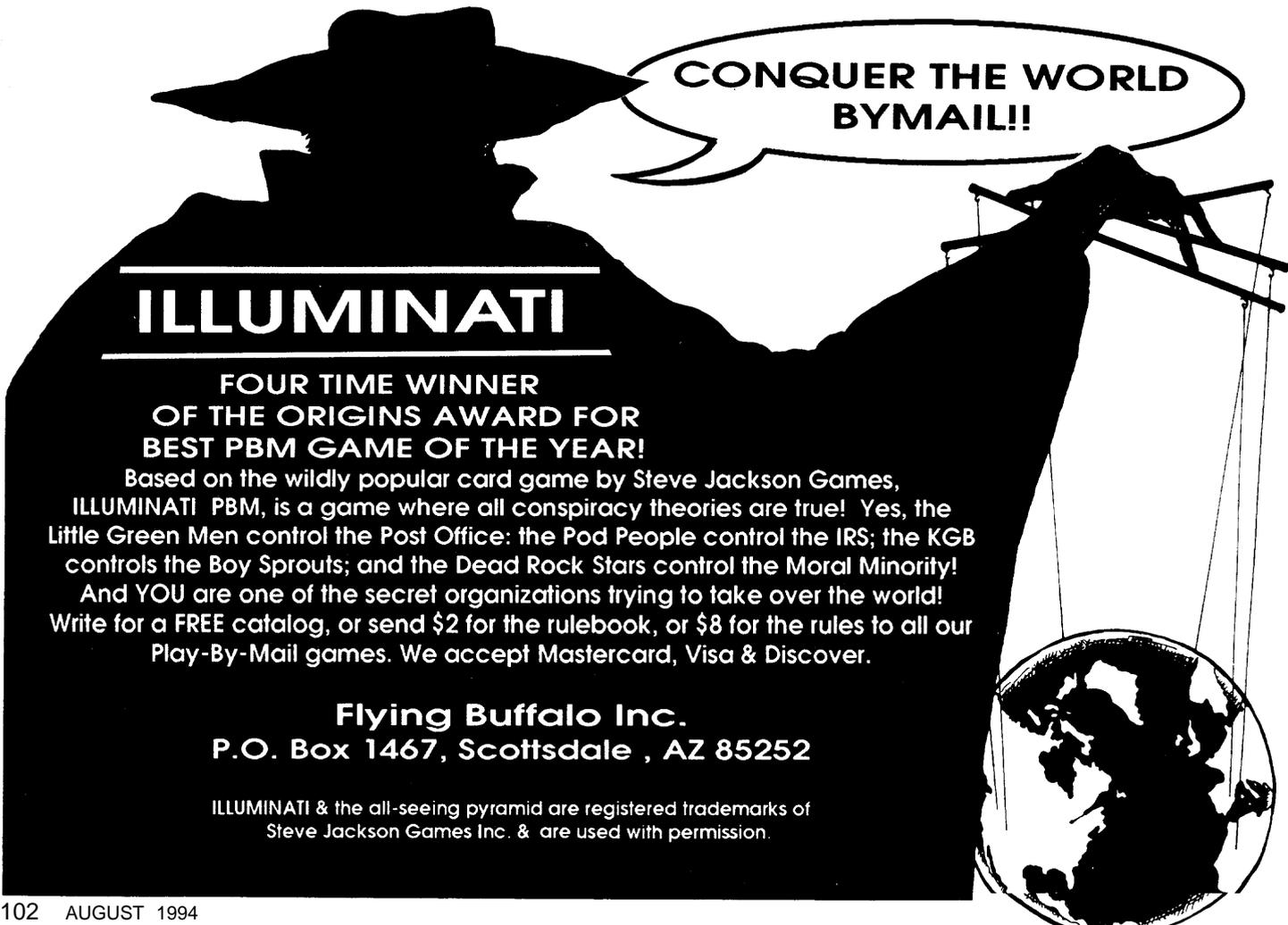
I form a quick eye for both of us to see through. His body stands before us, then it slowly falls to ashes. I dissolve the eye.

The Binding grabs for me, pulling me back into the bottle, but I hold onto Mustaph and the Binding siphons us both in. Such is Its strength, it sucks the stopper in behind it. Once more I am trapped, but not alone.

I sense his voice come through the energies.

"So tell me, Nij. Tell me again of the first battle between Ahriman and Ormazd."

Ω



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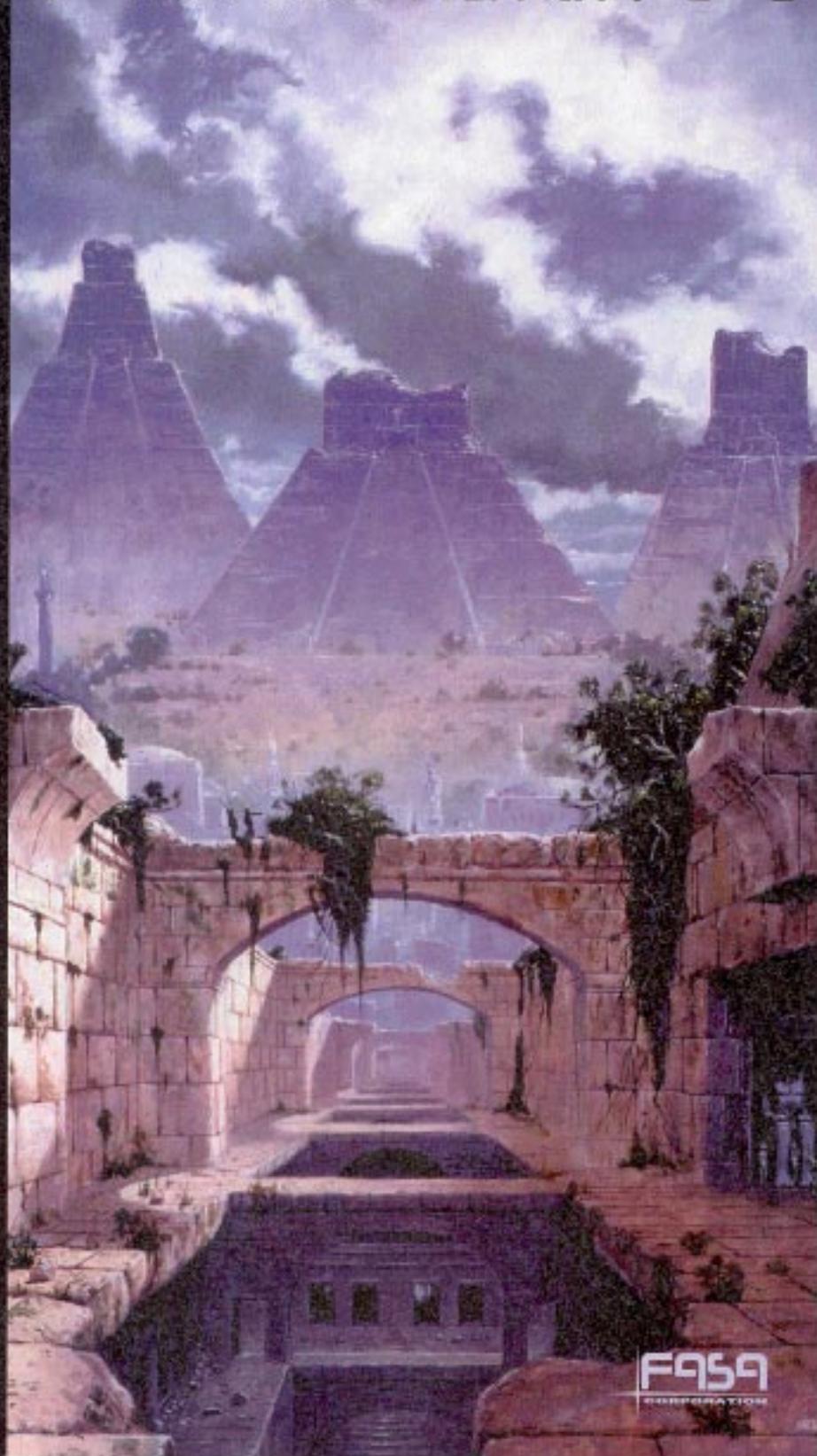
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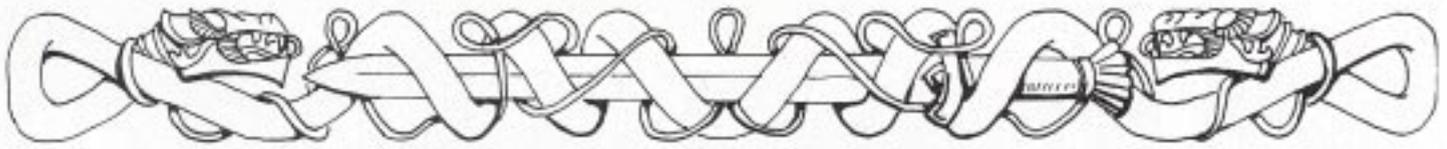
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BUT THE MINUTE MY FIST MADE CONTACT, I WAS PRETTY SURE THESE GUYS WEREN'T ELVES.

