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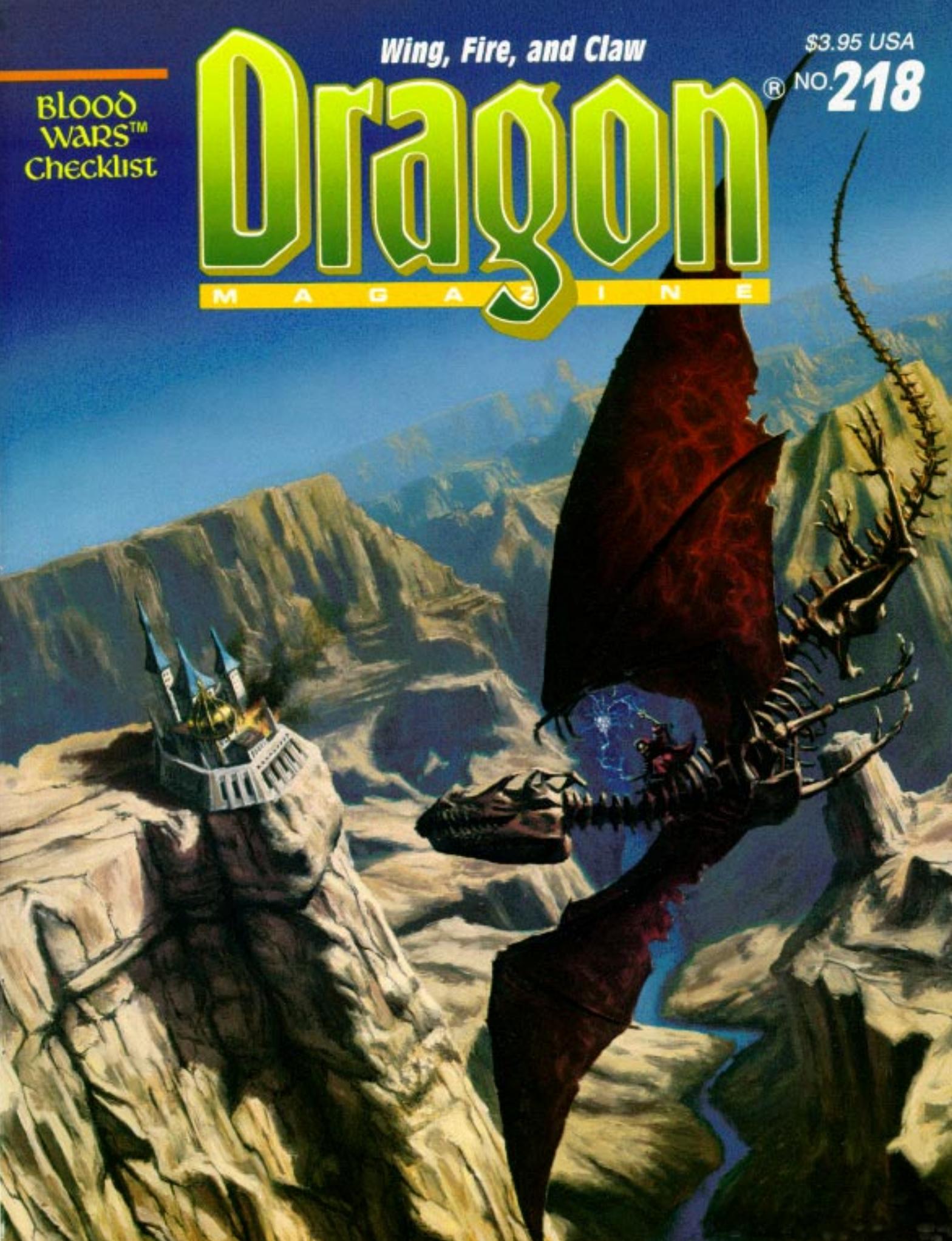
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NO. 218

# Dragon

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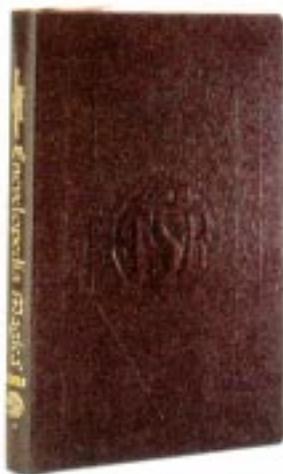
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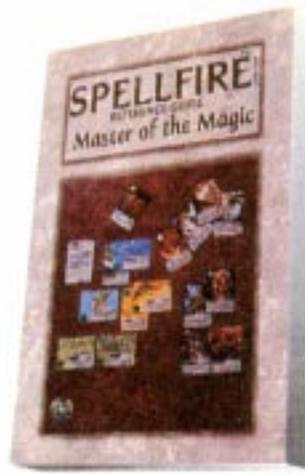
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## COVER

This issue's cover painting by Stephen King shows another side of dragons—a foul dracolich in flight over a barren wasteland. The issue is our annual tribute to our namesake—everyone's favorite engines of destruction—dragons.

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## Critical Hits 1

Dear Dragon,

I thought that the new critical hit chart published in issue #216 was very good, but I have just one small problem with it. I don't like the fact that a human with a long sword cannot possibly decapitate another human. That really makes no sense to me.

If this rule cannot be changed before publication I have suggestion. Perhaps the players could add all their "to hit" bonuses to their chart roll. This would allow them to reach the "decapitation" result normally reserved for larger weapons and creatures.

Mortarse  
via e-mail

*You're always free to change the rules to suit your preferences. That said, I'd like to pass along the designer, Rick Baker's, reasoning for this decision. Decapitation is a magical power of vorpal weapons; it detracts from their magic to say that any medium-size weapon can decapitate an opponent. In the critical hit system, doing so requires a two-handed sword, halberd, or other large-size weapon capable of overcoming armor and other protection. Being able to strike a two-handed blow is another factor; a generous DM might allow a bastard sword being used two-handed to inflict critical hits normally reserved for larger weapons.*

## We're Calmer Now

Dear Dragon,

Has anyone but myself noticed that the MtG craze seems to have died out some? I mean, in our gaming group, until recently, you were hard pressed to find someone who would appreciate a good role-playing session. It seemed that everyone there was up to their fanny-packs in black-border this, and such-and-such land!

Well, recently the craze seems to have ebbed; not died out entirely, just sort of receded. It has now been relegated to a before/after the RPG pastime instead of one that takes the place of it. This is greatly to my liking, I have to admit. And just as we have our board/war game nights, we also have our Magic/Jyhad nights. Again, greatly to my liking.

Goodness, I may even think about picking up a deck—but don't tell my friends I said that!

J.D. Carriker, Jr.  
926847@utb.edu

## Critical Hits 2

Dear Dragon,

I just got issue #216, and want to make a few remarks to Michelle Vuckovich. You have my complete support—what you said was well balanced, well phrased, and not strident or extreme in the slightest. I say this because I suspect some people will write in and claim just that.

I like "Paths of Power" but am confused by one point. On page 44, Table A: Number of Paths/Level gives low-level characters a higher number of paths than they can have 1st-level spells. Why?

While I'm glad to see TSR finally allowing AD&D® to have critical hits, I am saddened to see it so badly botched. The method for determining if a critical hit has occurred is good, but System I is too simplistic to be much fun, and the System II lists are horribly over-complicated. It almost makes me wonder if TSR's aversion to criticals has led you to design an unworkable system.

In the same issue, the blurb on the cover of the *Kill Zone* box says there are two sets of brand new figures, but Ken Carpenter says that half the figures are new: which is right?

Christopher David  
Snoqualmie, Wa

*In answer to your question, low-level wizards have access to several paths to give them a range of spells to choose from when selecting their memorized spells each day. Similarly, under the original spell system, wizards begin with more spells in their spell book than they can actually use, for just the same reason.*

*While the official core rules still don't allow critical hits, the optional system is a labor of love by a designer who enjoys criticals more than any other TSR staff designer Rich Baker. Rest assured, it has undergone rigorous play-testing. As for the complicated tables, well, we're confident that gamers can handle it. Certainly the system is no more complicated than any other critical hit system, though some might contend that's not saying much.*

*The figures are all new at the time of the game's release; five are exclusive to the box, the other five are available separately in blister packs.*

## Cthulhu by the Bay

Dear Dragon,

In issue #210, you reviewed an "Investigator's Companion" for the CALL OF CTHULHU\* game. It is published by Chaosium, Inc. I would appreciate the address for this company.

Matthew King  
Inverurie, Scotland

*Chaosium is the company responsible for the ELRIC\*, NEPHILIM\*, and PENDRAGON\* role-playing games as well as the CALL OF CTHULHU game. They can be reached at Chaosium, Inc., 950-A 56th Street, Oakland, CA, 94608-3129, USA.*

## Critical Hits 3

Dear Dragon,

A comment about issue #216's article about critical hits. What is meant on the Bludgeoning vs. Humanoids table (as well as elsewhere) when a 13 + is rolled? A 12 is "skull crushed, immediate death." A 13 + is "as 12 above with tripled damage dice." What is the use of the 13 +? The poor sap is already dead with most of his brains oozing out!

Ed Ogden  
Zephyrhills, FL

*So, basically, what you are asking is, "How dead is he?" Surprisingly the victim of a 13 + might not be slain at all. The victim is entitled to a saving throw against all the special effects caused by a critical hit (such as "skull crushed"); if this saving throw is successful, he suffers only the additional damage. In the case of a 12, that's double damage; for a 13 +, it's triple normal damage.*

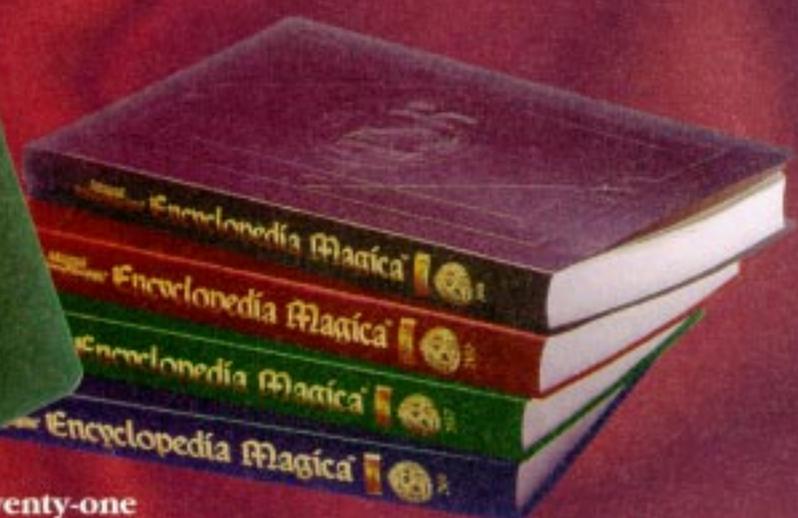
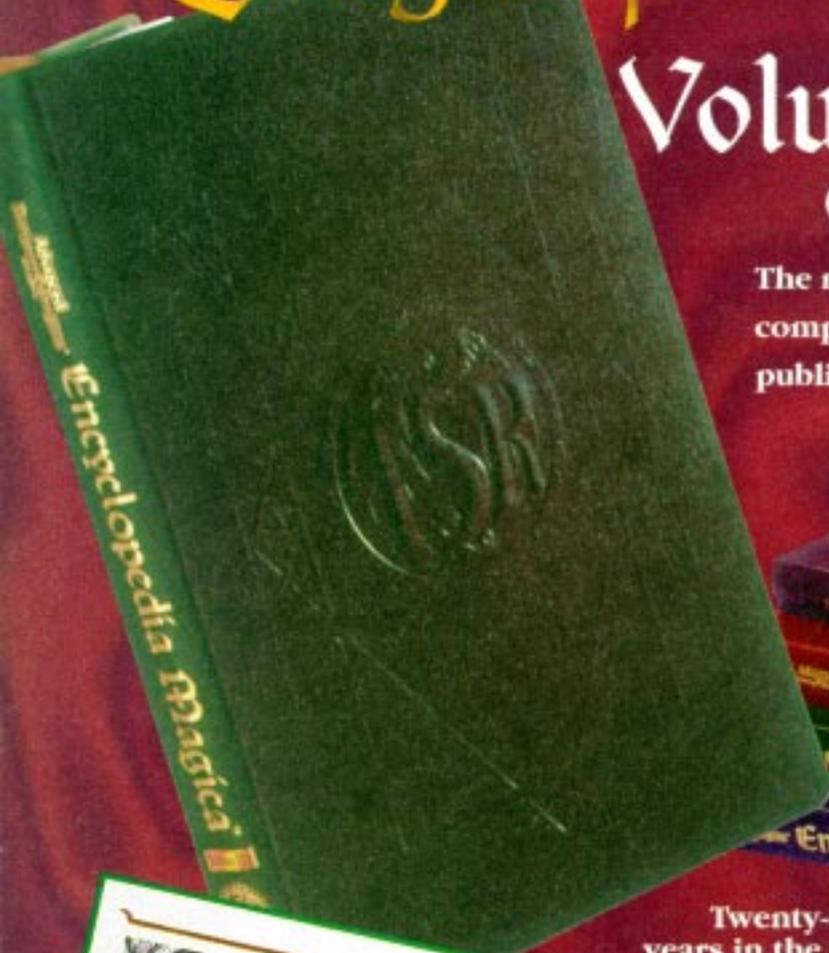


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# E

# ditorial

## Perspective Time

In the past few months, many editorials in DRAGON® Magazine have been devoted to the topic of change.

It's probably time to put things into perspective . . . but first, a little side trip.

Change can be good.

Change is evolution.

The dinosaurs did not evolve in the same way mammals did; they didn't survive.

Change can be bad.

Change can be capricious, even disastrous.

"So why don't we take the most popular soft drink in America and make it taste more like the competition? After all, 'new' is where it's at."

"What we really need is a new (insert name of your favorite superhero)! Let's kill him and replace him with a new guy! How can we lose?"

To answer the previous question: "With great ease and speed."

I remember a magazine called *Argosy*. It was one of the pulps catering to adventure fiction, cliffhangers, and heroes of the Doc Savage ilk. The covers were slightly more lurid than those of its science fiction counterparts, even though the raciness within was, at the best, slightly suggestive.

It disappeared with most of the other pulps but was resurrected in the sixties as a men's magazine catering to high adventure, tales of the unknown, and other manly stuff. It was moderately successful, appealing to the Playboy and Esquire crowds, with a bit of *True Adventure* and *One Step Beyond* thrown in. Other magazines jumped on the band wagon, and the market soon became crowded. Some powers that be somewhere determined that *Argosy* must change in order to assure a bigger market share, sort of like the one enjoyed by *Sports Illustrated*, but for the participant rather than for the specta-

tor. Thus, fiction and factual adventure features were cut back in favor of catamaraning and skiing. The new focus of the magazine would allow many more advertising opportunities with big-name accounts, thus assuring a healthy profit for all concerned. Unfortunately its readership declined. Long-time *Argosy* readers missed the healthy dose of fiction and far-off adventure and weren't interested in dune-bugging and windsurfing. The active sports crowd already had magazines that catered to their interests and saw no need to add another one to the pile. (After all, who had time to read magazines when one was busy jet-setting around the slopes and surfing off Australia?)

*Argosy* died, a victim of nonproductive change. It had turned its back on its core audience in favor of one it perceived as more profitable.

All of this is a roundabout way of saying that it is not our intention to mutate the new and improved DRAGON Magazine into something radically different from its TSR and AD&D game roots. DRAGON Magazine is not *Starlog*, nor should it become *Starlog* or *PC Gamer*. *Starlog* is a wonderful magazine of science fiction and fantasy entertainment, while *PC Gamer* does an admirable job of covering the booming electronic market, but neither addresses the concerns covered in DRAGON Magazine. Likewise, *Wizards of the Coast* and *White Wolf* and their respective publications do not reflect TSR . . . nor should they.

DRAGON Magazine has been and always will be the magazine of fantasy role-playing, AD&D, and TSR. To change into some other "soft drink" is to meet the same bitter aftertaste as experienced by the drink that was heralded as "the New."

Of course, there is always room for improvement. New graphics and design, new topics, new focuses, all will be taken into consideration as we design the new and improved magazine, but such alterations will not clog the lifeblood that has always been the magazine—material you want to read and material you want to play.

The new editor at the helm is Wolfgang Baur. Wolf is an accomplished designer and editor with credits too numerous to mention, and most importantly has a passion for the magazine only possibly equalled by his predecessor in the job, the inestimable Roger Moore.

Assisting Wolf (and helming the editorial laurels of DUNGEON® Adventures) will be Dave Gross, whose years of service to the RPGA®. Network and POLYHEDRON® Newzine have more than trained him for the demanding tasks that lie ahead.

Veteran role-players both, they will transfuse new blood into both publications.