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MIGHT WANT TO SEE OLAF DEAD—BUT  
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THE HALL?

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INSIDE JOB. BACK TO  
SQUARE ONE: WHO STOOD  
TO GAIN THE MOST?

I DID MY BEST THINKING  
WHEN THE NUMBERS WERE  
AGAINST ME, AND  
SUDDENLY, IT ALL  
BECAME CLEAR—

I HAD TO GET BACK  
TO THE HALL AND  
COLLAR MY MAN.

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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 delves into several different AD&D® game worlds and considers some follow-up questions to the April Fool's column in issue #204.

## **What are the advancement limits and allowable multi-classed combinations for tieflings (from the new PLANESCAPE™ setting)?**

Officially, tieflings can be fighters, rangers, wizards (including specialists), priests, thieves, or bards. The allowable multi-classed combinations for tieflings are: fighter/wizard, fighter/priest, fighter/thief, wizard/thief, and priest/thief. Advancement limits for tieflings are: wizard, 14th level; rogue, 15th level; priest, 10th level; and fighter, 12th level. Single-classed tieflings can exceed these limits by two levels.

## **Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts says (on page 31) that a ghost can retain any psionic powers it had in life. I am a big fan of psionics, so I allowed this rule to apply to any undead with a fairly good Intelligence score. Then one of my players pointed out that since vampires advance in power by age a psionic vampire could use the Aging power to become immensely powerful. What should I do (other than drop the rule)?**

There are several things you can do: You might decide that undead subjected to the Aging power get older, but don't get any more powerful. Vampires get more powerful as they age mostly because they accumulate knowledge and generally improve themselves through long practice at whatever they do. The various forms of unnatural aging don't provide any opportunity for meditation and self education, they just wear at the body and mind. Under this house rule, a vampire might be forced into hibernation by unnatural aging, but it would not gain any new abilities.

You might decide that vampires do get older and more powerful with unnatural aging, but are forced to hibernate (with its attendant disabilities and risks) more often as they add unnatural years to their lives.

You might decide that vampires and other undead are immune to all forms of unnatural aging. Time may weigh heavily on a vampire's mind and the passing decades may tear away at its body, but there's no reason to assume that a vampire really ages in the same sense that a living creature does.

## **I'm thinking about bringing some of the new DARK SUN® setting weapons from issue #185 into my non-Athasian campaign: the bard's friend, cahulaks, and tortoise blades. Could a druid use these weapons if they were made of bone, wood, or stone? Druids can wear leather armor after all. Also, will there ever be a Complete Druid's Handbook?**

For starters, I don't recommend adding three weapons to the druid's list of allowable weapons. Speaking unofficially, I think it's fine to add some distinctiveness to your campaign by expanding the weapon lists. On the other hand, it's easy to get carried away. I'd hold the additions down to one new weapon for druids, maybe two if a PC druid from your game actually visited Athas and came back home to tell the tale. Looking over the three weapons on your list, I'm inclined to eliminate cahulaks first because they are the most unlike the weapons already on the druids list. The bard's friend seems to be something like a dagger, albeit more complicated. There's no reason druids couldn't use metal versions of this weapon; they're allowed to use metal daggers and scimitars after all. I have doubts about tortoise blades. Essentially, a tortoise blade is a combination weapon and shield, which doesn't strike me as very druidical. If you decide to allow druids to use tortoise blades, I recommend that you restrict druids to tortoise blades made of natural materials (such as the ones you mentioned in your question) because they function as armor.

The *Complete Druid's Handbook* is at the printer as you read this. Look for it at your favorite game store in September; its TSR product number is #2150.

## **Alright ya' berks, what's the chant? The PLANESCAPE boxed set doesn't give any height, weight, or age charts. How's a blood supposed to know how much a bariaur weighs? Or how tall a githzerai is? Fess up addle-coves, ya goofed! All kidding (and planespeak) aside. What are the height, weight, and age limits for these three races?**

Githzerai use the human age tables from the *PH*. Githzerai are roughly human sized, but tend to be a trifle taller and thinner. I recommend a base height of 60" with a modifier of 2d12" and a base weight of 100 lbs. with a modifier of 5d10 lbs. Use the same numbers for males and females.

Tieflings, being planar crossbreeds, vary considerably, but are man sized. I recommend using the human, elf, or half-elf height and weight tables. Pick one or determine it randomly (but don't use two different tables to generate one character's height and weight). Use the half-elf age tables for tieflings.

Bariaur are about the same size as centaurs, but a tad smaller. I recommend the following numbers for males: 77" plus 3d6" and 700 lbs. plus 4d20 lbs. For females: 74" plus 3d6" and 660 lbs. plus 4d20 lbs. A bariaur is usually about three feet longer than it is tall.

## **Where within Myth Drannor is The Dawnspire (the temple of Lathander)? I've looked through the book twice and I can't find a clue. I know the site is supposed to cover about five acres, but there's no scale on the map. Is that an oversight?**

TSR's Karen Boomgarden and I also spent a great deal of time poring over the book and the Myth Drannor maps trying to find the answer to this one. (The floor in Karen's cubical is just about large enough to accommodate all the maps at once. An onlooker would have had a grand time watching the two of us trying to study the maps without soiling or tearing them with our shoes.) Karen and I suggest placing the temple in the Westfields area, just south of the Burial Glen (see the *Campaign Guide to Myth Drannor*, page 15.)

There isn't supposed to be a scale printed on the maps. Myth Drannor's Mythal, see the *Campaign Guide to Myth Drannor* pages 22-31) and the corrupting influences

of all the gates and wild magic make all distances within the ruins distorted and variable.

**Do githzerai PCs retain their plane-shifting ability? If not, why not? The original githzerai were psionic. What happened to this ability?**

No, player-character githzerai don't have any plane-shifting abilities. The most likely reason for this is that the ability is something that whole communities of monastic githzerai living on their adopted home plane of Limbo are able to generate at need. Independent githzerai living in other places throughout the multiverse don't have this ability. Perhaps they give it up voluntarily when striking out on their own.

NPC githzerai are psionic (see the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome, page 155). If you use psionics in your game, I suggest that you allow player githzerai to roll for wild talents as though they were human, and to become psionics of up to 12th level.

**Do planar PCs in the PLANESCAPE setting really have the ability to see portals? I can find only one reference to the ability and everything I read about portals suggest that they are inconspicuous and not noticeable without magic. What would a**

**planar "see" that would identify a portal?**

Yes, planars really can see portals. According to page 9 of *A Player's Guide to the Planes*, a planar sees a glowing outline when she looks at a portal. Common sense (and game balance) suggests a few limitations: A gate or portal must be active to show an outline; if a temporary or shifting portal is not active when a character looks at it there is no outline and there is no way to tell just by looking that there might be portal there sometime in the future. The outlines don't glow like neon signs; it takes a long, careful look to discover one. I suggest one turn to search a 10' x 10' area for outlines. No die roll is required—if a planar looks in the right place she finds the portal—but the character must make a special effort. Note that *true seeing* and *warp sense* spells make portals stand out, which makes finding them a lot quicker. Note also that planars can't tell where a portal leads just by looking at it.

**Do the sha'irs of the AL-QADIM® setting know first- and second-level priest spells as common knowledge? Does a sha'ir have to see a priest spell being cast before he can send his gen to get that particular spell? Does the deity the sha'ir worships have any effect on the priest spells he can cast or on his punish-**

**ment if he gets caught?**

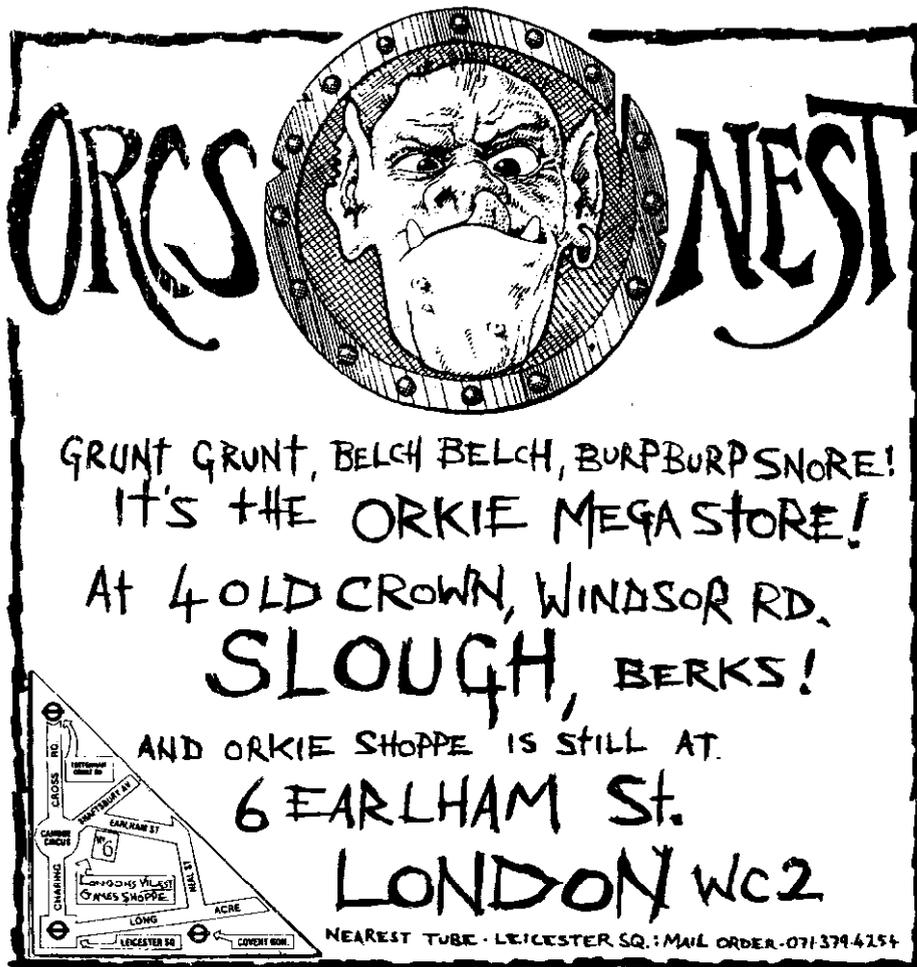
Priest spells are not common knowledge to sha'irs; a sha'ir cannot send his gen after a priest spell until he has witnessed it being used at least once. Sha'irs are not priests and always risk divine displeasure if they decide to try casting priest spells. In the case of devout sha'irs, it's best to assume that is the sha'ir's own deity that takes him to task if he is caught meddling with priest spells—the deities of the Land of Fate take care of their own.

**The DMG says that flying creatures have a daily movement rate in miles equal to twice their flying speed if the air is calm. The world map in the new COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ setting has a scale of 50 miles per hex. Most dragons have a flying rate of 30, so they can fly a little more than one hex a day. How can the dragons in this world ever answer a call to council in the required 15 days?**

I was party to a discussion of this very problem while the COUNCIL OF WYRMS box was in production. The solution goes something like this: The movement rate in the DMG assumes a 10-hour day at a moderate pace with stops for food and rest. Dragons, being fantastically strong fliers, can stay aloft for 20 hours a day with no stops at all. This yields a daily movement rate of 10 times the basic move, or six hexes a day for a dragon with a flying speed of 30. That's more than enough to allow any dragon to reach the Council Aerie in 15 days no matter where it starts on the map. An oversight caused this solution to be excluded from the final version of the manuscript.

I suggest you treat this kind of extended dragon flight as a type of forced march (see PH, page 120). Note that dragons can fly five times their basic movement rate in miles per day (three hexes for a dragon with a flight speed of 30) and avoid the daily Constitution check. You should assume that the oceans surrounding the Io's Blood island chain are dotted with landing places too small to appear on the map. Any dragons can pause at one of these for a quick nap and snack whenever the need arises. I suggest that you allow a dragon who is trying to answer a summons to council to ignore one failed saving throw during the trip for each age category it has. After the flight ends, a dragon must sleep one day for each day of extended flying, plus one week (15 days in a dragon's reckoning) for each failed saving throw. The dragon can postpone the sleep for one week per age category, which should allow it to attend all the council before it has to doze off.

**I've been diligently updating my two-year-old FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign to keep pace with all the developments in the novels. When will TSR release updates covering all the changes in *Prince of Lies*? I'm**



particularly interested in the current state of Cyric and his portfolio, along with Mask and the new deity Kelemvor.

*Prince of Lies* author James Lowder is planning an article for this magazine containing the very information you're asking about. The article wasn't finished when I wrote this column, but you should see it in these pages soon. Also, there has been some discussion at TSR, Inc. about releasing (possibly as early as 1995) a new book of the AD&D game deities. Plans for the book are not yet official, but it almost certainly will contain updated information on all Toril's deities.

**I enjoy "Sage Advice" very much, but I feel I must reply to some of issue #204's letters myself. First you claimed that beholders procreate by means of parthenogenesis. However, on page 69 of the *Lorebook of the Void* in the SPELLJAMMER® boxed set very clear reference is made to a beholder "hive mother" or ultimate beholder; this implies a gender distinction. Also, you pointed out all the errors in the letter about the exploding gnomish sidewheeler except the most glaring one: an amulet of the planes won't work in the Flow because alternate planes are inaccessible. The character, far from gaining 1,000 xp, should be radioactive toast. You shouldn't get soft on character death through stupidity just because you're writing for the April issue.**

**By the way, can the Mists of Ravenloft reach into the Flow even though access to other planes is restricted?**

I "claim" nothing about beholders. In issue #204 I merely pointed out what the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome says about beholder reproduction (see page 22). The MM material is only speculation, the exact nature of beholder reproduction is unrevealed. In any case, your single line from *Lorebook of the Void* hardly disproves the parthenogenetic reproduction theory. In fact a "hive mother" is not a female beholder, but a type of beholder-kin (see MM, page 25). Note that the term "hive mother" doesn't necessarily imply that beholders have genders—it's just a name. George Washington is known as the father of our country, but that does not mean that he and Martha are still having bambinos. Also note that any parthenogenetic creature could literally be a "mother" because it is capable of producing offspring. Such a creature is not female in the traditional sense of the term because it reproduces without assistance or interference from others of its kind.

Regarding exploding gnomish sidewheelers: I'm sorry, I think overlooking a crystal sphere's sheer size and volume is the most glaring error here. As far as escaping via an *amulet of the planes*, you

are right, the amulet shouldn't work in the Flow any more than a *plane shift* or similar spell would. But, the sidewheeler was exiting the Flow at the time of the explosion. I have you at a slight disadvantage, because the edited version of the letter didn't make that altogether clear. So, while the ship wasn't exactly in Wildspace, it wasn't really in the Flow either. More importantly, I think it's a very bad idea for a DM to reverse a decision that allowed a player character to survive a bad situation. Campaigns begin to crumble when players are jumping for joy over a miraculous escape and the DM poops the party by telling them their characters are dead after all. It would have been fine for the DM to warn the player never to count on saving his gnome from explosions in the Flow via an *amulet of the planes* again, but the ruling should be allowed to stand—lucky flukes happen to PCs from time to time—that's why they're heroes.

I'm inclined to think that the Mists of Ravenloft do not extend into the Flow. Characters who commit despicable acts are not necessarily safe, however. The Dark Powers are canny, and the Mists could be waiting for evildoers upon their return to Wildspace.

**Your discussion of beholders in issue #204 leads me to ask what happens to a beholder's eyes when its body is slain. Do the eyes die even if they have taken no damage or do they keep functioning until they, too, are killed?**

No, a beholder's eyes stop functioning when the body is killed.

**The toothless vampire question from issue #204 reminds me of a long-standing argument between my DM and me. My character met an old man one night. After studying the fellow with infravision and detecting a normal heat pattern, my character spoke with the man for a time and eventually shook hands with him. Zap! The old man was a vampire who drained two levels from my character. My DM explained that the vampire had a normal heat pattern because it had just fed. Wouldn't the heat left over from a feeding be concentrated in the vampire's stomach?**

If one assumes that a vampire imbibes and digests blood just as a living person swallows and digests food and drink, then yes, a character with infravision might see just a faint glow in the belly of a vampire that has just fed. Your DM, however, apparently has decided that a recent feeding imbues a vampire's entire body with a semblance of life, at least as far as its heat pattern is concerned. The concept seems reasonable to me.