Brian Thomsen

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this heat is  
enough to cause a  
fused diamond burn

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F

# First Quest™

FIRST QUEST is the title of TSR, Inc.'s Audio CD Introduction to Role-playing Game. This series is a feature where veterans of role-playing describe their first experiences in the hobby.

by Ed Greenwood

## Play with Me, She Breathed

The lamps were low as Elminster put me into the armor. "Ouch," I remarked intelligently.

"Belt up," he ordered gruffly. "If ye weren't crazed enough to spend entire days writing fancies about my world for those TSR folk, 'keyboard spread' wouldn't afflict ye quite so prominently and ye just *might* still fit into this

Recalling what befell the last time I last got into a suit of armor, took sword in hand, and sallied forth to battle in the SCA, an inability to get into armor might not be a bad thing.

Whenever I think of getting into armor, my mind always leaps to that moment in a sun-dappled ravine in Don Mills, Ontario, on a fern-strewn, sandy bank of Wilket Creek. My friends and I were wont to take our original, big-board DIPLOMACY\* and KINGMAKER\* games, and our model soldiers and Donald Featherstone rules to while away glorious weekend afternoons. We discussed Middle-earth and the works of Lord Dunsany, Clark Ashton Smith, Jack Vance, William Morris, and Fritz Leiber. We argued "what if this happened," and what hadn't we been told about what lay there, and longed to know more about things in Tolkien's Middle-earth, Lovecraft's Kadath, and many other fantasy worlds—longings that led, eventually, to the Realms. Later we discussed Roger Zelazny as one Amber novel after another came out and each was devoured. We dreamed of seeing his hard-to-find Dilvish stories published in a collection—and of all the other classics of fantasy, and, well, of girls. (More about that in a moment.)

Lin Carter at Ballantine was bringing all the great English-language fantasies back into print, culminating in the splendid guide called *Imaginary Worlds* (Ballantine, 1973), still required reading for anyone who wants to know what's what in fantasy. These, plus a steady diet of Conan and FANTASTIC\* magazine (later amalgamated with its sister publication, AMAZING® Stories) kept us wallowing in worlds full of swords, spells, dragons, beautiful princesses, crumbling castles, and fell wizards—

and also kept us (despite re-reading everything several score times) always hungry for more.

I'd been a reader and writer from my earliest days, growing up on A. Merritt's tales, Edgar Rice Burroughs, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and the like, and had even tried my hand (in 1967) at writing jaunty Three Musketeers/Fahrd & Grey Mouser-style yarns wherein swordsmen exchange witty repartee as they carve up endless bad guys in the proto-Realms. The first sentence in which the Realms came to life? "Now in all the lands 'twixt bustling Waterdeep and the sparkling waves of The Sea of Fallen Stars, no men were more loved—and feared—than the stoic swordsman Durnan, the blustering old rogue Mirt, and the all-wise, ancient wizard Elminster." A pretty good summation of the heart of the Realms even today, and not bad for an eight-year-old, eh? Once Carter published *New Worlds For Old*, I was hooked.

Things might have gone along just fine if it hadn't been for Gary Gygax—and for September.

Oh, I bought *Chainmail*, adding monsters to our knights-and-castles wargames—already, thanks to Featherstone, linked into an ongoing battle-by-battle history of several imaginary kingdoms. And I bought the original D&D® books, and played a game or two (in 1975, for those keeping score), but although we thought the rules were a great, nay, fascinating idea, they were still just sitting around together telling a fantasy story, which is what we'd already been doing, without rules.

Then the original *Monster Manual* came out . . . and September came to us. On reflection, the quality of this book (quantifying one mythological monster after another, and adding a lot of neat new ones to boot) and the brilliant Vanceian magic of the *Player's Handbook* (explaining *precisely* what spells do) were what made me change the Realms from a nebulous place of pretty maps into an AD&D® game world. But what really got me hooked on the game was September.

She came to town to attend university,

and she was quite the most beautiful being I'd ever laid eyes on. She loved fantasy and laughed heartily at the ungainly nerds she found fencing clumsily with homemade swords around the SF bookstores, quoting more fantasy writers than she'd ever read. September also saw in them someone to play her latest passion with: games of AD&D. And one of those nerds was me.

Three of us promised her a "great place to play" and loaded up a romantic cargo of pop, potato chips, and homemade dip (a tradition that continues to this day) before meeting her at the bus and taking her to (of course) our special spot in the woods. She loved it at first glance.

And we loved her. She stepped off the bus dragging a huge dunny bag and wearing swashbuckling boots and a cloak, and the moment we were in the woods, she announced that the trip had been long and that she had to go off by herself for a moment. Gallantly, we showed her the densest bushes, and a few minutes later we learned what had been in that bag.

September reappeared in splendid half-armor, cloak thrown back, leather gauntlets on her wrists. A real longsword gleamed in her hand.

"Come, play with me," she breathed huskily, reaching out her hand. All three of us stout lads fell over each other (and our steamed-up glasses) trying to kneel and kiss it.

Needless to say, she was the greatest Dungeon Master we've ever known, before or since. September believed in acting out all the NPCs, complete with funny voices, mannerisms, the works. Tears ran down her face when things grew sad, and she leaped around the clearing in glee when we tried witty repartee and clever battle-tricks—and ended up with slapstick accidents, just like the tales. Best of all, she believed in ending play sessions when we were still hungry for more, and she let us excitedly discuss plans and what might lie ahead (and thereby learned what we hoped for, so she could give it to us next time). She also allowed me to blossom slowly into our "idea man," shaping the

*Continued on page 54*

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# Tarazin

## THE GRAY

Meet the eldest dragon of Cerilia

by Rich Baker

Illustration by Stephen Daniele

The dragons of Cerilia, the setting of the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign, are a dying race. Once their kind filled the skies above Cerilia, but for millenia their numbers have declined. Today, 2,000 years after the coming of humankind to the continent, only six dragons are known to exist. No hatchlings have appeared in more than 500 years, and as the remaining dragons grow older they spend more and more of their time dreaming the days away in a deep slumber. More than 20 years have passed since the last time a dragon woke and flew.

Cerilia's dragons are not divided by differences of coloration or size—they are all members of the same species. The few that remain have withdrawn to the wildest and most desolate lands, the stark and forbidding Drachenaur mountains. Once their strongholds and meeting places could be found throughout these great peaks, but now the places of dragons are empty and abandoned. Very few people can even guess at the location of the remaining dragons' lairs.

While Cerilian dragons may be of

any alignment, even the most destructive and malevolent of the great wyrms is still a creature of near-infinite patience and deliberation. All dragons are extremely intelligent—they were the first speaking creatures in all the world, after all—and possess a great store of racial knowledge and lore that shames even the elven scholars. This body of dragon lore is one of the very few reasons that lesser mortals might ever seek out a dragon; from time to time, the advice or aid of a dragon has helped a hero triumph over seemingly invincible foes or accomplish impossible tasks. However, as they say in the pragmatic lands of Brechtür: "Only a fool seeks a dragon's favor." The minds of dragons work differently from those of humans, elves, or dwarves, and as a race they seem capricious and inscrutable.

Of the two or three dozen dragons whose names are recorded in Cerilian history, Tarazin the Gray is perhaps the most famous. He is known as "the Eldest," and he is the greatest and most powerful of Cerilia's wyrms. Tarazin predates the human occupation of

Cerilia by centuries, and his exact age can only be guessed at. As a young dragon, Tarazin befriended the elven scholar Ghaelfyd of the Sielwode some centuries before the human exodus, when refugees fled north from the evil of Azrai and his followers. Ghaelfyd later placed the date of their first meeting as more than 1,200 years before the battle of Deismaar (the defining battle of Cerilia's history, in which the powers of good destroyed Azrai, god of darkness and corruption, and were themselves destroyed). If this date is accurate, Tarazin is somewhere near 3,000 years of age.

Tarazin's fame begins with the wars of elves and humans for control of Cerilia's forests, in the centuries immediately following the arrival of the first settlers on Cerilia's shores. Ghaelfyd's friends and family had suffered greatly at the hands of the human armies, and the scholarly elf sought Tarazin's aid to turn back the tide of woodsmen and warriors moving into the western reaches of the Sielwode. Tarazin agreed and attacked the settlements and camps of the Elin,

the eighth house of the invading humans. Over a period of a century or so, Tarazin made dozens of raids into human lands, causing great loss of life and property.

It's interesting to note that Tarazin

wasn't the only dragon to take part in this conflict. Several others allowed themselves to be drawn in on one side or the other, but most were either bribed or simply curious. Tarazin seems to have been the only dragon

who took part out of loyalty; his friendship with Ghaelfyd led him to identify closely with the elven cause.

Despite Tarazin's efforts, the humans continued their inexorable advance, and the dragon tired of attacking homesteads and farmlands. His friend Ghaelfyd became angry and embittered, since most of his family had fallen to human warriors in the endless wars on the elven borders. Eventually, the former scholar joined the *Gheallie Sidhe*, the Hunt of the Elves, and engaged in a ruthless campaign of raiding and murdering humans wherever he encountered them. The noble and compassionate friend of Tarazin's youth became a cold-hearted killer. Weary of conflict, the dragon chose to retreat to his fastness and answer Ghaelfyd's call no more. For 200 years before the great battle of Deismaar, nothing more was recorded of Tarazin's deeds.

The awful confrontation of good and evil at Mount Deismaar marked the next appearance of Tarazin, along with more than a dozen of his fellows. Dragons fought on both sides of the great battle. Like the elves, some dragons were ensnared by Azrai's false promises and joined the side of darkness; others chose to help the folk of Cerilia resist the Azrai's armies that threatened the land. Ghaelfyd called on Tarazin before the battle, and the dragon agreed to aid the elf one last time for the sake of their ancient friendship. The dragon and elf stood with Azrai's legions when the day of battle dawned, and Tarazin marched with the elven host at Deismaar to fight against the defenders of Cerilia. Deismaar marked the last time that dragons took the field in battle, and nine were destroyed that day. Tarazin himself killed a much older wyrm known as Azakadazar, who was defending the dwarven host of Khurin Azur. Although he was gravely injured by the older dragon in turn, Tarazin went on to slay hundreds of dwarven warriors with his fearsome breath. To this day, the folk of Khurin Azur sing of the dragon's fury.

At the height of the battle, Ghaelfyd and most of the elven host changed sides and turned on the forces of darkness. This surprised Tarazin, and he withdrew from the thick of the fight while considering whom to attack. Ghaelfyd stood and fought, and died on an ogre's spear. Tarazin's retreat cost the life of his friend, but it probably saved the dragon from de-

## Tarazin

ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
ARMOR CLASS:	- 4
MOVEMENT:	9, Fl 30 (C)
HIT DICE:	23 (161 hp)
THACO:	1
NO. ATTACKS:	3 + special
DAMAGE:	1d10 + 12/1d10 + 12/2d12 + 12
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Breath weapon, spells, dive
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Fear aura, gaze, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	60%
SIZE:	G (80' body, 120' wingspan)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	30,000

S: 25 D: 9 C: 22 I: 20 W: 17 Ch: 15

Tarazin's scales are a dark, rusty gray in color, but age has faded the color along his snout, back, and wings. His belly is protected by thick folds of leathery hide, and his coat of iron-hard scales makes him nearly impervious to harm. Tarazin can attack with his claws and bite, or he can execute one of the special attacks described in the "Dragon" entry of the *Monstrous Manual*,™ such as a dive, snatch, wing buffet, or tail lash.

Tarazin's breath weapon is a foul liquid combining the worst properties of acid and fire; its corrosive power can destroy the finest tempered steel, or even solid stone. Tarazin can use his vitriolic breath once every six rounds; it affects a line 60' long and 5' wide, inflicting 20d6 +20 hp damage to anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in its area of effect. Objects caught in the deadly burning acid must make an item saving throw versus either magical fire or acid, whichever is worse.

Despite his great power in melee, Tarazin views claw and fang combat as a last resort, and he unleashes his breath weapon only if he believes that his life is in immediate danger. He has many more subtle weapons at his disposal.

Tarazin radiates an aura of *fear* in a 50-yard radius, just as described in the *MM*, with a -4 penalty to the saving throw because of his status as a great wyrm. If a creature should meet Tarazin's gaze, it must save vs. spells at a -4 penalty or be paralyzed with terror for 2d4 turns. If Tarazin spends an entire round exerting his will against the victim, he can use the powers of *geas*, *suggestion*, or *feeblemind* on the victim with no saving throw. The dragon's golden eyes can capture lesser beings with ease. This is one of Tarazin's favorite tactics for dealing with heroes or creatures he doesn't want to bother with; a moment's thought is all it takes to send the most offensive creatures away in a blank daze.

Like most Cerilian dragons, Tarazin is a spellcaster of immense power. He memorizes and casts the full complement of spells commanded by a 17th-level wizard, including *polymorph self*, *power words*, and *death fog*, among many others. In addition, dragon magic includes a number of spells and abilities unknown to human sorcery, and the elder wyrms often experiment with new combinations of spells and effects. As a result, Tarazin knows a number of unique spells that a PC spellcaster would not know (See this issue's "Dragon Dweomers" feature for details). Tarazin relies on his command of magic as his second line of defense against challengers, since he considers magic a more elegant weapon than crass physical attacks. Draconic magic allows use of spells only from the schools of abjuration, alteration, conjuration/summoning, and divination. Victims of Tarazin's magic suffer a -4 penalty to their saving throws due to the great wyrm's skill and power.

Role-playing notes: Tarazin is an extremely intelligent and well-educated opponent who has seen every trick in the book in his day. He is not a malicious or spiteful creature, but he is very proud and views no other creature in Cerilia as his equal. While he prefers to avoid confrontations altogether, he generally enters an encounter with a genuine desire to resolve the matter with the minimum amount of force possible. Despite this respect for lesser creatures' lives, Tarazin is not a fool—if it becomes apparent that death is the only argument a hero will understand, the great wyrm will deal it as quickly and efficiently as possible. He may be slow to anger, but once blood has been shed, Tarazin can become an engine of destruction whose equal does not exist in all of Cerilia.

struction, for shortly after the elves' change of heart, the great confrontation between Azrai and his divine brethren took place. The mountain-side was levelled by the unimaginable energies of a pantheon's death. Like the other surviving dragons, Tarazin was completely immune to the divine explosion that created bloodlines of power among humans and other survivors. Dazed, wounded, stunned by the death of his elven friend, Tarazin retreated to his cavern home and did not surface again for more than 100 years.

While Deismaar's effects on the human, demihuman, and humanoid cultures of Cerilia are well documented elsewhere, very few people realized what Deismaar signified for Cerilia's dragons. Ages ago, dragons had fiercely contended with each other for power, wealth, and courtship, but in more recent times the race had become wiser and slower to anger. The ancient contention among dragons had resurfaced at Deismaar, and the ghastly loss to the race—more than a third of all dragons living at the time—reignited the ancient draconic rivalries. The natural draconic tenden-

cies toward paranoia, pride, and the memory of almost-forgotten feuds now poisoned the relations between the surviving dragons. Within two centuries of Deismaar, dragon society ceased to exist, and they became a race of recluses who desired no contact with each other. This more than anything led to the race's long decline.

Tarazin himself was particularly ostracized by his fellows, since it was well-known that he had personally killed another dragon, and an older and more important one at that. This did not concern him for many centuries, since he was content to rest from his immense exertions and recover from the injuries he had sustained. During this time, he emerged from his caverns infrequently to feed. Meanwhile, the remaining dragons died off one by one. Several destroyed each other in the aftermath of Deismaar or in various schemes and plots. At least two fell victim to rising power of those warped by the magical explosion at Deismaar; it's said that Prince Raesene, the Gorgon, slew the wrym Raizhadik to claim the dragon's stronghold of Kal-Saitharak. And mortal heroes slew a handful of the ancient

wyrms, lured by legends of dragon-gold and magic. By the time Tarazin was prepared to resume his role in draconic society, less than a dozen of his race remained.

About 800 years after Deismaar, or 750 years ago (HC 813), Tarazin again entered recorded history when he met the Brecht warlord Eldracht Hoffstugart. Eldracht was a prince of Grevesmühl, one of the few Brecht nations not under the domination of the Anuirean Empire. He dreamed of creating an empire to rival Anuire, uniting the free Brecht states and then waging a war of liberation to free western Brechtür from Anuire. By all accounts, Eldracht was a man of immense energy, magnetism, and vision; in fact, he had already overthrown the Anuirean viceroy of Müden by the time he met Tarazin. Eldracht had scored his successes in the late fall of 813, and as the winter of 814 approached, he gained a brief reprieve from the wrath of Anuire as the great Krakennauricht bay froze and heavy snow blocked the passes of the Kiergard provinces that connect Anuire and Brechtür. Eldracht knew that the spring would bring the return

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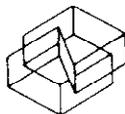
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of the Imperial fleets to Brecht waters and fresh armies reinforcing the Anuirean hold on western Brechtür. Since he saw no way to stop this counter-blow, Eldracht turned to a dragon for aid.