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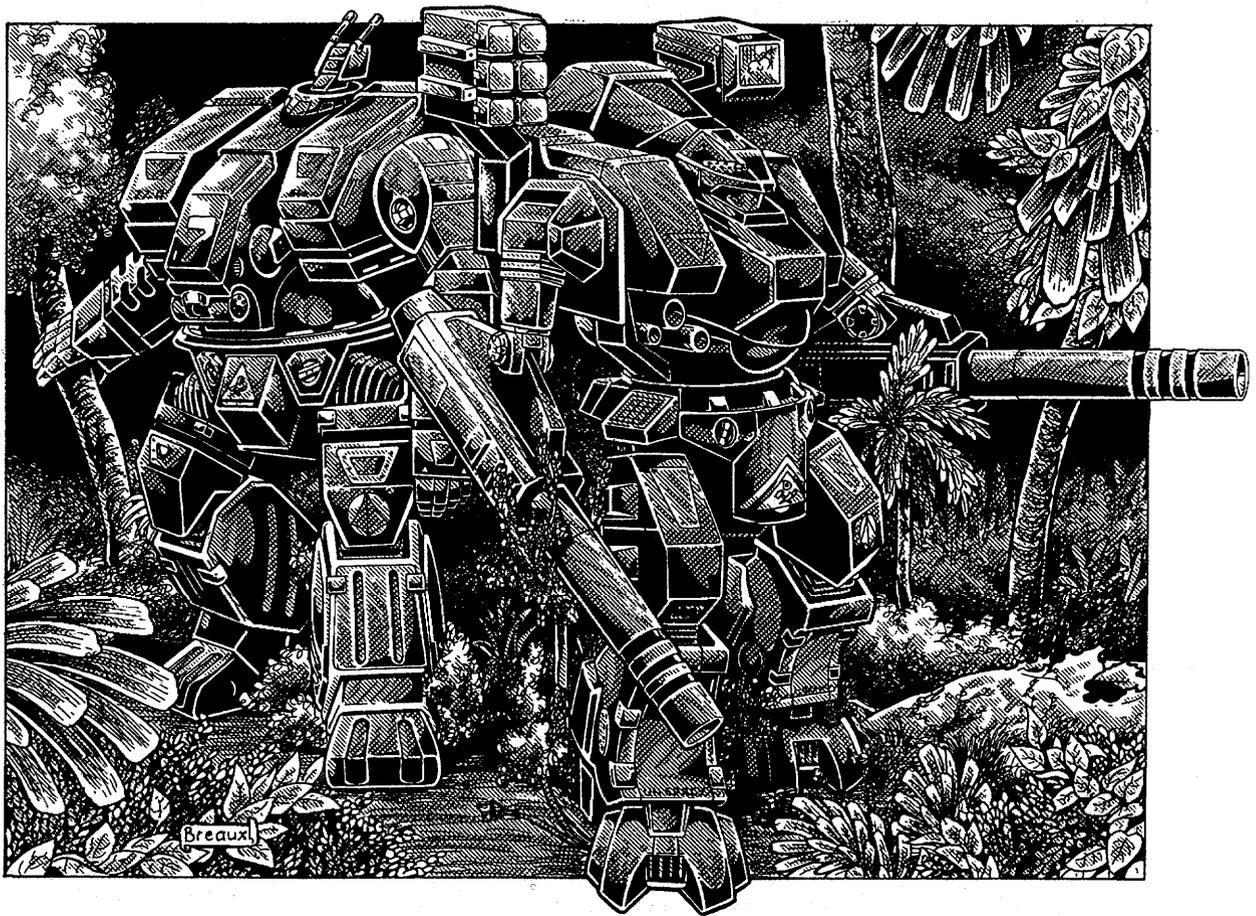
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THE STORY SO FAR: MY ATTEMPTS TO SEND JEN HOME HAVE COME CLOSE TO FRUITION- WE'VE FOUND THE DOOR THAT LEADS TO HER HOME PLANE. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS A SMALL ARMY BETWEEN US AND IT.

## Chapter 9 WAR ZONE

STORY  
JEFF GRUBB

ART  
BOB LESSL  
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CATHY LESSL



WHADDAYA THINK? FIND ANOTHER WAY?

OH!

SHEESH! WHAT A MESS!

HOW'YA FIGURE?



NO, THIS IS OUR BEST BET AND THE LAWBOYS PROBABLY KNOW IT AS WELL.

GASP!



WE HAVE SEERS, THEY HAVE SEERS.

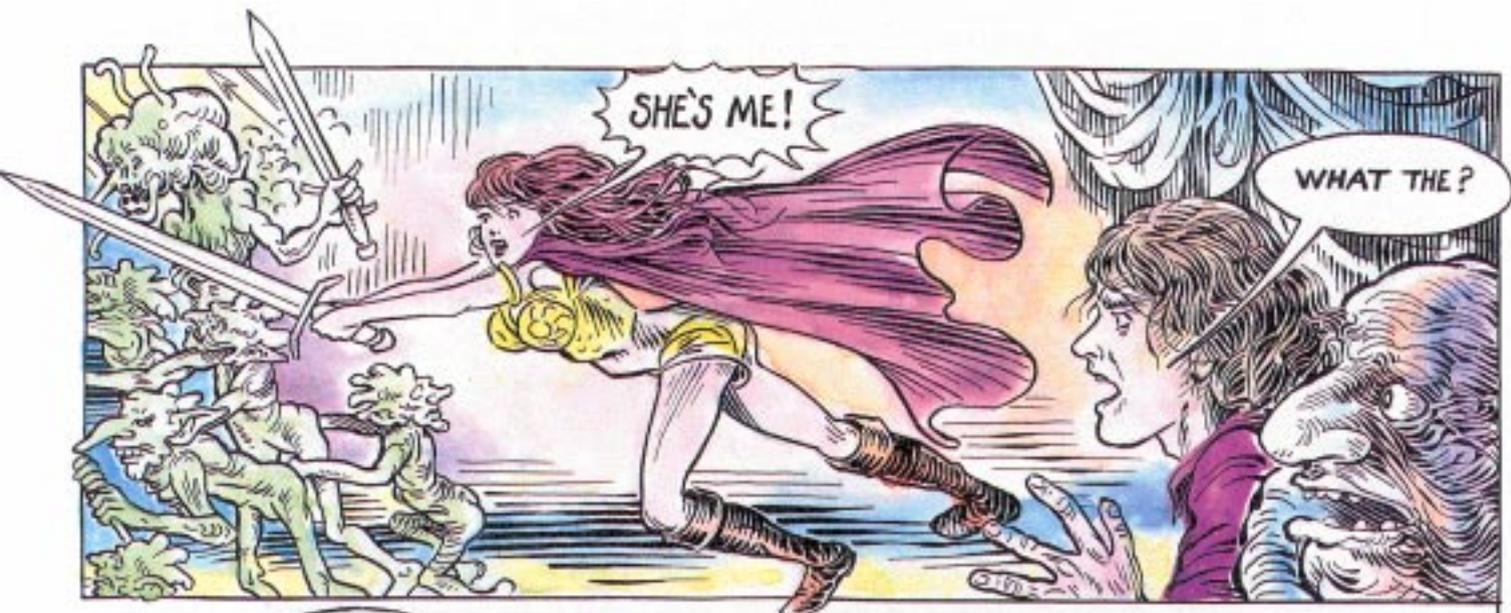
THAT WOMAN...



WE'RE JUST LUCKY THEY HAVEN'T TAKEN THE GATEWAY.

SHE'S ME!





SHE'S ME!

WHAT THE?



JEN!

OF ALL THE DAMNFOOL, IMPULSIVE, CRAZY THINGS TO...

YEAH, IT REMINDS ME OF YOU.

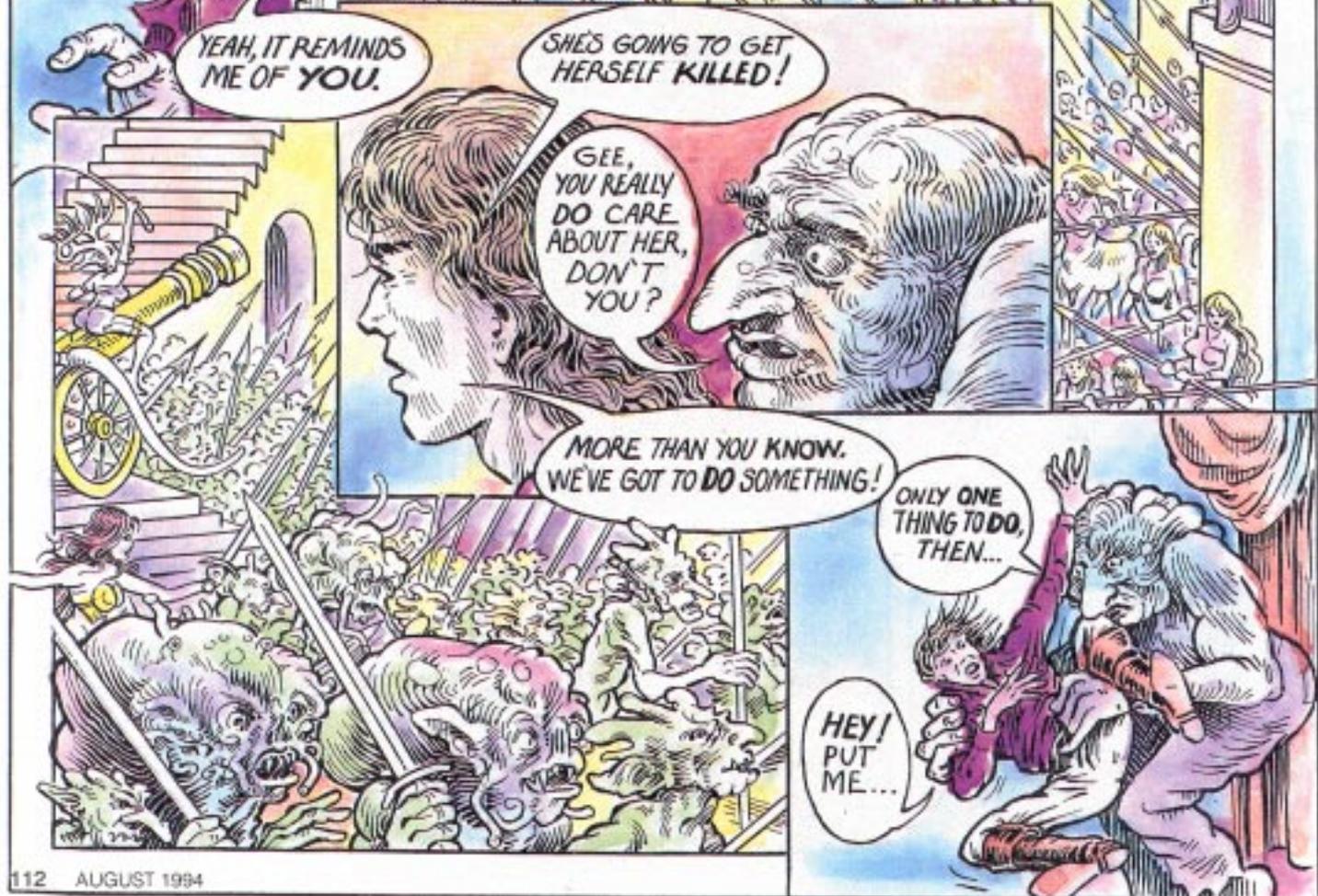
SHE'S GOING TO GET HERSELF KILLED!

GEE, YOU REALLY DO CARE ABOUT HER, DON'T YOU?

MORE THAN YOU KNOW. WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!

ONLY ONE THING TO DO, THEN...

HEY! PUT ME...





DOOOOOWN!



NICE OF YOU TO DROP IN.

WE HAVE TO TALK.



OH, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU NEVER DID ANYTHING RASH.

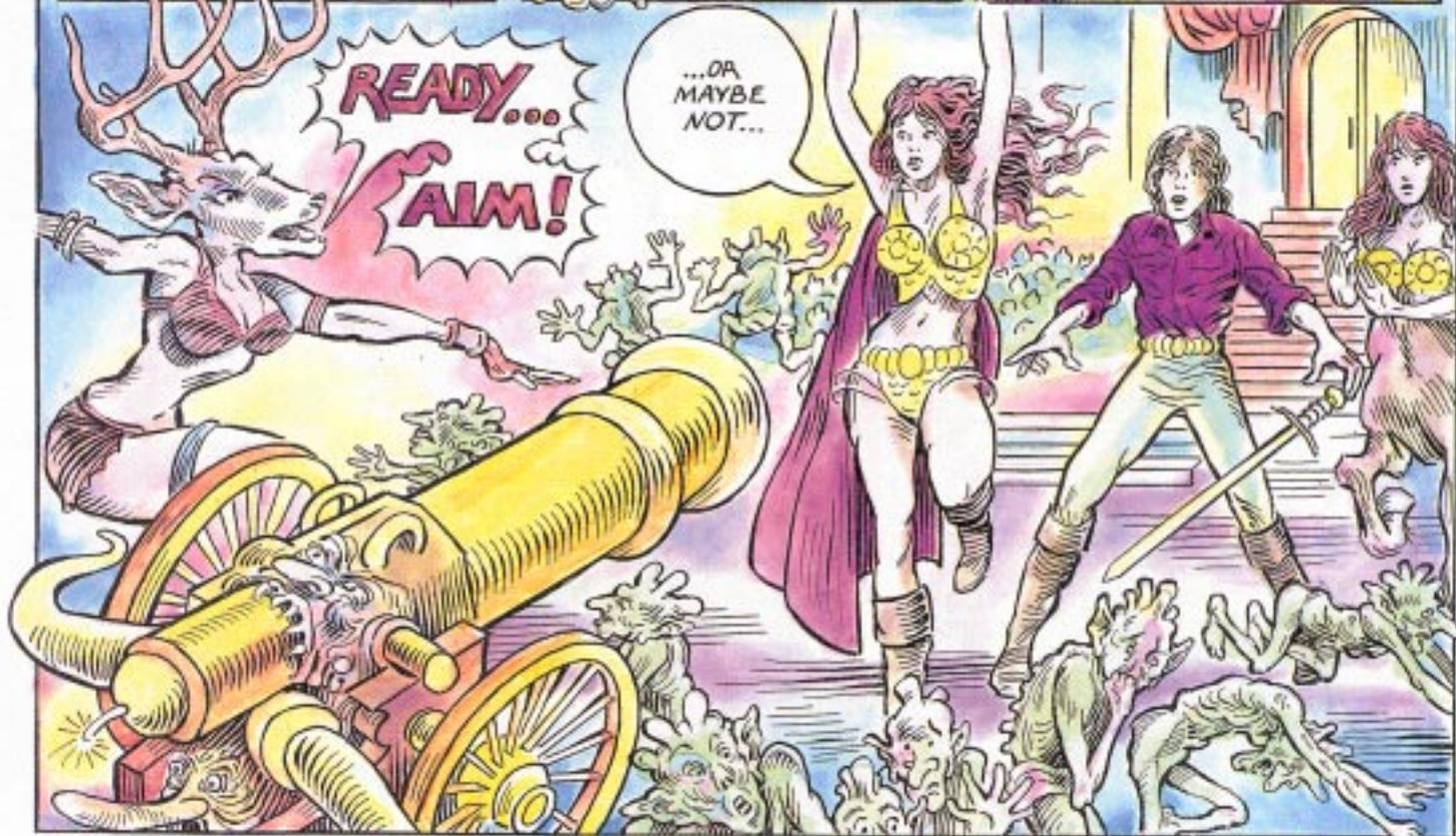
THAT'S DIFFERENT.

LOOK, AT LEAST WE'RE WINNING!



CORRECT THAT.

WE'VE WON!  
YES!  
WE'VE WON!!



READY...  
AIM!

...OR  
MAYBE  
NOT...

NEXT: THINGS GO BOOM.

# Dragonmirth

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"I was a prince before an evil witch transformed me into a frog . . . my friend here was a congressman."



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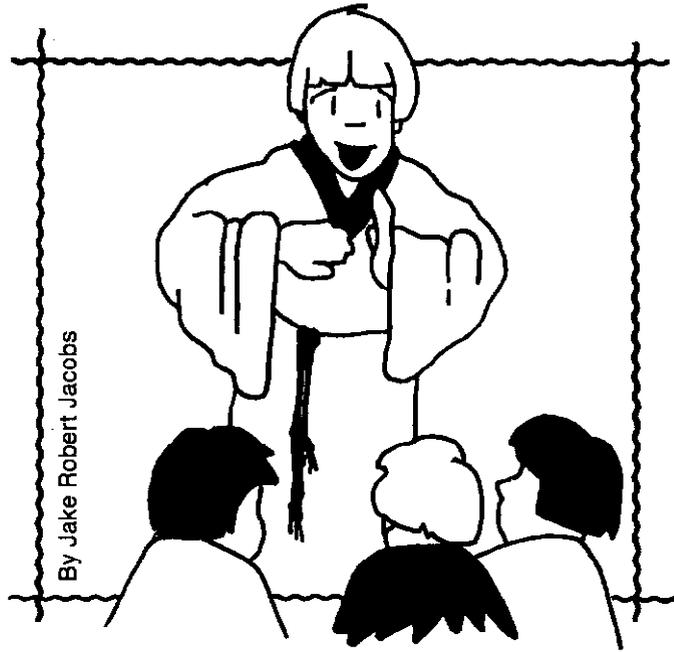


By Joseph Pillsbury



By Bill Cavalier

"Now, that's a good use for a heat metal spell!"



By Jake Robert Jacobs

"Hello, and welcome to Hooked on Psionics!"

**Yomoupa**

ON THE WORLD OF

**HARD FUN**

WERE MILES OUT INTO THE DESERT, NEL. NOW WHAT?

GO TO MOUNTAINS, FIND FRIENDS, BEAT UP GLATHHELD, RESCUE FOOD.

FOOD? OH, YOU MEAN RALPH... THAT'S QUITE A LANDMARK. YOU SURE IT'S SAFE? BIG KUZ DID THAT. KUZ SHARE WITH NEL. WE'RE TIGHT.

GETTING RALPH SHOULD BE EASY. EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE ON HARD FUN. ESPECIALLY KIDNAPPED TOURISTS. -DID YOU BRING THE TRAVELERS' CHECKS?

-YES. BUT HARD FUN KIDNAPPERS TRADITIONALLY LEAVE AN INVOICE, OR AT LEAST A RECEIPT. I'M AFRAID GLATHHELD IS PLAYING AT SOMETHING DIRTY.

I'M WORRIED FOR RALPH. GREAT, JOE, YOU'RE IN AN ACTION POSE, ANY IDEAS?

I SHALL SEEK A VISION TO HELP FIND RALPH.

HERE, THIS MIGHT HELP. I WAS BEGINNING TO WONDER IF I WAS THE ONLY CERTIFIED GOOD GUY LEFT. WELL, I HADN'T ACTUALLY *STOLEN* ANYTHING IN MONTHS, AND I WAS GETTING ANTSY.

MAY I HIDE IN YOUR PENUMBRA, MS. NEL?

Toy Boy CAN HIDE BY NEL.

BUT THE LOCAL SPIRITS ARE ALL CASH ELEMENTALS. NOT ALTRUISTIC WITH THEIR INFO.

WELL, HAVE FUN TRYING, SWEET.

DESIDES? I WANT TO SEE WHERE YOU HIDE THIS POINTY THING FROM YOUR GIRLFRIEND.