Prince Eldracht led a small expedition into the Drachenaaur Mountains in the heart of winter, seeking Tarazin's cavern. Tarazin was one of the older surviving dragons, and Eldracht probably decided that nothing short of the most powerful ally imaginable would suffice. By the use of powerful divinations, the prince discovered Tarazin's lair and led his men into the dragon's den. Regrettably, Eldracht angered Tarazin in the course of their discussions, and the dragon killed the prince and his party. Only a handful of squires—those who had remained outside watching the party's horses—escaped to carry the tale back to Grevesmühl. Had he lived, Eldracht might have been able to achieve some great successes against Anuire, which was dealing with the resurgence of other conquered peoples at the time. Eldracht's heirs carried on a feud against the dragon for over 70 years, and Tarazin was challenged no less than 11 times by various noblemen of Grevesmühl who sought to avenge their fallen prince. The last of these, a stealthy rogue named Witt, seriously injured the dragon by luring him into a nearby gorge and triggering a great rockfall that came within a handbreadth of crushing Tarazin. However, Witt met his end when he came down to gloat over his stunned foe, thinking him dead.

Following this last obnoxious intrusion, Tarazin relocated his lair to the extreme northern reaches of the Drachenaurs, choosing an icebound peak in the region now called Drachenward. After concealing it with the most powerful spells he knew, the wyrm left Cerilia entirely for 30 years. He crossed the Sea of Dragons in search of the ancestral home of all dragons, the legendary isles at the end of the world. No human knows where they lie or what secrets they hold, but Tarazin later revealed that he had visited the elders of his race and studied under them. When he returned, Tarazin sought out the other surviving dragons one by one, traveling to their lairs and strongholds to hold counsel with them. He advised a truce and an end to the rivalries that had divided Cerilia's dragons, and he also encouraged the other dragons to distance

themselves from human affairs. Since he was now one of the oldest dragons in Cerilia, Tarazin's words were taken very seriously, and his persistent efforts helped to restore a cool truce among the dragons of Cerilia (although many had let their feuds lapse through sheer weight of years long before Tarazin's return). Regrettably, the wyrm Infyrna saw Tarazin's travels as an opportunity to ambush him and settle an old score; over the plains of Merasaf, the two fought a spectacular duel that ended in Infyrna's death.

On returning to his new stronghold, Tarazin entered a long dormancy that lasted until only 100 years ago. He awoke to find that some human of extraordinary daring and skill had entered his cave and removed various articles of Tarazin's treasure, including unique scrolls and magical items older than mankind. Nothing is more insulting to a dragon than stealing from his lair while he is actually there, and Tarazin's years of wisdom and patience disappeared in a storm of rage. The great wyrm embarked on a wild rampage throughout northern Cerilia that lasted for months before calming down enough to consider the situation rationally. When he recovered his wits, Tarazin returned to his cavern and made preparations to track down and catch the thief. Most notably, he used sorcery to alter his shape, taking on a human form to walk the cities and nations of Cerilia in search of his enemy.

Tarazin's travels lasted for several years, and at first he had great difficulty in maintaining his cover. (Basic human behavior and courtesy took some time to learn.) Eventually, he tracked down a powerful mage named Beruile in the City of Anuire and determined that the wizard had indeed pilfered his hoard. Tarazin destroyed the wizard with draconic magics never before seen in Anuire, but he recovered only a handful of the stolen treasures—Beruile's companions had scattered to the four winds, carrying the dragon's treasures with them. Tarazin never tracked them all down, and he still occasionally searches for word of his lost baubles or the thieves' descendants.

By now, the reader has undoubtedly noticed that Tarazin's career is detailed to a remarkable degree for a dragon. No others are as well known as he. This is because of the efforts of a bard named Crisoebyr, a half-elven minstrel who set out to record Tara-

zin's story 10 years ago. She discovered the dragon's cave and piqued the dragon's interest by returning a ruby-bladed dagger that was part of his missing treasure. In exchange, she humbly requested one week of conversation with the great wyrm. Tarazin saw in her an image of the beauty, wit, and grace he had loved in the elves of old, and within a few days was completely charmed by her company. Most of the details of this account come from the works Crisoebyr composed after this meeting.

Unfortunately, the songstress vanished two years ago and has not been seen since. It has been suggested that Tarazin suddenly decided to silence her, that he took her away to his cave and imprisoned her to sing at his command, and also that the dragon took human form again to travel with her. Until someone else braves the dragon's den, the truth of the matter will remain unknown.

### **Using Tarazin in a BIRTHRIGHT™ Campaign**

Tarazin is a unique source of ancient lore and hidden knowledge who could come into play as the object of a great quest. Dragons remember much that has been forgotten by humankind, and a great hero may seek out Tarazin to humbly beg his assistance in such matters. Naturally, Tarazin is resentful of any intrusions, and the price he sets on his information could be quite high. For example, he might demand that a hero locate and return one of his missing treasures as the price of his help, or he might send a hero to bring him some unusual or valuable treasure before answering any questions.

Tarazin is not omnipotent or omniscient, but he is extremely powerful. Any PC party that decides to make a name for itself by taking on the greatest dragon in Cerilia should be prepared to face spells, traps, and deceit of diabolical cleverness before coming within sword's reach of Tarazin. The great dragon is fully aware of just how dangerous humans and their kind can be, and he rarely underestimates an opponent. Most heroes will get only one shot at Tarazin; if he feels seriously threatened, he'll use his magic to escape and live to fight another day. From that point on, those characters who forced his retreat will have to watch their backs for a long, long time.

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# Dragon



## Adding Craftiness to Power

by Gregory W. Detwiler

Artwork by Steve Schwartz

In the AD&D® game, as in all other fantasy games, the dragon is a figure of direct attack and overwhelming power. It is a souped-up dinosaur, whose intelligence—when the DM chooses to display it—is restricted to clever battle tactics and the elaborate guarding and trapping of its lair. But dragons in all cultures and most fantasy tales are described as exceedingly clever; such creatures would not only defend their nests wisely upon discovery, but would take steps to eliminate potential threats even before anyone knew of its existence. I hope to demonstrate here that a sneaky dragon can be a versatile and dangerous threat to any party, and certainly more entertaining than the old, stereotypical reptile that only reacts when the party barges into its lair.

### **Dragon Stealth**

Given their natural and magical powers, dragons have a wide variety of attacks at their disposal, some of which may be employed without anyone even realizing that there is a dragon within 100 miles of them. A traditional power of the dragon of

folklore and of a few game systems is the ability to poison water supplies and wither the landscape by its very presence. Now, among the AD&D dragons, only black dragons gain the magical power to *corrupt water* on reaching the adult age category. However, other dragon types can certainly foul water supplies by shoving in garbage, soil, and poisonous plants. If the dragon finds a deposit of arsenic in his cave, he can *really* go to work!

The reader is no doubt considering the possibility of the dragon leaving a pool of poisoned water near its lair as a trap for would-be dragonslayers. Well, the dragon can do this, but I had something more elaborate and long-term in mind. All dragons prefer privacy, particularly if they have lots of treasure to protect. Suppose a dragon lives in a wild area upstream from the only human or demihuman settlements in the area; wouldn't it be tempted to poison the river or stream at a point below its lair (and water supply), forcing those pesky two-leggers to pull out for good? This would considerably reduce the threat of anyone stumbling onto its lair—and

hoard—by accident. In a totally wild region, it might do so at the first sign of colonization.

If the water in the local stream goes bad, the typical party of adventurers will probably regard it as a petty annoyance and move to another town. They would certainly consider an obvious sanitation problem beneath their dignity, unless they are doing so poorly at the adventuring game that they are literally starving. Even a land-owning player character might not take much notice at first, especially if the PC is a haughty lord. "The water in the stream's bad? Dig a deep well and stop bothering me, you filthy peasant!" (The sound of a mailed gauntlet connecting with a grimy chin can be heard at the end of the "conversation.") When even the wells go bad, however, he will have to take action.

Depending on what powers the dragon has, it may not be obvious that sabotage is taking place. After all, a mudslide into the river seems innocent enough, particularly after a heavy rain, and *corrupt water* in the wells leaves no clues. If the dragon

starts a physical mudslide, it might even avoid leaving any traces of its presence behind. Perhaps it can hover while starting the slide, leaving no tracks on the ground. If the river banks are heavily wooded, a green dragon at wyrm stage can *pass without trace* three times a day. All mature oriental dragons can turn *invisible* at will, and nonoriental dragons with the appropriate spell or magical item can do the same. Dragons with weather-control abilities are also prime candidates for this tactic.

Some of the gem dragons (the amethyst, sapphire, and topaz) have the psionic power telekinesis; perfect for hands-off manipulation of the environment. Juvenile or older sapphire dragons can cast *stone shape* three times a day, useful for starting avalanches, and emerald dragons of *venerable* age can do the same with *animate rock*. In addition, the sonic breath weapons of the emerald and sapphire dragons and the exploding breath weapon of the amethyst dragon could start rockslides or mudslides.

If the dragon can take human form, possibly with the aid of a magical item, he can stroll right into the town

square at night and dump manmade poisons in. Even if someone sees him fleeing the area, how many people will suspect a dragon as the culprit? If a dragon is known to live nearby, then the villagers may assume that the poisoner is an evil or *charmed* agent, not the dragon itself. If the villain is cornered in human form, the town guard might even try to arrest the suspect.

Eventually, somebody will go upstream to find out just what is going on. If the initial investigators include one or more NPCs, the PC lord will wait forever for them to come back and report. A squad of low-level men-at-arms may follow eventually, with the same result. Finally, with a reluctant sigh, the noble PC fighter temporarily shelves his plans for a punitive expedition into the Abyss and crankily heads upstream himself. ("If you want something done right, you've gotta do it yourself. Just can't get good help anymore.") *Surprise!* The climactic battle of the adventure may be fought now, though it is just as likely he will be taken by surprise, falling back to re-equip and regroup (and summon reinforcements) for the final conflict.

Assume the enemy is a black dragon, lairing in a dismal marsh or swamp. With its aquatic powers, the dragon can wage a guerrilla war against any party that dares invade its realm. This is true all the time, of course, but what makes things really sticky in this case is that the PCs won't even realize that they are up against a dragon until it is too late. Assuming the dragon has been using *corrupt water*, it must be at least of adult level, with bonus Hit Dice, greater size, and AC protection, a more potent breath weapon, and a greater radius of effect for its *fear* aura. Unlike the standard dragon hunt, your players won't even know they will be fighting a dragon until the very last minute. The advantage of surprise can weigh heavily in this case.

If the dragon can control other monsters, it can destroy or turn back weaker groups of adventurers while still maintaining its anonymity. The black dragon, for instance, can *summon insects* and *charm reptiles* as it gets older, and most oriental dragons have the *scaly command* power. If the dragon turns the local water supply into a stagnant pool, mosquitos and

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similar insects may swarm the area. Crocodiles will expand into any nearby swamp, so even their attacks won't necessarily tip off the players that this is anything but a natural disaster.

In the above example, the PC lord was lucky even to have his fortress built in the first place—building a castle could be much more complicated if a dragon opposes the project. Assume the king has just granted a PC fighter a large fiefdom on the frontier, a gloomy area with perpetually overcast skies to settle and guard. The newly-landed lord chooses to build his tower on a small hill with a commanding view of the surrounding area, contemptuously ignoring the superstitious tales that the hilltop is either cursed or sacred to some lightning god like Thor, who will punish any defilers with a bolt from the blue.

**What's Really Happening:** A blue dragon (or a dragon with the lightning bolt spell) frequently patrols the area for any signs that someone is planning to settle down. When an enterprising PC settler starts building on the hill (the only natural defensive position in the area), the dragon takes advantage of the perpetual cloud cover and breathes away, quite invisible. Lightning without thunder; how eerie! Attempts to transport materials are met with sandstorms: blue dragons gain *dust devil* and *control winds* powers as they get older. Cursing his "bad luck" with the weather, the PC settler gives up in disgust, particularly if he has a hard time convincing superstitious peasants to settle in the area.

Red dragons (or other fire-breathing monsters with the brains to think of this tactic) who are not adverse to burning down an entire forest to drive out or destroy a party might try the "careless camper" approach. When the party leaves its campsite to continue its travels, the dragon sets that part of the woods on fire. With any luck, the PCs may think the fire was their fault, because they didn't take enough care in putting out their campfire. If no animals witnessed the dragon's perfidy—and dragons are very good at eliminating witnesses—the local druids, unicorns, dryads, and other forest folk might well think the same thing.

A green dragon with the *burning hands* spell could pull this stunt as a form of revenge on its neighbors; framing the party would just be a bonus. Other fire-producing spells or

magical items could easily be substituted. If it has no magical spells or items, the dragon might dig up the old campfire site (assuming the party covered it with soil) in the hope of finding at least one still-glowing coal. And if the party really is lax in making sure its campfires are out, maybe the dragon will have someone to share the blame with.

## Weather & Wildlife

Some would argue that dragons are themselves a form of natural disaster, but elder dragons can conjure up weather that even a great druid would have trouble taming. Most oriental dragons have some degree of weather control, as does the silver dragon, while the bronze dragon can use *weather summoning* when it gets old enough. (Good dragons, of course, would only use these tactics against evil communities and parties.) The blue, brass, and silver dragons can *control winds* at a certain age, while the white dragon can use *gust of wind*. The white dragon's *freezing fog* can also seem natural, as does the *wall of fog* used by it and the silver, bronze, and sea dragons (the last being the oriental lung wang). The li lung (earth dragon) has the *earthquake* power, while both the Chiang lung and tun mi lung (river and typhoon dragons, respectively) can create a *tsunami*. Hit the PCs with bad weather, and they'll never know whether they're under attack or not.

Dragons can wreak havoc with the local wildlife. I've already mentioned the black dragon's powers over insects and reptiles. The *scaly command* ability of most oriental dragons can give a party endless grief. Since dragons naturally scare all wildlife out of an area, one lurking just out of sight of an adventuring band could frighten a large group of herd animals into stampeding in the party's direction—or over a farming community's fields. A big enough herd could stomp any but the most fantastically powerful parties flat, and peasants living a hand-to-mouth existence in the time-honored tradition might have to pull out or die after a single season of ruined crops. A dirty shame those animals just happened to choose that direction in which to stampede, isn't it?

Clever dragons can force predatory animals and lesser monsters to roam an area, even without commanding them. Anyone who takes a look at the statistics of AD&D game dragons soon

realizes that a dragon can move in anywhere it likes, forcing the previous inhabitants to flee or die. Predators and monsters wandering about in search of food and shelter are more of a threat than usual, and they will be blamed for their actions. If someone bothers to talk to a monster prisoner, using a *speak with animals* or *speak with monsters* spell, they may find out the truth behind the sudden influx of dangerous creatures, unless, of course, the local druid fell victim to an arranged "accident" beforehand.

What works on land works at sea as well. Suppose a sea dragon sees the party gradually working its way through the area in an underwater adventure. After waiting for them to enter an undersea cave (which can house anything from a sahuagan tribe to a mottled worm), the dragon can kill one or more big fish and deposit them outside the cave mouth, letting the fresh blood draw every shark for miles around. Note that the lung Wang's *scaly command* power works on fish as well as reptiles. When the party leaves the cavern, weakened and bloody after a hard fight, possibly with victorious foes in hot pursuit, they will blunder right into the middle of a feeding frenzy: the end of a perfect day.

Clever dragons may enter symbiotic relationships with other monsters or animals. For a real-life example, a small fish known as the clownfish is immune to the poison of sea anemones, and so lives among their deadly tentacles. When larger fish go after it, the anemone simultaneously defends its "boarder" and catches a meal for itself at the same time (the clownfish gets some of the anemone's scraps). It doesn't take too much imagination to come up with scenarios where lesser monsters live with the dragon as deliberate decoys to lure weak parties into an ambush, since both monsters benefit from the ensuing meal. Since dragons can eat virtually anything, perhaps his "agent" would get the parties' flesh, while the dragon contents itself with their gems, money, and magical items.

Imagine a black dragon or lung wang coming to such an arrangement with an evil nereid or a kelpie. These siren-style monsters can lure lone men into their clutches, perfectly fitting into the dragon's plan to pick off the party members one at a time. To provide the men with a further spur to action, both the dragon and its femi-

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nine aide could appear at the surface together, with the dragon clutching her with one claw as if dragging her away. This could well prompt even the most cautious characters to attempt a rescue. An evil and embittered merman or triton who was exiled from his tribe might do equally well, though the exile's own kind would be preferred prey over humans. And all this is in addition to the tactic of capturing a truly innocent victim and holding her hostage as bait for heroes.

Wilderness adventures have a tendency to devolve into simple survival scenarios, with none of the paranoia-inducement of their urban or dungeon counterparts. After the party has been hit by one or more dragons who fight primarily with "acts of nature," they will never feel secure in the howling wilderness again.