SHE'S NOT MY HMM.

HELLO, JOE. NEW THREADS?

LH--YES, ST NOBIAN, SIR.

NUDITY OF THE BODY IS A FINE THING, JOE. IT HAS ITS PLACE. FOR INSTANCE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO WASH WHEN CLAD. BUT NUDITY OF THE SOUL IS A LOT MORE DODGY.

LH...TRIE... DONT I GET TO ASK YOU YES-OR-NO QUESTIONS WITH A COMMUNE SPELL?

No.

NOT THIS TIME. YOU'RE IN TROUBLE, JOE, AND IT'S MY PLACE TO BONK YOU ON THE HEAD WELL, AND LECTURE YOU STRIDENTLY.

OH DEAR. WHAT HAVE I DONE NOW?

YOU'RE SEEING FAR TOO MUCH OF THIS VAMPIRE, JOE. THERE'S TALK GOING AROUND. I KNOW. BUT THERE'S A SWEET, WONDERFUL PERSON TRAPPED INSIDE THAT VAMPIRE. ISN'T IT MY JOB TO HELP HER SPIRIT STRUGGLE AND OVERCOME ITS TERRIBLE OBSTACLE?

ARE YOU SURE THAT'S THE ONLY PART OF HER THAT INTERESTS YOU, JOE?

HEY, ANGEL FACE! WHO ARE WE TALKING TO UP HERE?

LOOKS LIKE THE BATTLE IS JOINED, JOE. GOOD LUCK.

WHY DON'T YOU SHARE SOME OF THESE THOUGHTS WITH ME, YOU TERRIBLE OBSTACLE.

OH, AND... WHEN YOU SEE RALPH, REMIND HIM THE OVOID IS WAITING. GOOD-BYE.

BUT SIR-- SIR!! SILLY! I'M NOT A SIR--

By Barbara Manui & Chris Adams

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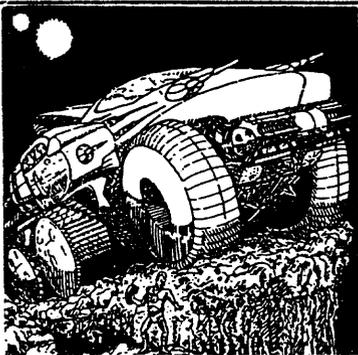


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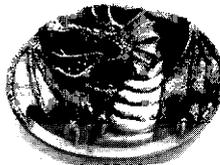
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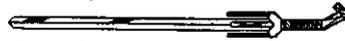
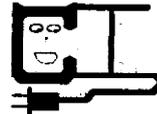
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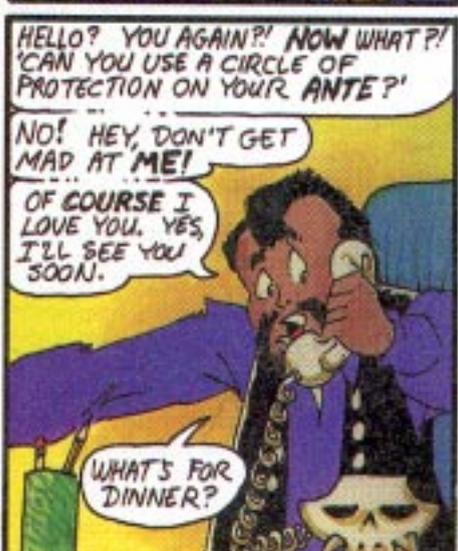
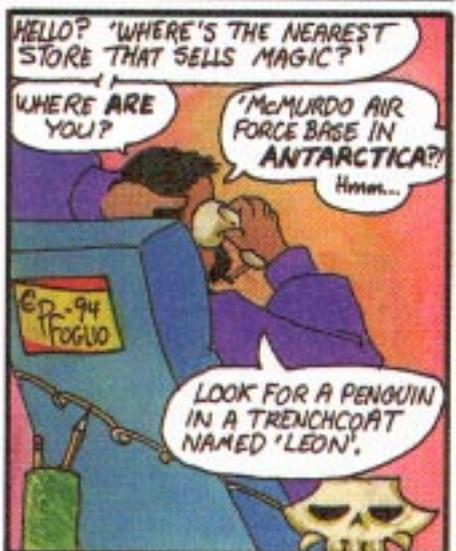
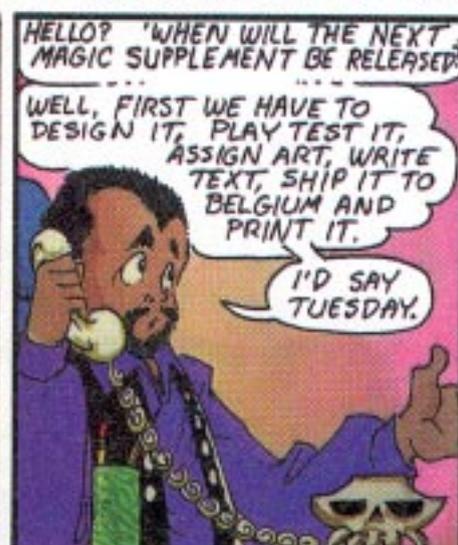
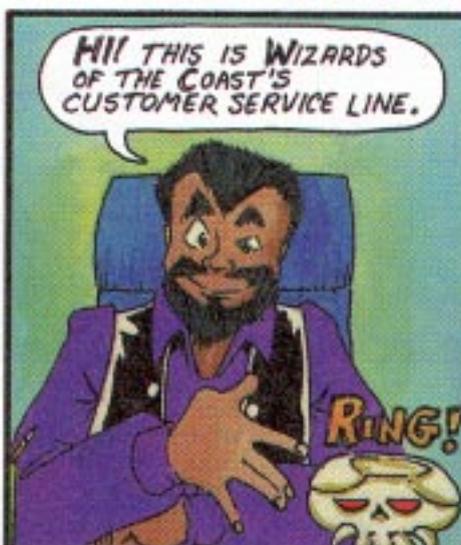
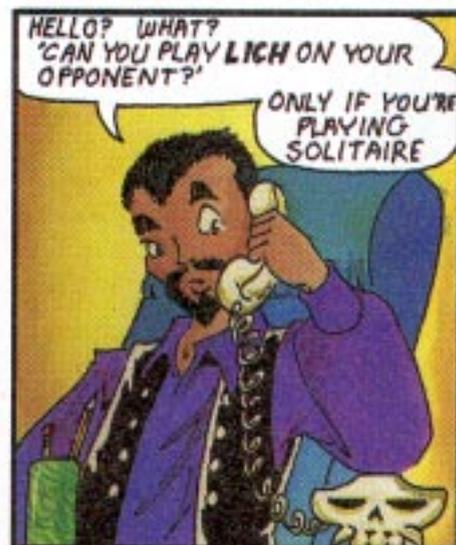
### Hunting for your next game convention?

If you're looking for a good time gaming, turn to this issue's "Convention Calendar" for current information on where the fun is.

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Skarsnik & Gobbler (Games Workshop)

## The why and wherefore of reviews

Since I've become a bimonthly fixture here, I thought I'd give you my philosophy with regards to miniatures reviewing. That way you'll understand where I'm coming from and why.

If a movie reviewer sees three movies in a week, hating one and loving two, but can review only one of them, would you rather be warned away from the bad one or would you rather hear about a good one? As a miniatures lover, collector, and hobbyist for quite a few years, I really enjoy looking at a great figure. Because I love figures so much, I'd hate to set aside a good one to make room for a poor one. There are so many good products that deserve attention, why waste space on mediocre or poor figures? Given the choice, I'd rather show you something worth having than warn you away from something else. If you disagree with me, and would like to be warned away from the mediocre and poor, by all means let me know.

We're all reviewers of a sort. Regardless of what a review says, you make the final

decision with your purchases. My review may influence that decision, by warning you about some major casting flaws, poor details, great proportions, excellent features, etc., but you make the final call. With that in mind, I try to review these figures the way I think you would. The review should point out the good and bad points, plus suggestions or fixes where needed.

Now that I've gotten that out of the way, I have to present a rebuttal to one of my own reviews. I know, I think it sounds strange too, but it has to be done. In DRAGON® issue #204, I reviewed Pressman Toy's *Mutant Chronicles: Siege of the Citadel*, and my review stank. I say that

### Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

with a confidence born during 30+ hours of play at two different conventions. Let me explain. . .

When I originally playtested the game, I did so with a small group of traditional war gamers. You know the type—you see them at every convention setting up a EUROPA\* game. They pay \$25 to go to the con, set up for 12 hours, play two turns over two days, then tear the game down and go home. Well, they tended to painstakingly review every conceivable move before actually taking their turn. Consequently, I found the game to be enjoyable but not "to die for".

A few months ago, I took the game to a local convention and set it up for a few friends (most have never even heard of the EUROPA game). We started playing and were really getting into the game when one friend had to leave. Since we were playing the campaign (all ten missions), we found someone to replace him rather than pack up the game. In less than an hour we had over a dozen people ask when they could get in and probably double that number asked about the game in the dealers' room.