### Human Agents

All clever dragons will *charm*, bribe, or threaten human agents into their service. Even worse are the dragons that can assume human form.

The "human agent" threat usually takes the form of somebody spying on the neighborhood, letting the dragon know when dragonslayers are on its trail. Said agent may betray both outsiders and locals into the dragon's clutches. This works, but it doesn't even begin to cover the potential a dragon has for manipulating human society for its own ends.

First, consider an extension of the bribery business. Many nobles and would-be conquerors need financial backing, and a dragon with a massive treasure hoard certainly fits the bill nicely. In return for services rendered, the traitor does everything in his power to discourage exploration of any sort in the dragon's territory. "Don't waste our time and money roaming out there in the wilderness, young man. We've got plenty of problems to keep us occupied here in the shire." If more than one stretch of wilderness borders the civilized area, the noble could also actively push for exploration in some other direction, effectively steering all adventuring parties clear of the dragon's realm. If the dragon leaves everyone alone (perhaps it raids the people in a nearby area), the would-be adventurers may never overcome the local "inertia" sufficiently to mount an expedition in the right (or wrong) direction.

Suppose the dragon is at odds with a nearby tribe or kingdom of human-

oids; not all evil creatures work together in harmony, after all. Our bought nobleman could agitate for a campaign to "eliminate this threat to our borders," simultaneously removing a thorn from his patron's side. In fact, as the main goblin army marches out to confront the invaders, the dragon could attack the goblins' lair while they're gone and thoroughly plunder it. Of course, this means the invaders won't get much loot, but—after all—they were marching out primarily to eliminate a threat; doing a good job is a reward in itself. So, although the mercenaries may stand around scratching their heads, wondering how those puny little humanoid women and children could have dragged off and hidden the one-ton, jewel-encrusted gold statue of their chief deity before committing mass suicide ("They burned themselves *en masse* inside the cavern complex? How perfectly dreadful!"), no one in a position of authority is going to do anything about it.

Of course, since the mercenary life is so lucrative in fantasy games that the dragon itself could sell its services to the highest bidder. A canny dragon that secretly despises its neighbors could play off one side against the other, taking massive bribes from both sides. It could even show up too late, or not at all, at the final battle, letting the rivals exterminate each other, or at least weaken themselves so severely that neither can withstand the dragon's subsequent attacks. A dragon who does this had better be thorough in eliminating survivors, so that word does not get around.

Better yet, the dragon could use its considerable sabotage abilities to induce two mutually suspicious communities—dwarves and elves, for example—into war. One side would think the other was launching an insidious sabotage campaign, the other would think they were facing an unprovoked attack. Again, the dragon simply mops up any survivors and takes all their treasure.

Now imagine the fun a dragon in human form can have. Rather than merely relying on an agent's second-hand reports, the dragon can strike up an acquaintance with the members of the party himself and get to know all their strengths, weaknesses, and quirks of personality firsthand. It may also discover what magical items they have (or at least make some shrewd guesses). The dragon may even sell its

services to the party as a guide, leading them directly into one death trap after another. If the "guide" lets himself get separated from the party for even a minute, he can take dragon form in secret and fly off, leaving behind an agonized human scream that will make the PCs think their trusty guide has just become one more dragon victim that they must avenge. If the battle starts going against the dragon later, the "guide" might show up after a miraculous escape—and lead the party astray once more.

A spellcasting dragon can maintain his cover a little longer even if the party is suspicious and attacks him. After all, an old red dragon can cast spells like *fireball* and *lightning bolt* in human form, and thus can easily defend against the party's attack while posing as a wizard. If he has the appropriate wand as part of his treasure, he'll do even better. He might not be able to wield a wand made for humans in his talons, but he could easily use such a wand while in human form. If the bloody, bruised, and battered party survives the magical barrage, imagine their dismay as the spy turns into an ancient red dragon right before their eyes!

For that matter, a malicious (or merely mischievous) dragon could infiltrate society in human form, then terrify everyone by suddenly taking his natural shape again, just for the fun of it? Even a good dragon might feel like having a bit of fun now and then; how many DMs who create holidays for their specific worlds include a counterpart for April Fools' Day? An evil dragon would enjoy seeing people crushed to death in the panic resulting from the initial shock and the dragon's *fear* aura. Swarms of fleeing people and animals could trample the PCs as they try to get at the dragon, damaging them even before they engage it in combat.

For that matter, think of the great damage a dragon who can take human form can inflict against a city. It can slip in among crowds of visitors, change its form in an open square or market, and play Godzilla among the flimsy homes of the citizens after infiltrating past the fortifications. How many designers of fantasy fortresses take *that* contingency seriously? Since the troops and artillery are stationed on the walls looking out, they will be out of position to attack a threat within the walls. On the streets, the town guard mainly deals with low-level

criminals and rowdy adventurers—they certainly aren't ready to face a dragon. Many commoners in ancient and medieval times were totally unarmed, able to wield only a club, knife, or agricultural implement in an emergency: not something to take on a dragon with. When the dragon has helped itself to the choicest merchants' goods, it takes its leave by flying over the walls.

The "aliens among us" scenario is common in science fiction, but not as common in fantasy, doppelgangers and the like notwithstanding. The dragon in the marketplace is the ultimate "alien infiltrator" scenario, combining the plots of *Godzilla* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Have fun!

## Sample Adventures

### 1) The Naughty Nereid

The party is hired by a lakeside fishing village for a job of middling difficulty. It seems that several of the town's men have been disappearing when alone by the shore. A number of witnesses reported some time ago that a nereid haunts the shoreline, so it is a fair bet that she has enticed the men away, possibly to their doom. If the party is composed mostly of female adventurers, they shouldn't be anticipating too many problems.

What the party doesn't know is this: A black dragon recently moved into the area and proposed an alliance with the nereid. The nereid in question is of neutral alignment: selfish and vain, but not maliciously evil. She refused the dragon, who does not accept "No!" for an answer. Unfortunately, the cave mouth to her home is too small for the dragon to enter, and there are no dangerous aquatic reptiles in the area for it to send after her. Anxious about guarding its hoard, the dragon can't lie in wait outside her lair for her to emerge—the nereid has a good idea of what's going to happen the minute she steps outside, and she is staying put. Now the dragon is picking off stray men and pinning the blame for their disappearance on her.

When the PCs arrive at her underwater cave lair, they notice the skulls of the missing men, which the dragon thoughtfully arranged around the cave mouth in a decorative design. Since not even evil nereids commonly display trophies, this might make the PCs suspicious. Further cause for suspicion might come from the fact

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that the entrance to her otherwise pristine lair is melted and scarred as if from acid (the dragon tried to kill the nereid with his breath weapon, but his acid didn't reach nearly far enough). The party must ask some clever questions to figure out what's going on, and the courage to act on what they uncover. After all, who would you rather take on, a lone nereid (assuming you can avoid her charm), or a clever black dragon? I thought so.

## 2) The Cranky Kobolds

A large underground colony of kobolds is both a nuisance and a security threat to a neighboring blue dragon (and his treasure), so he has taken steps to eliminate them. The colony is dug in near a river running through mountainous terrain, and the dragon has used his strength and breath weapon to create rockslides that dam up the river, diverting its flow to flood the kobolds' burrows. Banished from their own homes, the kobolds are now pushing into human-controlled territory, looking for a new home and coming into conflict with the locals. The PCs are part of an expedition sent

against the kobolds, and must fight at least one battle with the creatures. If the PCs take any prisoners, interrogation reveals the true cause of the invasion and eventually leads the party to a confrontation with the dragon, who is quite adept at hit-and-run attacks. Any treasure the kobolds salvaged was stolen by the dragon, who "just happened along" as the humanoids were fleeing from the apparently unrelated flood.

## 3) Evil Is Its Own Reward

A group of players believes that a party of evil PCs is a viable gaming group (they may even have written to "The Forum" about it), and have created one. This particular group takes advantage of the *Oriental Adventures* game setting and is out to pillage their way to fame and profit. In particular, they have heard that a nearby valley is the site of a wealthy landowner, and so they begin traveling to the mountains, plundering as they go. As word of their impending arrival spreads, the locals flee into the hills, taking their treasure with them.

Frustrated and angry, the PCs leap at the opportunity offered when a

ragged peasant shows up, offering to betray his fellows for a share of the loot. The group agrees, secretly planning to kill him later on. Their "guide" leads them right into an ambush, and as the characters turn on the treacherous fellow, before their eyes he transforms into a pan lung (coiled dragon). The ambushers are the dragon's *charmed* servants and minions; whether any ambushers are local peasants depends on how well-armed the locals are. In any case, the coiled dragon's own servants are sufficiently well-equipped to provide a stiff fight. With the dragon itself launching a simultaneous surprise attack from the rear, the party may not even live long enough to see the error of its ways.

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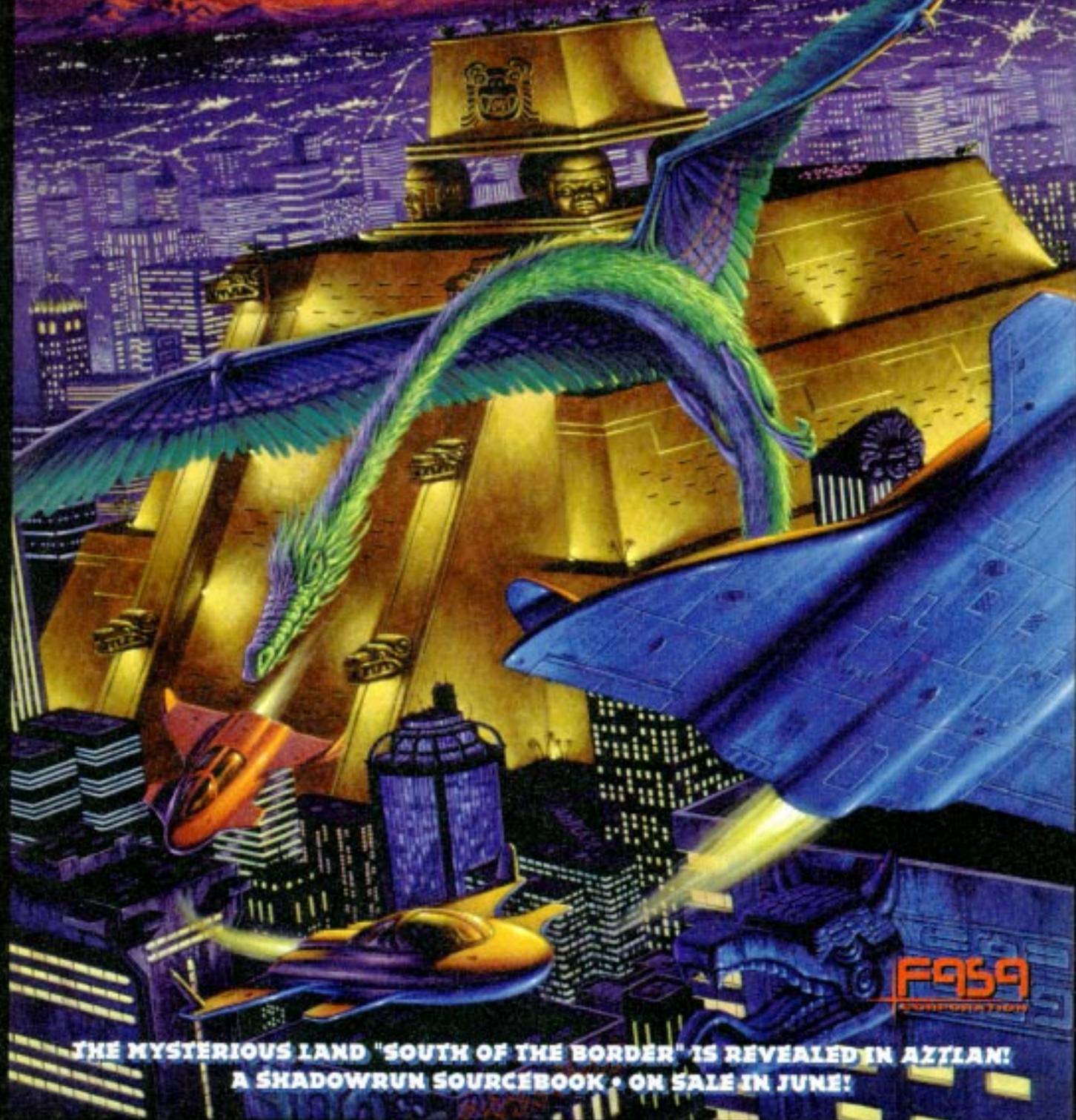
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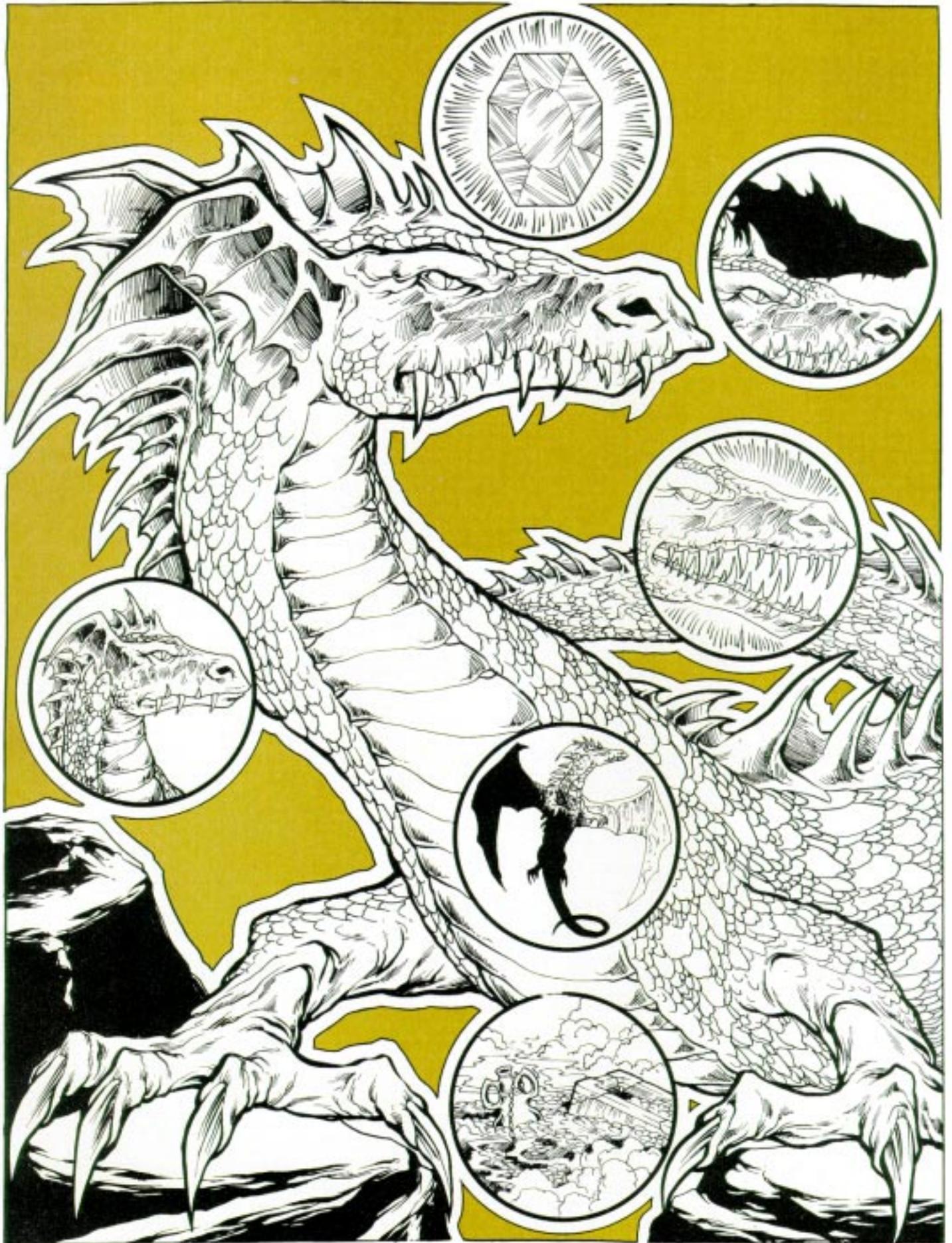
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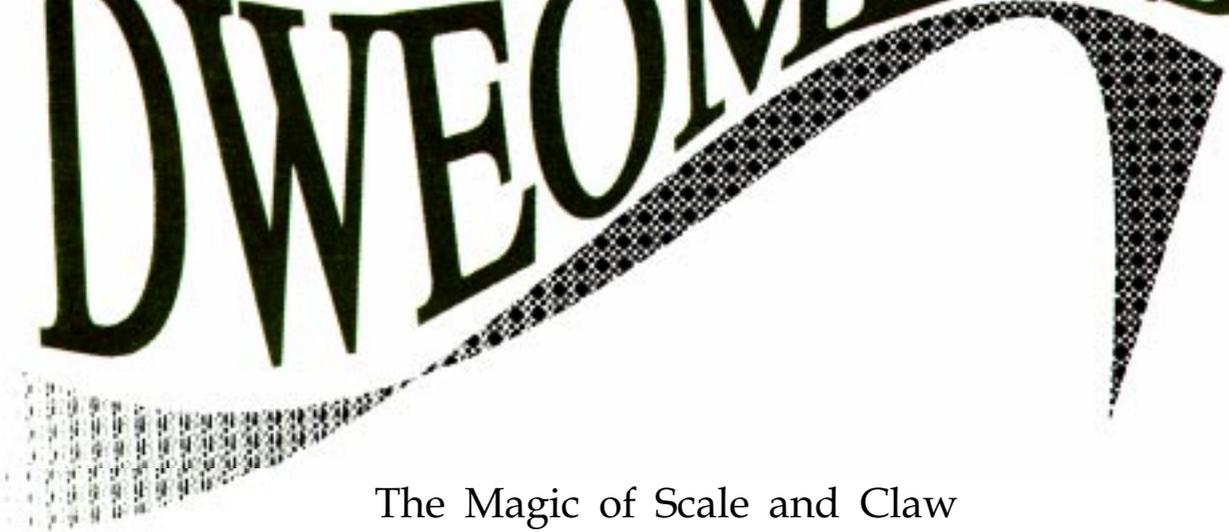
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# DRAGON

## DWEOMERS



### The Magic of Scale and Claw

by Robert S. Mullin

Artwork by Scott Rosema

In the past, DRAGON® Magazine has featured several articles that discussed the subject of dragon magic (see "Closing Words" for a list). FOR1 *The Draconomicon* expanded on the basics of dragon magic by introducing a handful of new and unique wizard spells devised by dragons and for dragons.

This article describes original wizard spells to use in conjunction with those detailed in *The Draconomicon*. Like the spells in that work, the wizard spells that follow are assumed to have been created by and for dragons. A few comments on the nature and theory of dragon magic are also included, since some aspects of these draconic spells (for instance, the heavy reliance on verbal components) indicate that some of the basic principles of dragon magic differ

from the magic of humans and demihuman spellcasters.

**Aerial acceleration** (Alteration)  
Level: 2                      Components: V  
Range: Touch                CT: 2  
Dur.: 1 turn + 1/lvl      Save: None  
Area of Effect: One creature

This spell reduces air friction, increasing a dragon's flying Movement Rate by 50%. Thus, a dragon with a Movement Rate of 24 can fly at 36 for the spell's duration. While flying at this increased speed, however, the dragon's Maneuverability Class drops one step, and special aerial maneuvers (e.g., snatch) are impossible. However, the dragon is not required to move at

the increased rate, and may slow to a familiar speed to overcome the spell's drawbacks.

Although developed by dragons, *aerial acceleration* affects any single flying creature touched by the casting dragon (either natural or empowered by magic). However, since dragons eat or scare off most visitors, this spell is usually reserved for the dragon.

At the DM's discretion, dragons who employ this spell regularly could be considered expert flyers, even at the increased rate, and thus may retain their normal Maneuverability Class and special aerial tactics. This should be the exception, however, and not the rule.

*Aerial acceleration* cannot be cancelled by the caster's (or recipient's)

wishes, but a successful *dispel magic*, or a more powerful spell, can force it to end prematurely.

Dragons typically use this spell before an aerial battle to increase their odds of catching opponents by surprise or, if things go awry, as a way to outdistance pursuers. Of course, inventive dragons may find other uses for the spell.

Nondragon spellcasters may have converted *aerial acceleration* to a nondragon format, and versions unrelated to dragon magic have been devised independently by several wizards. These spells are of higher level, for the draconic version of *aerial acceleration* depends heavily on a dragon's innate ability to visualize flight patterns and air currents.

#### **Aura of terror** (Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 2                      Components: V  
Range: 0                      CT: 2  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl              Save: Special  
Area of Effect: Caster

By using this spell, a dragon enhances its ability to strike terror in creatures subject to its *fear* aura. See the "Dragon, General" entry of the *Monstrous Manual*<sup>TM</sup> for an overview of the details of dragon fear.

When the spell is cast, the dragon weaves an illusion that enhances its image of rage and battle experience: multiple battle scars, altered or disfigured features, longer spine-spikes, fangs, and talons, and so on. All this makes the dragon seem even more menacing than usual. The illusion cannot change the dragon's size or species, but the spell does make the dragon seem older.

Once the spell is cast, the dragon gains two age categories for purposes of determining the range, saving throw, and effect of its *fear* aura. Young and juvenile dragons gain a fear aura that they would normally not be entitled to; older dragons gain a more powerful aura. Because of the shift in effective age category, saving throws against the *fear* aura of dragons of "young adult" age and older suffer a -2 penalty. Thus, the usually unmodified saving throw for a dragon of old age becomes a saving throw with a -2 penalty, a wyrm dragon's aura inflicts a -5 penalty, and so forth.

Furthermore, the enhanced power of the aura allows the dragon to strike panic into creatures of up to 2 Hit Dice and fear into creatures that would normally be unaffected (i.e.,

those with up to two more levels or Hit Dice than the dragon).

The dragon need not concentrate to maintain an *aura of terror*, and the caster may engage in other actions as desired (e.g., combat, using its breath weapon, or casting additional spells). The dragon can end the spell at will.

Creatures attempting to disbelieve the illusion gain a saving throw vs. spells to negate the *aura of terror*. Even if this is successful, however, normal saving throws against the dragon's regular *fear* aura still apply. *Detect magic* can indicate the presence of an *aura of terror*, and a successful *dispel magic* can remove it.

This spell is popular among younger, weaker dragons, though dragons of all ages and types have been known to use it. While nondragon versions of this spell have yet to surface, other spellcasting creatures who produce a *fear* aura (e.g., liches) have shown interest in the *aura of terror* spell.

#### **Blast jewel** (Evocation, Alteration)

Level: 3                      Components: V,M  
Range: Touch              CT: 1 round  
Dur.: Special              Save: Special  
Area of Effect: Special

By means of this spell, a dragon traces an *invisible* glyph on a prized gemstone worth at least 500 gp. The gemstone used as the material component must be an individual, loose stone; it cannot be set into a piece of jewelry or embedded into a weapon. The symbol can only be seen by the dragon who traced it, though a *detect magic* will indicate a faint magical aura on the affected stone, and *detect invisibility*, *true seeing*, or similar magic will reveal the sigil to the viewer. A successful *dispel magic* negates the rune before its effects can be activated, without harming the jewel itself. Otherwise, the spell remains dormant until the casting dragon decides to activate it.

At the mental command of the dragon, the affected gemstone will explode with great force, showering a 20' radius spherical area with a hail of shrapnel. All creatures within the area suffer 5d4 hp damage, half that if a saving throw vs. breath weapon succeeds. If the jewel is held or carried by a creature when the explosion occurs, no saving throw is allowed. However, if the stone was carried within a chest, metal box, or a similar rigid and sturdy container, the explosion is contained, and no damage is

inflicted on any creature, though objects inside the container (and the container itself) must save vs. crushing blow or be destroyed. If the *blast jewel* was inside a *bag of holding*, *portable hole*, or similar magical item when the explosion took place, the container is automatically destroyed (but further damage is prevented), and all other items within it are ejected into the Astral plane, if not destroyed themselves. The explosion is not fire-related, but its magical force is sufficient to shred pouches, sacks, backpacks, saddlebags, and so forth, even if such items are made of leather or other durable fabric.

The dragon can trigger the explosion from any distance, even if thousands of miles separate the dragon and the gem. If the jewel and the dragon are separated by a planar boundary, or the dragon is slain, however, the spell is immediately canceled, and the dragon cannot command the gem to explode.

The material component is the jewel itself, which is completely destroyed in the explosion. Any remaining shards or fragments are consumed by the magic within one round following the explosion; nothing but dust remains.

Dragons use this spell as the proverbial "last laugh" against thieves. When the dragon notices that one of its *blast jewels* is missing, it simply activates the magic, thus destroying the gem and sending a message to the creature that had the audacity to take it.

The exact origins of this spell are unknown, for most believe that all spellcasting races employ versions of this spell. In fact, many variants of this spell exist among dragonkind alone.

#### **Focus fear** (Alteration) Reversible

Level: 4                      Components: V  
Range: 0                      CT: 4  
Dur.: 1 rnd/lvl              Save: Special  
Area of Effect: Special

Similar in function to the *aura of terror* spell (q.v.), *focus fear* increases the potency of the dragon's *panic* and *fear* auras. It is useful for all dragons of adult age or older, and it can be used in conjunction with an *aura of terror*.

By means of this spell, the dragon reduces the radius of its *fear* aura, which in turn, focuses the power of that fear. For every 5 yards the dragon reduces its aura, the saving throw modifier against the dragon fear gains an additional -1. However, a dragon

cannot reduce its *fear* aura to a radius of less than 15 yards in any case. An adult dragon, with a normal fear radius of 20 yards and a saving throw modifier of +2, can reduce its fear radius to 15 yards and change the modifier to +1. Likewise, a great wyrm could condense its fear radius to 15 yards from 50 yards, changing its usual -4 save modifier to -1!

The reverse of this spell, *extend fear*, allows the dragon to enlarge its fear radius to a maximum of 50 yards. An *extended* aura weakens when made larger, with saving throw modifiers changing in an opposite manner as that of *focus fear*. The reverse can be used by young adult dragons (if they possess the required spellcasting ability), but is useless to a great wyrm.

Both versions of this spell allow the dragon such fine control of the fear radius that it can alter the dimensions of its fear radius on a round-by-round basis. Of course, the aura can only be altered within the parameters of the version employed (i.e., any radius between the dragon's normal radius and the limits of the appropriate version of the spell). To change the radius while the spell is in effect, the dragon

must stop what it is doing and concentrate; it may not engage in other activities in that round. Otherwise, the dragon is free to cast spells, fight, fly, use its breath weapon, and so on, as the spell requires no concentration to be maintained. The dragon may cancel the spell at any time.

A *dispel magic* has no effect on either version of this spell, though spells such as *wish*, *limited wish*, and the like can end the *dweomer* immediately.

Both versions of this spell are fairly common among dragons capable of casting a spell of this level.

**Hoardguard** (Evocation, Abjuration)

Level: 4 Components: V  
Range: 0 CT: 1 round  
Dur.: 1 hour/1vl Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

By means of this spell, a dragon can protect its hoard in such a way as to make theft virtually impossible.

When the spell is cast, the dragon's breath weapon temporarily changes. Instead of the usual fire, lightning, acid, and so on, the breath weapon becomes pure magical energy, which must be released by the dragon within

1 round following the spell's casting, or the magic is wasted. The dragon breathes this energy (which conforms to the dimensions of the dragon's usual breath weapon) over its hoard, attempting to encompass as much of the hoard as possible within the area of effect.

This energy bonds whatever parts of the hoard it touches into a solid mass. The spell does not harm the hoard in any way, nor does it alter its appearance or position; the items within the hoard remain loose and separate. Instead, the *hoardguard* magic fills in the spaces between the individual coins, gems, weapons, chests, ingots, and so forth, and holds them together as a solid mound of wealth. This invisible bond prevents the hoard from being sorted, separated for transport, scattered, or otherwise moved or manipulated as separate items. Because it has essentially become one single mass, lifting the hoard as a whole is impossible by any single creature, except through powerful magic.

*Dispel magic* has no effect on a hoard protected by the spell, and an *anti-magic shell* frees only as much

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treasure as fits within its area of effect. (If freed treasure is not removed from the hoard, the *hoardguard* magic reasserts itself as soon as the *shell* expires or moves away.) A *limited wish* negates a *hoardguard* for one hour (and if the treasure is not separated in that time, the *hoardguard* will return as above), though a full *wish* destroys the spell permanently.

In addition, a hoard so protected cannot be harmed by physical or magical attacks without first removing the *hoardguard*. Therefore, it is impossible for intruders to break off pieces or sections of the hoard and carry them away.

Treasure added to a hoard already protected by this spell does not gain the spell's benefits. New treasure requires a *hoardguard* of its own, though the dragon may include the new treasure after the first *hoardguard*'s duration expires and a new *hoardguard* is cast.

This spell only affects the dragon's hoard. It does not function against creatures or the items they possess, unless the dragon acquires the items and adds them to its hoard.

This spell typically protects the dragon's treasure while it is out hunting for food or seeking treasure. Some dragons arrange their hoards so that the entire amount can be warded with a single *hoardguard* spell. Others make several smaller piles, to use up an invader's magical powers in repeatedly negating the spell, and thus minimizing the overall treasure loss.

Many dragons cannot use this spell due to its level, but all dragons who know of it seek magical items that can duplicate its effects.

Nondragons who somehow cast *hoardguard* (or a derivative thereof) instantly contract a form of insanity that combines paranoia with intense greed, for which there is no known cure, short of exceptionally powerful magic.

**Pseudodragon** (Conj./Summoning)  
Level: 3 Components: V  
Range: 30 yards CT: 3  
Dur.: 2 rnds + 1/lvl Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

This spell is a draconic version of the various *monster summoning* spells, but rather than calling random monsters to aid the dragon, the spell summons 2-8 pseudodragons within 1-4 rounds.

The summoned pseudodragons dif-

fer slightly from those usually encountered. Instead of resembling miniature red dragons, the summoned pseudodragons are tiny replicas of the summoner; that is, a green dragon conjures green pseudodragons, a blue dragon summons blue ones, and so forth. In addition, the pseudodragons share the alignment of the dragon who cast the spell. Regardless of alignment, however, the pseudodragons serve their summoner with complete loyalty (even evil pseudodragons cannot be forced to serve another creature, nor can they have their loyalty swayed by bribes or promises). Otherwise, these pseudodragons conform to the abilities and characteristics noted in the *Monstrous Manual*.

Once the pseudodragons arrive, they fight on the summoner's behalf until they are slain, until the dragon commands them to stop fighting, or until the spell's duration expires. If all opponents are slain, the summoner must grant the pseudodragons a portion of the kill.

If no opponents are available, the dragon can assign the pseudodragons other tasks (assuming communication is possible, and they are physically capable of performing such tasks). In return, the dragon must give each pseudodragon a gemstone (before aid is rendered) worth at least 50 gp. If no gems are forthcoming, the summoned dragons immediately return from whence they came. Similarly, the dragon must give each surviving pseudodragon a 50-gp gemstone after a battle with the dragon's enemies. (If a dragon makes a habit of killing or refusing to pay the pseudodragons, the pseudodragons summoned by subsequent castings may refuse to assist or may simply refuse to answer the summons.)

*Dispel magic* has no effect on the pseudodragons called by this spell, but *protection from evil* functions normally against the summoned creatures.

Because all known specimens of pseudodragons look like miniature red dragons and are of neutral (good) alignment, most sages familiar with this spell believe that it either summons pseudodragons of variant colors and alignments from an as-yet-undiscovered draconic world, or the spell temporarily alters the nature of normal pseudodragons before transporting them to the summoner. Some sages even think that the spell simply creates the pseudodragons to ensure that they conform to the color and alignment of the casting dragon. Of

these theories, the first seems the most probable.

### **Razorfangs** (Alteration)

Level: 5 Components: V  
Range: 0 CT: 5  
Dur.: 1 rnd/lvl Save: Special  
Area of Effect: Special

This spell is a highly improved version of the *sharptooth* spell (see below), for both use the same principles of operation. This version, of course, is a great deal more dangerous than its lesser cousin.

When a *razorfangs* spell is cast, the dragon's teeth become exceptionally hard, strong, and sharp. Due to this alteration, any successful bite attack inflicts +2 hp damage/age category to each damage roll. Furthermore, on an unmodified roll of 19 or 20, the bite severs an opponent's limb (or other extremity, as appropriate), just as if the victim had been struck with a magical weapon of *sharpness*. If the victim fails a saving throw vs. death magic, his head is severed as if by a *vorpal blade*.

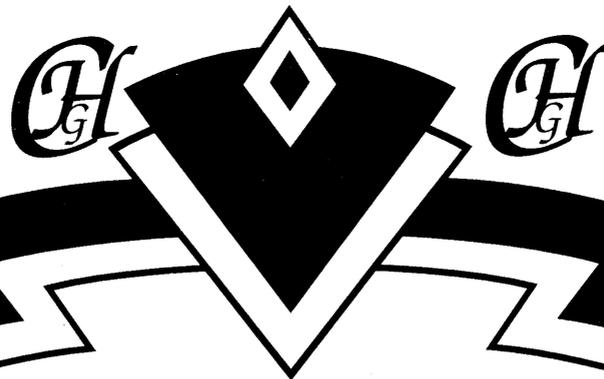
As with the *sharptooth* spell, *razorfangs* is useless to nondragons.