We played about 18 hours worth of *Siege* at that convention and I returned home just yesterday from another convention after a similar experience. The players at this last convention, having read my review, were kind enough to show (more like force feed) me the error of my ways. While the review was not a bad review by any means, it did not do the game justice, and for that I humbly apologize.

I usually stay away from outright plugs but if you don't get this game, or force a friend to get it so you can play, you will truly be missing out. (Whose got the equipment deck? Isn't it my turn?)

There probably are more than a few of you that haven't experienced miniatures gaming yet, right? I don't mean having played one game of FASA's BATTLETECH\* or GW's SPACE HULK\* games, I mean sitting down and reading a set of rules, building an army, and playing it a few times.

What you really need is for an experi-

enced miniatures fanatic guide you to the game that's right for you. I can give you some suggestions for your first miniatures game.

One of your concerns is probably expense. The cost of miniatures has almost doubled in the last five years and you don't want to get a second mortgage on your DRAGON Magazine collection. I don't blame you. That's why you should try something inexpensive the first time you venture into miniatures.

The problem is, what is inexpensive when it comes to a miniatures game? To be honest, I'd have to say about \$60-80, if you get everything you need to play.

Games like TSR's BATTLESYSTEM® rules, SJG's OGRE\* Miniatures Rules and the STAR CORP\* rules all come as game books and cost under \$20 each. If you already have appropriate miniatures (and it is important to have appropriate, if not "official," figures), great. If not, another \$20-30 ought to get you enough figures to try it out.

Some miniatures games, including GW's WARHAMMER\* boxed edition, BATTLETECH, LEGIONS OF STEEL\*, and other games come with all the figures you need to play the game (at least some beginning scenarios). These run from \$35 to \$60 and usually include maps, counters, templates or other helpful accessories.

For beginning miniatures gamers I usually recommend the BATTLETECH or OGRE Miniatures rules. Both are inexpensive and easy to learn, but both require some special figures. While the BATTLETECH game comes with enough plastic 'Mechs to start play, the OGRE game is less expensive so you can pick up a few figures with the difference in price. The LEGIONS OF STEEL and WARHAMMER 40K games also are very good and come with figures, but they cost a bit more and can seem a little more complex.

If you aren't into science fiction, I'd recommend WARHAMMER FANTASY or TSR's BATTLESYSTEM *Skirmishes* (if you can find it). The WARHAMMER set comes with a number of figures but the BATTLESYSTEM game is less expensive and you may already have enough figures to play the *Skirmishes* rules.

My first miniatures game was a micro-armor game called *Tractics*. Later, I became a BATTLETECH junkie. Over the years I have become involved with WARHAMMER FANTASY and 40K, SPACE HULK, BATTLESYSTEM, ADEPTUS TITANICUS\* (the grandfather of the SPACE MARINE\* game), LIVING STEEL\*, LEGIONS OF STEEL, and other miniatures games. While I wouldn't recommend this for everyone, I've thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it, and heartily recommend the hobby.

Miniatures gaming isn't a replacement for any of the gaming you do now, it's just another facet of the existing hobby. The fact that you've read this column is proof enough that you are interested. Tell you



Street Samurai (Ral Partha)

what - if you prefer, don't make any investment at all. Just go to a local convention and get involved in one of the many demonstration games. The "old timers" will be glad to help you learn.

I welcome your comments, suggestions for future topics, and miniatures-related products for review. You can write me at: Ken Carpenter, P.O. Box 9, Murrieta CA 92564.

## Reviews

### Games Workshop (Citadel/Marauder Miniatures)

3431-C Benson Avenue  
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### #9061 Skarsnik and Gobbla

WARHAMMER line  
Sculptor: Kev Adams  
Scale: 28mm cost: \$7.99

A special character from the Orc & Goblin army list, Skarsnik - Warlord of the Eight Peaks, along with his pet cave squig Gobbla will provide your army with the heavy-handed leadership required to keep the orcs and goblins in line.

Gobbla, a huge cave squig, has been cast without sign of parting line or flash. Considering the nature of the figure, I'm not quite sure how they did it. Skarsnik has negligible lines along his robes and staff.

Gobbla is a big, ugly mass of scars, horns, and teeth—an excellent example of a cave squig. Painting it will be a blast, as you explore shading and detailing to take advantage of features like the broken tusk, the heavily veined hide, and his scars.

Skarsnik, a goblin chieftain, has an ornate hat with spikes and skull, a raised sword that is huge compared to the goblin, and the three-tipped spear (actually a squig prod). He is embellished with belt pouches, dagger sheath, rodent skulls, and an ornate mantle covering his shoulders. Even his belt buckle shows the attention to detail that makes Citadel figures stand out.

### Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

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Voice: (800) 543-0272 Fax: (513) 631-0028  
Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$4.00

### #20-562 Street Samurai Male & Female

SHADOWRUN\* series  
Sculptor: Tom Meier  
Scale: 25 mm cost: \$4.00

Not exactly your typical samurai for the SHADOWRUN universe, these figures are nonetheless a great pair. Your average samurai is cybered up, armed to the teeth, and usually carries at least one sword that he used once, just so he could say they did.

The female samurai (now there's counter-culture for you) has a minor mold line down the right side of her face that continues down her right side. The line continues between her legs but very little shows on the left side. There are almost no mold lines on the male.

Both carry automatic pistols or SMGs, an additional pistol, grenades, and ammo pouches. They appear to have had a short hair contest, but the male won with his head being shaved clean except for a flat-top. The female is wearing shorts and boots and has a bare midriff. Her expression is one of concern. The male samurai is wearing more of a scowl, fatigue pants, boots, and shin guards. Both have razor blades along their left hands.

While they break the mold on tradition, I like the simplistic, honest, human approach to a street samurai. These are great additions to the collection and you should add them to yours.

### #11-952 Ogres of Dragonspear

BATTLESYSTEM line  
Sculptor: Chris Atkin  
Scale: 15 mm cost: \$7.95

A set of nasty infantry for TSR's miniatures system, these eight ogres make a dangerous addition to your evil army. Chris Atkin, the father of Ral Partha's BATTLESYSTEM line, has done a great job



Ogres of Dragonspear (Ral Partha)



Rebel Leaders (Grenadier)

with this crew.

Minimal filing is required to remove the faint parting lines on these pieces, though you will want to use fingernail clippers or a hobby knife to trim the many threads. On figures this size, many threads are likely to occur because the moldsman creates quite a few vents to be sure the figures fill. They remove easily and leave no trace.

The pack contains one leader, a standard bearer, and six regular troops, if you can call ogres "regular". The troop figures are all the same—spear, club, and plate armor covering only parts of the body. The standard bearer wears better protection and even has been issued a sword, but his first priority is to hold aloft the standard (which has seen better days).

The leader wears gladiator-style arm protection and armor similar to the troops. His positioning and demeanor clearly mark him the leader of this motley crew.

#### #11-051 Zulkir Szasstam

AD&D® game series  
Sculptor: Dennis Mize  
Scale: 25 mm

Cost: \$2.15

Another character from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, Dennis has done an excellent job with Zulkir.

The figure needs a little cleaning around

the hood and along the upper arms, as well as along the bottom of the cloak. Other than those minor parting lines, the figure is without flaw.

Zulkir's mustache and beard have an oriental flavor, though the shape of his face and nose have more European design. His fur-trimmed cloak flows majestically down his back and his hands are poised for spell casting.

The belt, hood, and hemmed sleeves add detail and mystery to the character. Painting should be simple enough but will prove a challenge of your highlighting skills.

#### #11-990 Windriders

BATTLESYSTEM line  
Sculptor: Chris Atkin  
Scale: 15 mm

Cost: \$6.95

Some of the most ferocious flying critters made for Ral Partha's 15-mm line, these Windriders ought to give your opponent pause.

There are a total of five pieces to each figure and three figures in the blister. There are numerous threads to remove, showing that great care was taken to ensure a good mold fill, but they remove easily with knife or file. There are slight parting lines along the edges of the wings and a few traces on the griffons, but little



Zulkir Szasstam (Ral Partha)

work will be required to clean them off. The figures assemble easily but will need some carefully applied epoxy to blend the joints.

The detail is great, from feathered head and wings to lion body and diving pose. The rider even has a mustache and his face is set in fearful determination.

There aren't specific points for this troop type in the book, so I would recommend adding the price of the type of cavalry rider you're using (light or medium—I wouldn't allow heavy on a flying creature), subtracting six points for the horse you aren't using, to the price of the griffon (45). Thus a human medium cavalryman on griffon would cost 59 points (20 - 6 + 45 = 59).

#### Grenadier Models, Inc.

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#### #1506 Rebel Leaders

FUTURE WARRIORS\* series  
Sculptor: Mark Copplestone  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$4.00

This line has charted new territory for miniatures and done so in an imaginative and original way. So far the FUTURE WARRIORS line is a tremendous cross between a Mad Max style dark future and the tongue-in-cheek creativeness of Mark Copplestone.

There were a few minor mold lines on the figures but only one cut through any detail, at the gathered pants just above the large fellow's boots. A little careful filing fixed it good as new.