### **Shadow Scry** (Divination)

Level: 1 Components: V  
Range: Special CT: 1  
Dur.: 10 rnd. + 1/lvl Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

By casting this spell, a dragon can use a shadow within its lair as a form of scrying device. The chosen shadow must be in the dragon's line of sight, no more than 10 yards distant.

Once the spell is cast, the dragon may "contact" other shadows within its lair (only shadows outside the lair cannot be reached). DMs must use common sense when designating the extent of the dragon's lair. For example, a dragon may claim an entire forest as its territory (and may well control such a large amount of terrain), but its lair should be regarded as the area where the dragon sleeps, keeps its treasure, and generally feels most comfortable and powerful. Using this spell, the dragon can see out of the contacted shadows as if the dragon were actually standing within the contacted shadow, regardless of the size or shape of the shadow, or the boundaries of the dragon's lair. The dragon can see everything within sight of the contacted shadow, including the passage of *invisible* creatures—



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all of the dragon's normal visual capabilities function normally through the *shadow scry* spell.

As long as the spell remains in effect, the dragon can switch shadows to inspect different areas, or view the same area from separate shadows to gain a different vantage point. However, only one shadow can be contacted at a time. Switching from one shadow to another occurs instantaneously at the mental command of the casting dragon (switching shadows refers to the contacted shadow, not the shadow used as the *shadow scry* catalyst). While complete concentration is not required to maintain this spell, a small amount of attention is needed. If the dragon casts another spell, moves more than 10 yards away from the *scry* shadow, or no longer wishes to use the spell, the spell immediately ends.

Like normal scrying magic, *shadow scry* is revealed by a *detect scrying* spell. The contacted shadow radiates a faint dweomer, and, once detected, spells such as *dispel magic* or *screen* can be used against it (the former spell negates the *shadow scry* if cast successfully). Detection and location obscuring magic impedes the spell's effectiveness just as it impedes all other Divination magic. Eliminating shadows with bright light or utter darkness prevents the spell from working in the illuminated or darkened area, but the dragon caster could still view these area from a shadow just outside such effects. The spell does not allow the dragon to cast other spells through the link between shadows; it allows vision only.

*Shadow scry* was created by a shadow dragon that wanted to search its lair for intruders without risking a physical search. Other dragons have come to enjoy this spell as well, for its uses in spying on parties of adventurers.

If a nondragon version of this spell exists, it has yet to surface, though such a spell would probably have slightly different characteristics (since many spell-using creatures don't have lairs). However, *shadow scry* uses the same principles common to other types of scrying magic, and in theory it could be mastered by a nondragon caster.

### **Shadow Dragon** (Alteration)

Level: 5                      Components: V  
Range: 0                      CT: 1 round  
Dur.: 1 turn/lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

Used almost exclusively by shadow dragons, this spell allows a dragon to transform itself into pure "shadow matter." While so transformed, the dragon retains all of its powers and abilities, including spell-use, breath weapon, and so forth. In dim, shadowy areas, a *shadow dragon* can hide in shadows with a 90% chance of success, and the dragon is totally invisible in utter darkness (either magical or natural).

Once in this form (and during the one full round it takes for the dragon to transform), the dragon is impervious to most attacks, though it is not entirely invulnerable. Attacks that can harm a *shadow dragon* include:

Light-based spells inflict 1d6 hp damage per spell level for each round a *shadow dragon* remains in their area of effect. Thus, a *light* or a *faerie fire* spell inflicts 1d6 hp damage per round of exposure, a *continual light* inflicts 3d6, and the light of a *prismatic sphere* inflicts 9d6 hp damage each round a *shadow dragon* remains within its radiance. All other spells will not harm a *shadow dragon* unless specifically designed to effect shadows or creatures composed of shadow, or dragonkind in general. (While a *fireball* and other fire-based spells do shed some light as a byproduct of the heat they produce, they are not considered light-based for purposes of this spell.)

Normal weapons do not harm a *shadow dragon* unless augmented with a light-based spell, in which case damage is inflicted as above, according to the spell used (the weapon itself inflicts no damage, nor do bonuses from magic or high Strength scores). An augmented weapon implies the use of a *light*, *continual light*, or similar spell that has been placed directly on the weapon.

Magical weapons inflict damage equal to their magical bonus. If augmented with a light-based spell, the light damage and the magical damage are combined. Strength bonuses and normal weapon damage are still excluded. Magical weapons that normally shed light inflict damage as an augmented weapon, as described above.

Full sunlight, either magical or natural, immediately negates the spell and forces the dragon back into its true form. The change occurs in a single round, during which time the dragon is helpless and can do nothing other than suffer through the forced transformation. Opponents gain a free

round of attacks. While the transformation takes place, the light-based attacks noted above have no effect, but other attack forms may be used normally.

As mentioned earlier, this spell is used almost exclusively by shadow dragons, and if used in conjunction with the *create shadows* spell-like ability available to powerful shadow dragons, the combination can be quite effective, and no doubt, lethal when used against opponents.

Some sages believe that shadow dragons came into being due to the extended use of this spell by other dragon types. This theory is not widely accepted. However, some scholars speculate that if this spell is cast by a nondragon, the caster might very well be transformed into a variant type of shadow permanently.

### **Sharptooth** (Alteration)

Level: 1                      Components: V  
Range: 0                      CT: 1  
Dur.: 1 rnd/lvl              Save: None  
Area of Effect: Special

This simple spell is a favorite among dragons who enjoy sinking their teeth into combat. The spell alters the dragon's fangs, making them harder and sharper. In melee, this adds +1/age category to each damage roll on any successful bite attack, for as long as the spell lasts.

Dragons also employ *sharptooth* when gnawing apart a tasty but tough meal, such as orcs, armored dwarves, or knights in plate armor. Other spell-users have not sought to learn the spell simply because most spellcasters lack dragons' teeth.

### **Closing Words**

DMs interested in reading more about dragon magic should refer to FOR1 *The Draconomicon* and the DRAGON Magazine articles, "Dragon Magic" (issue #15), "Dragons and Their Deities" (issue #86), "The Cult of the Dragon" (issue #110), "Give Dragons a Fighting Chance" (issue #134), and "Serpents & Sorcery" (also in issue #134). Several general articles about magic could apply to dragon magic, but those listed here are the best examples (in this author's opinion) regarding the subject. Perhaps these references will inspire creative DMs to devise a few of their own dragon dweomers.

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Multiple Plotlines in Role-Playing Campaigns

by Thomas Kane

Artwork by Wayne Mondak

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In a classical Chinese mystery story, at least two or three plots unfold at once. As the story goes on, the hero continues to investigate new crimes, and although occasionally two incidents prove to be the work of the same villain, others have no connection at all, forcing the detective to pursue first one case and then another. The authors of these mysteries reasoned that no real-life detective had the luxury of dealing with only one criminal at a time. This technique of telling several stories at once is a perfect model for a role-playing campaign.

Like a Chinese mystery, a fantasy world that develops more than one story at a time offers numerous advantages. First, multiple plotlines add to the scope and realism of the campaign world, helping PCs see their place in a complete world, a world that does not exist merely for them to adventure in it. Second, multiple plotlines add exciting variety to a game. Finally and most importantly, multiple plotlines expand the players' chances to participate in the drama of the game.

But first, a definition. In a multi-plot game, the PCs may always choose between several challenges that potentially lead to adventures. Usually, this means that the party meets a number of villains and adventure patrons, each of them with their own plans and lives. The stories of these characters may collide, friendships and rivalries may develop between both PCs and NPCs, but no single theme dominates the whole campaign. As the PCs grow stronger, they may become as important to the story as the prominent NPCs. In time, the PCs may sponsor younger adventurers themselves.

When I mention NPCs, I mean any character able to affect the campaign's plot. This includes kings, party henchmen, innkeepers and people the party meets during adventures. It also includes monsters, and, in some games, deities. It does not include cannon fodder, window-dressing NPCs, or the innocent bystanders who may be dragged into the PCs' schemes, since these characters rarely, if ever, alter the course of the story.

## Making Choices

Excluding Chinese detective stories, of course, most fiction follows a single plot. The characters face a central challenge, and—though it may take them an entire novel to reach a conclusion—most major plot elements lead to the final scene when the characters confront this problem. DMs and game designers often intend campaigns to work the same way. This is not a mistake. A game needs direction, and players need to know who their enemy is. However, the DM should not fall into the trap of planning a game's plot in advance or thinking that one challenge will last for the entire campaign.

Players are simply not patient about waiting for a plot to unfold. A large part of gaming lies in planning ways to overcome

obstacles. Therefore, when players find a challenge, they begin devising schemes to overcome it. If the opposition is clearly too strong for them, they quite sensibly attempt to retreat, avoiding the situation altogether. Nobody can deny that these are the most intelligent responses to a dangerous situation. However, when a DM has not planned for these responses, he may feel that the PCs are "short-circuiting" the adventure.

Some DMs respond by disrupting the PC's plans, so that it takes the party adventure after adventure after adventure to overcome their opposition. This strategy works, but most players find it very frustrating, because it denies them the chance to make decisions and get results. Games are far more satisfying for everybody when the DM allows PCs to accomplish their goals relatively quickly and then proceed to new ones.

## Plot Problems

Multi-plot scenarios have hazards. When the DM introduces too many plots too quickly, the party can become confused, and confusion kills a game. PCs must always have a goal and know what it is. Without such a goal, players have nothing to plan, and therefore characters have nothing to do. (All gamers must remember adventures where the party was deep in a dungeon or enemy king's castle when someone looked at the DM and asked, "What was our quest supposed to be anyway?")

To keep multiple plots from being confusing, the DM should allow the party to concentrate on one story thread at a time. Whether the game is multi-plot or single-plot, adventures should begin with someone, be it a PC or NPC, choosing some project for the PCs to attempt. As long as the party wishes to continue this effort, the DM should introduce other plotlines only when they affect the main story. However, when PCs talk with their NPC acquaintances, they may hear news of things that may not seem important at the moment, but that could blossom into future adventures. Furthermore, PCs should always have the option to switch their focus from one plot to another.

In an ideal game, individual adventures follow a single-plot format, while the overall campaign follows many storylines. This way, players usually know what they are doing in a particular game session, but their characters are not trapped in a series of quests programmed by the DM. PCs always have the option of shifting their focus, changing the type of adventures they undertake and the type of problems they solve.

During a multi-plot campaign, PCs can always choose what adventures they will attempt. Naturally, not all their choices will be equally attractive. For example, if one of the DM's plot lines involves an invasion of orcs about to overrun the PCs' homeland, the party will almost certainly choose to address this threat. If they do

not, they must face the consequences of that choice. However, the mark of a multi-plot game is that in such a situation, the players and their characters will have a range of possible decisions and options. Depending on their style, the PCs might:

- attempt to rally an army against the invaders.
- personally raid the orc camp.
- pack their belongings and flee the area.
- ally themselves with the orcs.

Again, some of these choices might produce better results than others, but in a multi-plot game, the DM should not punish any of them simply for being contrary to the adventure. The choices are all valid developments in the story.

Multiple plotlines keep the campaign lively by offering changes in mood and pace. They also give the PCs interesting choices about what sort of adventure to pursue. A party of thieves, for instance, may choose to pursue city intrigues where they feel most at home, while warriors preferring open battle might seek out bandits in the countryside. Sophisticated role-players, of course, may base these decisions on far more subtle reasons, relating to the campaign background, the characters' personalities and the characters' relationship to other people in the game. In all cases, multiple plots let players pick adventures that appeal to them and also lets them develop character personalities by deciding what sort of activity their PCs would prefer.

## Campaign Design

Designing a multi-plot campaign could require an enormous amount of work, if the DM took the time to prepare each and every storyline as if it were the whole campaign. However, a DM need not expend this much effort. Why prepare material unless the PCs will encounter it in play? Even in a multi-plot game, the PCs can still pursue just one adventure at a time.

Dungeon masters in a multi-plot game need two things. First, they require full details on the opposition that the PCs must tackle on any particular game night. He must prepare the game statistics of enemies, maps for important areas, role-playing notes for major NPCs, and the NPCs' courses of action. Second, the DM must have a feeling for the setting. This includes knowing the game-world's culture and environment, details of everyday life, and sensory details of what characters see and smell and think. It also includes sketching out the plots of the multi-plot game are. When the PCs act, the DM must be ready to describe how NPCs respond, and when the PCs meet NPCs, the DM must know what stories the party has stumbled across.

In fact, a multi-plot game requires less preparation than a more linear campaign because it shifts many story decisions to the PCs. This lifts a great burden from the

DM's shoulders because the DM no longer needs to script the entire game. The players choose turning points in the storyline, and they often choose the adventure objectives as well. This is not to say that the DM must relinquish all control. NPCs can have just as much influence over the action as the PCs do, and outside events like wars and natural disasters may completely change the course of the campaign. However, the DM need not plan all these events in an artificial way. When he understands his NPCs and their motivations, he can choose their actions spontaneously, in the same way players role-play their characters.

The DM still needs to plan. When PCs actually fight NPCs, the DM should write down the enemy's capabilities in advance. This increases the PCs' sense of accomplishment, and it can save the DM a lot of time and headaches during play—no more split-second decisions about how the genius-intelligence lich reacts when confronted by hostile PCs. As long as the DM has a general idea of what forces NPCs can muster, he need only plan out the PCs' opposition for a particular evening. When the players decide to switch opponents, it will almost always take them at least one game session to extricate themselves from their previous operations and make plans for their new adventure goal. A smart DM will use the time between game sessions to prepare the details of the new adventure.

## Steps To Establish Multiple Plots

The following system works well for designing a multi-plot game. First, generate the setting where the game will take place and the major events that will dominate the storyline. When using a published campaign world, choose a region of the map to play in; in a home-brewed campaign, develop an idea of the local climate and culture. Second, pick the NPCs likely to become major villains and adventure patrons. Decide what the NPC's goals are, what general resources they command, and what they want from the PCs.

Give all the NPCs backgrounds and motivations of their own; this is where the multiple plotlines appear. Each faction has its own ideas about how the adventurers fit into its plans—or how they must be eliminated for its plans to succeed. Some NPCs may be openly hostile. At least one NPC should have a reason to send the PCs on adventures so that an unmotivated party has something concrete to do while it forms its own plans. The other NPCs may begin as neutral figures with their own ambitions. If the party interferes with their plans, they become enemies, but if the adventurers assist them, the neutral groups may become allies or patrons.

NPCs do not exist in a vacuum. All of them should have relationships with the others. The NPCs may be allies, rivals, friends, relatives, lovers, former lovers, bitter enemies, or wary neutrals. These

relationships, of course, affect the party. If the party's patron has an enemy, the adventurers probably share that enemy as well, even if they have no other reason to quarrel with that foe. As the campaign develops, the party will become aware of these relationships and the reasons behind them. Eventually, the PCs must decide how they fit into the game's many stories. Adventurers may cling fast to their original loyalties, or they may break old connections, ally themselves with former enemies and try to re-shape their role in the world. This is where serious role-playing begins.

Finally, pick one or two NPCs to start the PCs on their first adventure. Lavish attention on this opening game, which introduces the PCs to the world and allow PCs to determine where they fit in. The first adventures also help the DM decide which parts of the campaign to develop, as the players express their preferences. Adventurers will cleave to some NPCs and develop rivalries with others, grow fascinated with some mysteries and bypass others. The DM can then develop the parts that generated the most interest, saving other plots for the future.

Naturally, DMs should not reveal all their secrets at once. If players wish to understand the world the DM has created, they must look for information. They may gain a great deal of information simply by talking with the right NPCs; other secrets may require entire adventures to uncover. Uncovering this information makes for exciting play. As the party gathers it, the PCs grow more able to make informed decisions about their future.

## A Sample Campaign

As an example of how a multi-plot game develops, consider the following campaign.

The DM wants to develop a campaign around Blackbriarton, a castle village set in a fertile river valley in his campaign world. He envisions the village as a town of relatively prosperous peasants and free farmers, used to living under the feudal rule of the House McAllister. Blackbriarton lies on the edge of the Trollfell Wastes, and raiders from those wild hills present a far more serious threat than the politics of the capital far away. However, in the rest of the kingdom, minor nobles such as the McAllisters are losing their influence to the High King and to the powerful merchant guilds.

Having developed this overall campaign concept, the DM considers the sort of adventure he wants the PCs to undertake. The Trollfell Wastes offer an obvious attraction to bold folk such as the PCs. Therefore, as a first challenge for the party, the DM develops a band of ogres who raid the farms on the outskirts of Blackbriarton. The DM designs an NPC to send the party against these ogres. He creates Lorna Gow, a stocky and outspoken peasant who has single-handedly organized the farmers of Blackbriarton to defend themselves against the attackers.

To entice the adventurers further, the DM decides that Lorna has also collected reward money.

The DM puts most of his effort into designing the farms on the outskirts of Blackbriarton and the ogres who raid them. The ogre clan has a hill giant leader and few bands of orcish scouts, not to mention wolves, a shaman beast-tamer, and so on. The party finds the ogres tougher than expected and spends a number of game sessions fighting them. Along the way, the PCs take a liking to Lorna Gow, and, having taken substantial booty from the ogres, decide to refuse their reward money.

Meanwhile, the DM develops other elements of the campaign. The House McAllister falls from power. Angus McAllister, a sorcerer and patriarch of the family, dies after a long illness reportedly brought on by traffic with dark spirits. The PCs hear rumors that Angus rose from his deathbed in undead form and consumed the McAllister household, turning them into undead abominations like himself. Whatever the truth of these matters, the High King orders the McAllister's castle sealed, so that none may enter or leave. The merchants' guild appoints a governor to rule the town in the McAllisters' stead.

Once the players have heard some of the rumors, the DM introduces an important NPC into the game. Robert McAllister, the rightful heir to the barony, escaped the massacre in the castle with some of his personal guards. The horrors Robert saw in the castle shook his mind, but that isn't the worst of what he has suffered: His treatment after his escape drove him even further from the sheltered life he had led. The merchant-governor, an unscrupulous politician named Vincennes, saw the McAllisters as an obstacle to guild power and arranged for Robert to die in an accident. Robert fled to the woods, taking his loyal followers with him. He now lives as a bandit, seeking revenge on those who wronged him. Robert is not yet evil or insane, but he could easily lapse into madness.

At this point, the PCs must make a choice between the three options before them. The decision they make will affect the course of the adventure and their reward.

- The McAllister's castle lies empty of human inhabitants, with all the noble family's possessions still inside. The party contains several thieves who relish the chance to loot it. In this adventure, the PCs discover the nobles and their household are now ghouls and ghosts, with Angus himself as a spectre. If the players do not think of exploring the castle themselves, the DM may suggest the idea through an NPC.

- The PCs could work for Vincennes, since nobody knows of his assassination attempt against Robert. Although few people like the unctuous merchant lord, no one considers it dishonorable to work

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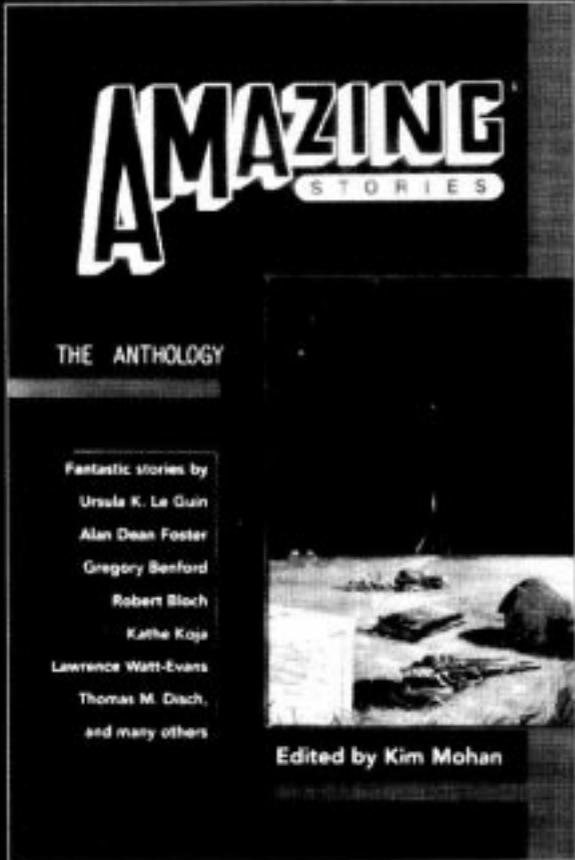
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for him. At the moment, Vincennes needs competent people to deal with Robert's bandits. He admires the PCs' work against the ogres, and he offers them a substantial sum of money to work for him.

• Finally, the party may talk with Robert and learn his side of the story. In this case, they could become bandits themselves, harrying the merchant-lord and his forces. This could be a mistake, because the Merchants' Guild can send powerful reinforcements to Blackbriarton. However, if the PCs are subtle enough to gain proof of Vincennes' assassination attempt, they could charge him with the crime before the High King. The King might then sentence Vincennes to death and restore Robert to his place over the town.

At this point, the DM has not fully detailed all the forces of the spectre Angus, Vincennes, or Robert. He will wait until the party decides its next move.

The PCs make no attempt to contact Robert. The party, however, falls into a long argument about whether to investigate McAllister Keep or to accept Vincennes' offer of a bounty. Everyone in the party dislikes Vincennes already. However, the mage in the party is convinced that Angus McAllister has become a lich, which makes the rest of the PCs understandably wary about entering the castle.

The party eventually decides to make an exploratory probe into McAllister Keep. Between game sessions, the DM prepares details on its interior and inhabitants. Among other things, he decides that Robert McAllister keeps a watch on his family fortress. In the next game session, the party goes in prepared for the worst imaginable danger and finds the going far easier than it expected. The PCs return bearing most of House McAllister's heirlooms, including the family silverware, jewels, and signet ring.

At this point, the DM considers how the NPCs would respond. Robert McAllister does not know exactly what the PCs brought out of the castle, but his scouts have seen them enter and leave the fortress. Robert suspects they may have stolen property that rightfully belongs to him. However, he also wants to know exactly what the PCs met inside, and whether they destroyed the spectre Angus. Therefore, Robert sends a messenger to fire an arrow into the PCs' camp, requesting a parley. Meanwhile, the DM puts together statistics for Robert's band, in case the PCs end up fighting it.

The party agrees to meet Robert. During the conversation, Brian, one of the party's thieves, steps forward and takes charge of the discussion. He does not deny that he went to the castle hoping for loot, but he smoothly assures Robert that the party failed to acquire anything of value. On the subject of Angus, he quite truthfully tells Robert that the adventurers failed to destroy the undead being. Robert, in turn, tells the party the full story of how Vincennes tried to kill him.

Robert asks Brian for help against the merchant-lord. The thief agrees to consider the matter and departs. As soon as the party reaches a safe place for discussion, another long debate begins. The more quixotic PCs now wish to attack Vincennes. Brian and the more roguish adventurers, however, feel no particular love for Robert or the McAllisters.

Here, the thief confers with his friends in the party, and—to emphasize his point—he stands up and delivers a speech. Brian asserts that the only NPCs who have really earned his trust or respect are the peasants who followed Lorna Gow. Furthermore, the farmers are the true lifeblood of the land, and the people most suited to govern it. Brian proposes that the party fight against both Robert and Vincennes to establish a freehold for the local common folk. Brian adds that they can finance their revolution with funds from the McAllister castle.

The rest of the party agrees, and the campaign enters a new epoch, as the party carries on a guerilla war to seize control of Blackbriarton. First, the DM must decide how Lorna Gow, who never intended to be a rebel, responds. The DM must also decide what forces Vincennes has in the area, and what he and Robert will do when the party attacks. As time passes, outside forces may intervene, and the DM may introduce more conflicting interests (and adventure opportunities) from the larger world: the King's men, rival guilds, a sorcerer seeking Angus's secret spellbooks, and others. If the party establishes its freehold, it must then decide how to govern and administer it, while keeping all the outside forces encountered earlier at bay.

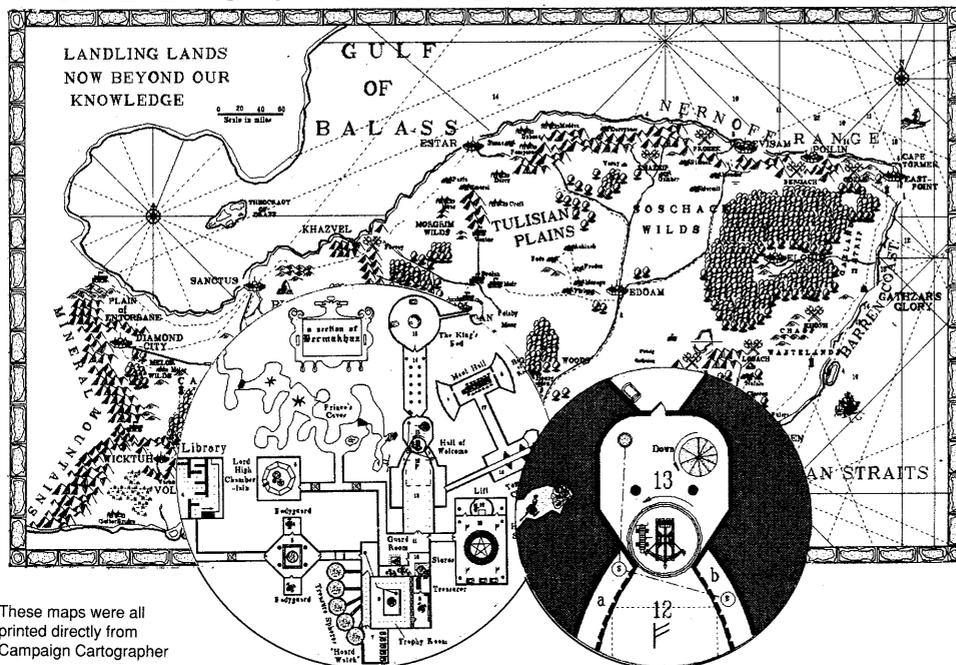
## Conclusion

A campaign based on a single quest tells a simple tale of a challenge and how the party overcame it; a campaign based on multiple plots tells a tale as complex as the players care to make it. The storyline progresses in phases, each one dominated by a different story, a different peril, and often a different PC. The transitions between these phases often feature dramatic role-playing, in which the PCs discover a new fact about their world, and make the difficult decision to change their loyalties and their goals. The characters progress. Changing times bring out facets of a character's personality that even the player did not know existed, as the characters take on the roles forced on them by circumstances. The storyline becomes a complex, multi-layered saga, which each PC may remember a different way.

Those actually interested in Chinese mystery stories should track down *The Chinese Gold Murders*, by Hans Gulick (published by Harper and Row of New York, NY in 1961).

Ω

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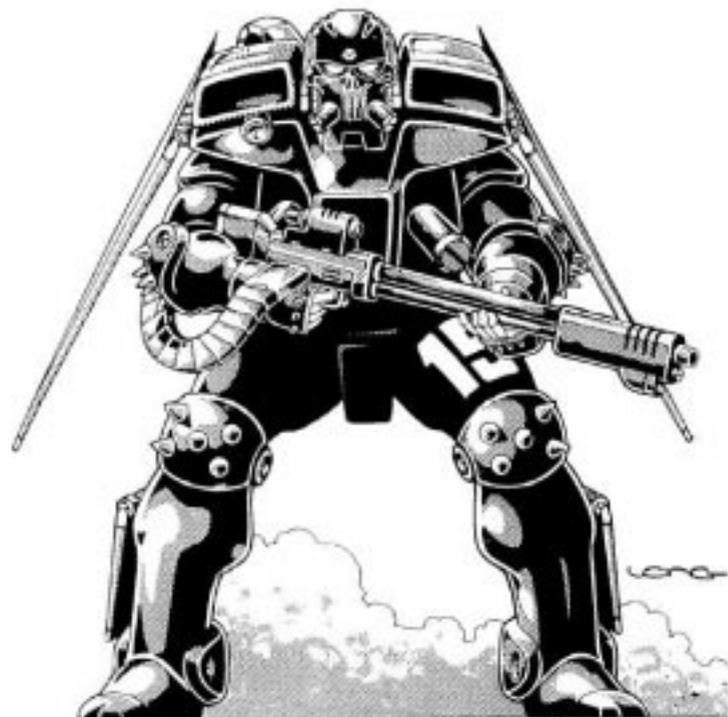
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— **Mutants in Orbit™.** Half of this book is for Rifts. The section on "Rifts Space" includes space stations in Earth's orbit, moon and Mars colonies, A.R.C.H.I.E. 7, the Cyberworks Corporation, space Glitter Boys, bots, power armor, killer satellites, mutants, and more! \$11.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

— **Rifts® Mercenaries™:** 9 new O.C.C.s, including the bounty hunter, forger, spy, smuggler and safecracker. Rules for creating mercenary armies, organizations like Crow's Commandoes and Robot Control, Naruni Enterprises, more data about North America and tons of new weapons, power armor, and equipment! 160 pages, \$15.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

— **Rifts® T-shirts.** Four different shirts currently available.

— **Aliens Unlimited™.** A 196 page sourcebook with over 100 different aliens, plus weapons and vehicles. Written for *Heroes Unlimited*, but compatible with Rifts (includes conversion notes). \$19.95 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling.

## Coming in 1995 for Rifts®

**Rifts® South America 2:** 160 pages, \$15.95, coming this Summer.

**Rifts® New West™:** 160 pages, \$15.95, coming this Summer or Fall.

**Rifts® Lone Star™:** 160+ pages, \$15.95, coming this Fall.

**Rifts® Game Master Companion™:** Coming this Summer.

**Rifts® Novels and other surprises.**

## Other Palladium® Products

**Heroes Unlimited™ RPG**

**Villains Unlimited™ Sourcebook**

**Aliens Unlimited™ Sourcebook (new)**

**Scrapers™ (by Zeleznik & Siembieda; coming soon)**

**Mystic China™**

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**Beyond the Supernatural™**

**Scrapers™ (coming Soon)**

**Original RECON®(coming soon)**

**RECON® Modern Combat (coming later this year)**

**Robotech®**

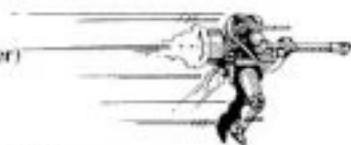
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# The Game Wizards

## FLASHPOINT

## SIGIL!

### Sigil enters the Blood War

by Steven E. Schend



It's been two months since the release of the BLOOD WARS™ card game, and the battles are growing fast and furious. But a new beachhead has opened up with the second Escalation Pack: the Blood War has invaded the City of Doors itself! Given the hidden plot of the card game, the Blood Wars have expanded well beyond the original five planes that contained it; sooner or later, we'd knew it would enter Sigil. The heart of the PLANESCAPE™ multiverse is poised on the point of a gelugon's spear!

*Escalation Pack II: Factols & Factions* recruits the Factols, leaders of Sigil's factions, into the BLOOD WARS card game as its newest Warlords. They work like standard Warlords, but they also can gather Legions of any alignments into their Battle Hands that belong to their factions. Included with the new Warlords are 40 Legion-Acolytes that are designated as faction members. These Acolytes can stack as normal Legions (by alignment), but they can also create a six-Legion Battle Hand when they are all of the same faction.

Other surprises within the *Factols & Factions* escalation pack include Portal cards (Fate-Spells) that lead from the wards of Sigil to random planes and realms, the Battlefields of Sigil (including all the headquarters of the factions), Fate-Acolyte cards that allow Legions from the initial set to join the factions of Sigil, and much, much more.

### Portents of War

The future holds much turmoil for the BLOOD WARS card game; the gods arrive in August—Zeus, Lolth, Bast, Ilsensine, and over 40 other gods will join the ranks of the Warlords of the conflict infernal! Powerful Fates and mighty Legions also join the fray, bringing the proxies of the gods into game play. All this and more awaits in late summer, so watch for it!

Once again, though, I'm asking all BLOOD WARS fans and players to let us know what they think about the game. Tell us what you like and don't like about the game. Clue us in about what you'd like to see in further Escalation Packs. What does the game need, in your esteemed opinion? Write to me care of TSR and let me know what's on your mind. Even though I designed the game and its first three supplements, it's just as much your game as it is mine, and I'd like to ensure that it's fun for everyone.

Oh, one last thing, you didn't think I'd set up this column without a deck suggestion and a card list, did you?

### Assault on The Lady's Ward!

This 50-card deck, compiled with cards taken from the Duel-Decks and the first two Escalation Packs, is a "theme" deck based on its composition and the information in the text boxes (and the PLANESCAPE RPG setting). In a nutshell, this deck suggests the following theme: The Xaositects and a number of tanar'ri battalions have joined forces to conquer The Lady's Ward of Sigil and remove Sigil's ruler from power!

**Battlefields (9):** Streets of Sigil\*, Azza-grat, The Lady's Ward\*, Torremor, Armory of Sigil\*, The City Barracks\*, The City Courts\*, The Hive\*, The Prison\*.

**Warlords (6):** Factol Karan\*, Graz'zt, Lord Tenarrus, Marilith Colonel, Molydeus Magistrate, Pazrael.

**Legions (25):** Armanite\* (x2), Dretch (x6), Foxwoman\* (x3), Glabrezu (x2), Hezrou Desecrater\* (x2), Hieracosphinx\* (x3), Mane\* (x5), Vrock (x2)

**Fates (10):** Chaosmen Mark\* (x3), Diplomatic Treachery\*, Lower Planar Conscript (x2), Monster Summons (x2), Powers of Evil Intervene, Spirited Troops.