The big, bearded guy is your stereotypical motorcycle bad guy—right down to his jeans, vest, and bare belly showing between unimaginably tortured clothing. He is hugely muscled and his face is mostly covered by shaggy hair, mustache, beard, and shades. The clothing is well detailed



Windriders (Ral Partha)



Herald (Thunderbolt)

and the accessories, like the buckled boots and skull belt buckle, add to the general feel of the figure, as does the SMG in his right hand.

Our other leader is more the romantic lead, though his clothing could use a tailor's attention. His armament, namely a shotgun-looking weapon in his right hand and pistol in his left, leave no doubt that he can take care of himself, even in a *Mad Max* setting. His coat and pants show

numerous modifications and tears. His pony-tailed hair hangs over the long scarf he has wrapped around his neck. Again, minute details set the figure apart—details such as the extra gun tucked into his belt, the knife in his boot, and the patch at-

tempts on his pants.

While these figures fit a fairly specific genre of games, their originality and depth make you want to create more uses for them.

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### #3024 Herald

*Le Morte D'Arthur* series  
Sculptor: Tom Meier  
Scale: 25 mm

Cost: \$6.95

Another excellent figure for T-Bolt's Arthurian series, this herald comes on foot and mounted.

There are five pieces, not including the selection of weapons. Mold lines and other flaws are barely discernible. The shield on both versions will need some filing, just to flatten it out.

Though not posed for action, as many of the other Arthurian figures, the herald is noble in pose and manner. His attire is simplistic, as befitting his station, but his horse has a fine saddle and harness. In plate and flowing tunic, the herald can fit any number of gaming uses.

Use a Dremel tool or small hacksaw to remove the tabs connecting to the figures' feet. The Bobinium alloy used by T-Bolt is

very hard and will dull numerous knife blades before you get the tabs cut.

## Lance & Laser Models, Inc.

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### #003 Elementals-Earth & Water

Fantasy series  
Sculptor: Kevin Contos  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$5.50

How many elementals have we seen over the years? Virtually every miniatures manufacturer has made a set of the four elementals, so it's about time someone got them just right! These two elementals by Kevin Contos are the best I've seen.

The earth elemental has minor parting lines under his right arm and down his torso and the water elemental has some traces of mold line across his shoulders and down his right side. None of the lines are significant and should file away without a trace.

Each elemental is heavily laden with its element. The earth elemental appears to be coming right out of the ground, covered in earth, grass, and moss. His face, torso, and parts of his arms are humanoid with well-

defined musculature. The water elemental seems to have sprung right out of the sea, with globules of water spilling off his form. His humanoid shape is made of sharp angles and indelicate musculature.

Both are excellently detailed and present a great opportunity for painting. They leave the two-dimensional appearance behind with thick bodies and good movement.

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### #3959 The Beast

FANTASTIQUE NOIR VAMPYRE\* line  
Sculptor: Bob Murch  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$4.25

Rafm's *Vampyres* line has been ingenious. With creative, gothic themes for a darker, modern-day genre, the line has produced blister pack after blister pack of original figures.

The vampire figure in this blister has some moderate parting lines on his right arm, leg, and torso. Lighter lines appear on the left side, but all should file away well with no impact to detail. The boom-box carrying youth has very light mold lines appearing on his arms and right side. There is a rougher line cutting along the left side of his face, so be careful not to apply much pressure with the file as you work that away.

The youth, in T-shirt and baggy pants tucked into boots, carries a huge cassette player and appears to be totally beguiled by the powers of the vampyre. He's even gone so far as to tilt his head, exposing more of his vulnerable neck to the beast.

The vampyre wears only belted jeans and boots. He has heavy, almost mane-like hair falling to his thickly muscled shoulders. The knees of his pants are torn and his boots are of the biker variety.

### #1020 XME-419K Vortex

MEKTON\* line  
Sculptor: Dennis Koo  
Scale: 1/285th Cost: \$7.50

Now this is Japanimation! Rafm's figures for R. Talsorian's MEKTON game are perfect for the genre.

Vortex has a few visible mold lines, on shoulders, arms, and legs, but they don't interfere with detail and should clean up with a little time and care. The figure comes in two pieces, one of which is the right arm's weapon. It attaches easily but will need a little filing to get it just right.

This figure has all the bulky limbs, sharp angles, and exaggerated proportions that made Japanimation such a popular style. From the back, the Vortex looks almost wasp-like with a narrow central segment and bulkier sections on either side.

Detail is great, with all the stabilizing

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Vortex (Rafm)

jets, thrusters, weapons, and transforming sections readily visible. Intake valves, exhaust ports, and panels make up the remaining refinements. The mix of sharp angles and smooth curves really works for this figure.

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#### #1270 Template Pack 3

LEGIONS OF STEEL accessory  
 Artist: Tom Frank cost: \$9.95

Also known as the Mega-room template set, this set of 24 floor tiles for the LOS game will create chambers that are much too large for a UNE trooper's peace of mind.

The artwork is comparable to the other template sets but the artwork doesn't line up real well. Still, the offset is marginal, so there won't be any impact to play.

The set contains four tiles with no wall sections at all, four tiles with just a corner showing, eight tiles with a wall along one side in which is a small opening and eight tiles having walls along two walls, each with small openings in them.

By adding this set to what has already been released, you should be able to construct just about any layout your sick, twisted mind can conceive of. (Not that there's anything wrong with a sick, twisted mind—I happen to like mine.)

### Best of show

Since "Best of show" sounds much more prestigious than "litter," I've changed the name for the highest honor my column gives.

There really isn't a modeler's choice this time, since none of these pieces require significant assembly, so we'll go straight to gamer's choice, which was very close. The Beast is a great blister with a lot of creativity, but it was just barely edged out by the Earth & Water Elementals from L&L. The visual effects sculpted into the elementals were excellent and make the figures very believable (for fantasy figures).

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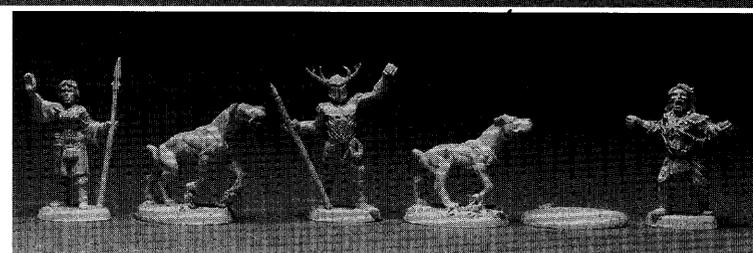
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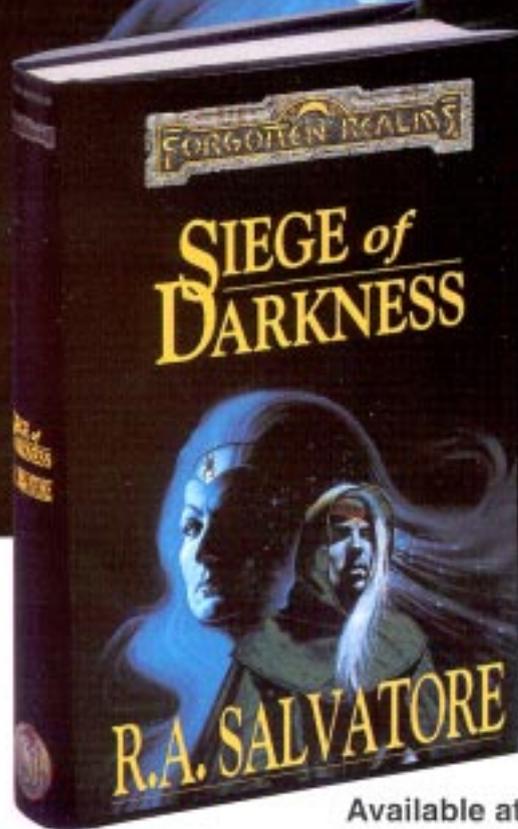
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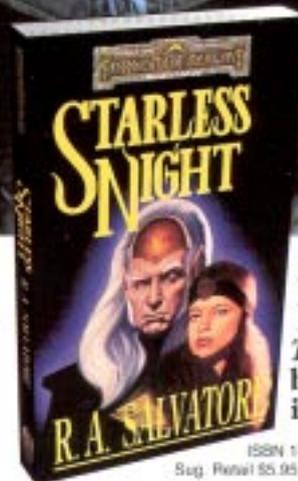
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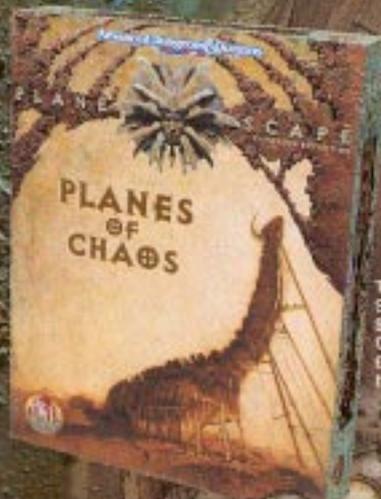


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