Cards marked with an asterisk (\*) are from Escalation Pack II. All others are from the original set of cards listed in DRAGON® Magazine #215.

The "Assault" deck is only one of the new types of decks you can construct with the new Escalation Pack for the BLOOD WARS card game. With future expansions planned for the gods and other powers among the planes, the fun—and the bloodshed—will never end!

Ω

## BLOOD WARS™ Card Game Factions & Factols Card Distribution

The set contains a total of 134 cards; 15 cards per pack.

Frequency = Common (C); Uncommon (UC); Rare (R); Ultra-Rare (UR); Chase (Ch).

Card Artists = Jeff Butler (JB); Ned Dameron (ND); Tony DiTerlizzi (TD); Newton Ewell (NE); Paul Jaquays (PJ); Dana Knutson (DK); Rob Lazzarretti (RL); Robb Ruppel (RR); Peter Venters (PV)

### Battlefields

Abbreviations: P = plane; Rm = Realm, S = site.

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Armory of Sigil	S	UC	DK
Bogles' Glen	S	Ch	TD
The City Barracks	S	UC	RL
The City Courts	S	R	NE
The Civic Festhall	S	R	NE
Clerk's Ward	Rm	UC	RL
The Dragon Bar	S	R	DK
The Gatehouse	S	UC	RL
The Great Foundry	S	UC	RL
The Great Gymnasium	S	UC	RL
The Greengage	S	R	TD
Guildhall & Market Ward	Rm	UC	RL
The Hall of Records	S	R	NE
The Hall of Speakers	S	UC	NE
Harbinger House	S	R	NE
The Hive	S	UC	DK
Hive Ward	Rm	UC	TD
The Lady's Ward	Rm	UC	TD
Lower Ward	Rm	UC	RL
The Mortuary	S	UC	ND
The Prison	S	UC	RL
The Screaming Falls	S	Ch	TD
The Shattered Temple	S	UC	RL
Streets of Sigil	P	R	TD
Temple of the Abyss	S	R	DK

### Warlords

New abbreviation: Fl = Factol.

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Artus		R	PJ
Factol Ambar	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Darius	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Erin Darkflame	Fl	R	TD
Factol Hashkar	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Karan	Fl	UC	PJ
Factol Lhar	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Mallin	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Pentar	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Rhys	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Rowan Darkwood	Fl	R	TD
Factol Sarin	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Skall	Fl	UC	TD
Factol Terrance	Fl	UC	TD
Gamakar the Studious		R	TD
Orryx		R	TD
Perigon		R	TD

### Legions

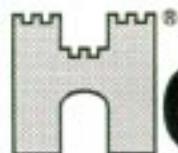
New abbreviation: Ac = Acolyte; all of these Acolytes are Faction cards.

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Agathyn Anarchist	Ac	C	PJ
Amazon Guardian		Ch	TD
Apothean Archer	Ac	C	TD
Aquallorian Sensate	Ac	C	TD
Armanite		Ch	TD
The Aspirant	Ac	C	PJ
Beholder	Ac	C	TD
Bleak Battalion	Ac	C	PJ
The Cynical Wizard	Ac	C	PJ
Dabus		Ch	TD
The Defiant Ones	Ac	C	PJ
Doppelganger	Ac	C	TD
Emerald Dragon			
Hatchling	Ac	R	PJ
The Entropy League	Ac	C	TD
Foxwoman	Ac	C	TD
Gladiator of Sigil	Ac	C	TD
The Glee-Bashers	Ac	C	PJ
Godsman Warrior	Ac	C	PJ
Guvner Bailiff	Ac	C	TD
Halfling Cleric	Ac	C	TD
Hardhead Dwarves	Ac	C	PJ
Hezrou		Ch	TD
Hieracosphinx	Ac	R	PJ
Hill Giant	Ac	C	PJ
Hin Archer	Ac	C	TD
Hobgoblin Deader	Ac	C	TD
Inquisitive Kender	Ac	R	PJ
Judge Arcane	Ac	C	TD
Larvae		Ch	TD
Lizard Man	Ac	C	TD
Mane	Ac	C	TD
Minor Magistrate	Ac	C	TD
Moon Dog	Ac	C	JB
Ogre Mage	Ac	C	TD
Paladin	Ac	R	PJ
The Perished	Ac	C	PJ
Rogue Modron Merchant	Ac	C	PJ
Sigil's Sentries	Ac	UC	PJ
Tiefling Mage-Thief	Ac	C	TD
Treant	Ac	C	TD
Valhallá's Finest	Ac	R	NE
Vorkehan Guard	Ac	C	TD
Wemic Shaman	Ac	R	PJ
Wererat Indep	Ac	C	TD
Wererats of Sigil		Ch	TD
Weretiger	Ac	C	TD

### Fates

Abbreviations: Ac = Acolyte\*, Imi = Item, Magical Item\*, Ia = Item, Artifact\*, O = Orders\*, Sp = Spell\*, St = Support.

Name	Type	Freq.	Artist
Anarchist Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Astral Searcher	St	UC	TD
Barber Shop Portal	S p	R	ND
Bladeswirl Portal	Sp	R	PV
Bleaker Mark	Ac	R	TD
Cipher Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Chandlers' Portal	Sp	Ch	PV
Chaosmen Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Dagger's Throw Portal	Sp	R	PV
Dead Mark	Ac	R	TD
Defier Mark	Ac	R	TD
Diplomatic Treachery	Sp	Ch	NE
Doomguard Mark	Ac	R	TD
Equipment Disintegration	Sp	Ch	PJ
Erosion of Faith	Sp	Ch	PJ
Factol's Favor	St	UC	TD
Foecircle Portal	Sp	Ch	PV
Godsman Mark	Ac	R	TD
Golden Web Portal	Sp	Ch	PV
Great Blade of Tasup	Ia	R	PJ
Guvner Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Hard Head Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Harp of Stars	Ia	R	PJ
Heartless Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Hidden Treasure	S p	Ch	TD
Hope Incarnate	St	UC	TD
Indep Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Inkwell Portal	Sp	R	PV
The Key of Pain	Ia	Ch/UR	PJ
The Mazes	Sp	Ch	TD
Mediator	St	UC	TD
Mimir	Imi	Ch	RR
Moon's Rose Portal	Sp	Ch	TD
Notice of Secundus	St	UC	TD
Portal of Pain	Sp	Ch	PV
Quick Escape	Sp	R	PV
Ratatosk Glider	St	UC	TD
Red Death Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Rest & Relaxation	O	Ch	TD
The Scratcher	Sp	Ch	PJ
Sensate Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Servant Li's Request	Sp	Ch	TD
Signer Mark	Ac	Ch	TD
Swords' Breath Portal	Sp	R	PV
Undead Horde	Sp	Ch	NE
Under Arrest	O	UC	TD



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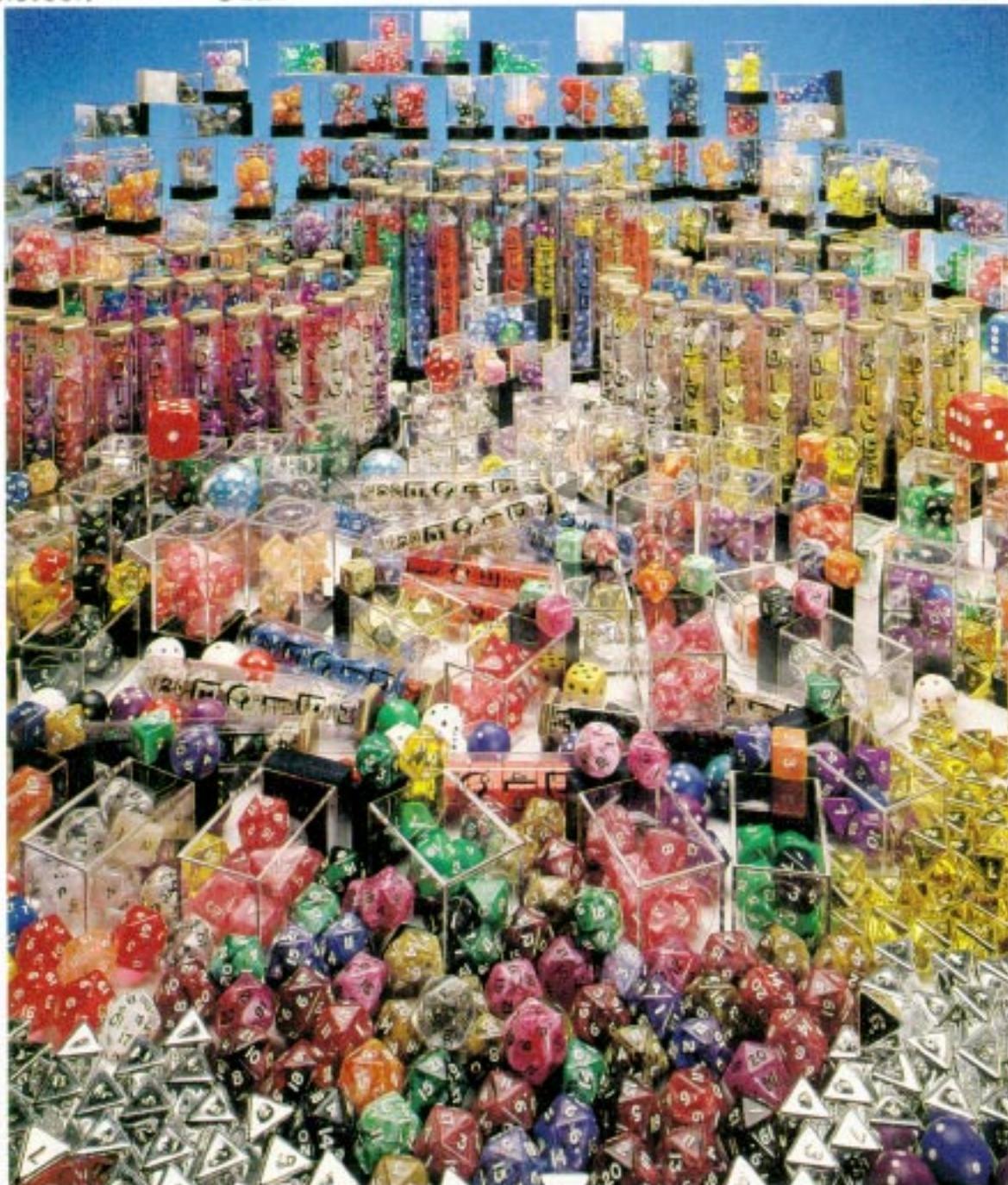
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GHENGHIS CON	Denver, CO	February 17 - 20	EUROPEAN GEN CON	Camber Sands, England	April 27 - 30
DUNDRA CON	Oakland, CA	February 17 - 21	MARCON	Columbus, OH	May 5 - 7
ORC CON	Los Angeles, CA	February 17 - 21	GAMES SPECTACULAR	Eindhoven, Holland	May 5 - 7
TOTAL CONFUSION	Marlboro, MA	February 23 - 27	GAMEX	Los Angeles, CA	May 26 - 29
COLD WARS	Harrisburg, PA	March 3 - 5	FURRY CON	Brighton, England	May 26 - 29
SPRING FANTASY	Chicago, IL	March 16 - 19	BAY CON	San Francisco, CA	May 26 - 30
LUNA CON	Rye, NY	March 17 - 19	CHICAGO COMIC CON	Chicago, IL	June 30 - July 2
GAMA	New Orleans, LA	March 22 - 25	ORIGINS	Philadelphia, PA	July 13 - 16
ENCOUNTERS	New York, NY	March 24 - 26	DRAGON CON	Atlanta, GA	July 13 - 16
PENTECON	Ithaca, NY	March 31 - April 2	DEX CON	Newark, NJ	July 20 - 23
NORWESCON	Seattle, WA	April 6 - 9	SAN DIEGO COMIC CON	San Diego, CA	July 27 - 30
WELSH CON	Cardiff, Wales	April 8	DRAX CON	Aberdeen, Scotland	August 19 - 20

**GEN CON® GAME FAIR 1995**  
Milwaukee, WI August 10 - 13

# 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.

### CONMAN 003, June 2-4 **NH**

This convention will be held at the Center of New Hampshire Holiday Inn in Manchester, NH. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Registration: \$18 preregistered; \$23 on site. Prices vary for individual days. Write to: Jonathan McCosh, 59 Onway Lake Rd., Raymond NH 03077.

### MOBI-CON '95, June 9-11 **AL**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Downtown in Mobile, Ala. Guests include Margaret Weis, Don Perrin, and Douglas Niles. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, costume contest, art show, auction, and dealers. Write to: MOBI-CON, P.O. Box 161257, Mobile AL 36616.

### STAFFCON '95, June 11 **✿**

This convention will be held at Stafford University in Stafford, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Write to: Chris Grice, C/O SU Office, Stafford University, Beaconside Site, Stafford England ST16 0AD.

### CONFIGURATION VI, June 16-18 **OK**

This convention will be held at the Tulsa Days Inn in Tulsa, Okla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® events and tournaments. Registration: \$15. Write to: CONFIGURATION VI, 215-A OMU Box 304, 900 Asp Avenue, Norman OK 73019.

### MAGIC: THE GATHERING\* TOURNAMENT, June 17 **OH**

This tournament will be held at the Ohio Army National Guard Armory in Wooster Ohio. Registration: \$4 per event preregistered; \$5 on site. Write to: MAGIC TOURNAMENT, 453 College Avenue, Wooster OH 44691-3326.

### BEN CON '95, June 22-25 **CO**

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Hotel in Lakewood, Colorado. Guests include Margaret Weis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show and a blood drive. Write to: RMBGA, P.O. Box 19232, Boulder CO 80308.

### D-DAY, June 22-25 **CA**

This convention will be held at Game Towne in Carlsbad, Calif. This is the 2nd Annual San Diego County Board Game Championships. Events include tournaments, miniatures gaming, painting contests, and prizes. Write to: D-DAY, Game Towne, 2933 Roosevelt, Carlsbad CA 92008.

### ARCHON 19, June 23-25 **IL**

This convention will be held at the Collinsville Gateway Center and Collinsville Holiday Inn, Collinsville, Ill. Guests include Jack Williamson, Doug Chaffee, Sam Moskowitz, First Fandom, and A.E. Van Vogt. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$25. Write to: ARCHON 19, P.O. Box 483, Chesterfield MO 63006.

### Q-CON II, June 23-25 **✿**

This convention will be held at the Queen's University Common Rooms, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and a raffle. Write to: The Registration Secretary, Steven Rushe, 3 Ulsterville Gardens, Belfast, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland BT9 7BA.

### KULCON III, June 30-July 2 **KS**

This convention will be held at the Topeka Ramada Inn in Topeka Kan. Guests include Steve Jackson, Bruce Nesmith, Tom Dowd, Dave Gross, and others. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® events, Japanese animation, computer gaming, and a charity raffle. Write to: KULCON, 400 Kansas Union, Lawrence KS 66045.

### MICHICON GAMEFEST '95, June 30-July 2 **MI**

This convention will be held at Van Dyke Park Suites Convention Hotel in Warren, Mich. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: MICHICON GAMEFEST, P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte MI 48192.

### VI-KHAN '95, July 7-9 **CO**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn North in Colorado Springs, Colo. Special guest is Connie Willis. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show, auction, banquet, a miniatures painting contest, and a yacht race in the hotel pool (using milk cartons). Registration: \$15 preregistered before June 30, \$20 thereafter. Write to: VI-KHAN, 1025 Garner St. #10B, Colorado Springs CO 80905.

- ✧ indicates an Australian convention.
- ✿ indicates a Canadian convention.
- ✿ indicates a European convention.

**DRAGON CON '95, July 13-16 GA**

This convention will be held at the Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel, Atlanta Civic Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Over 200 special guests including Kevin Anderson, Ben Bova, Harlan Ellison, Margaret Weis, and Timothy Zahn. Events include role-playing, board, card, computer, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, tournaments, dealers, a costume contest, live music and dancing. Registration: \$55 before June 15. Write to: DRAGON CON '95, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta GA 30362.

**MAGNUM OPUS CON-10, July 13-16 GA**

This convention will be held at the Callaway Gardens Resort in Pine Mountain, Geog. Guests include: Roger Zelazny, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and Bruce Boxleitner. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include casino night, a masquerade ball, tournaments, and a banquet. Registration: \$40 before June 1, \$25 for a day pass. Write to: MOC-10, P.O. Box 6585, Athens GA 30604.

**WAR '95, July 13-16 GA**

This convention is part of the MAGNUM OPUS CON-10. Events include a MAGIC: THE GATHERING\* card game tournament. Registration: \$50 in addition to the registration fee for the host convention. Write to: National Association of Professional Gamers, P.O. Box 6585, Athens GA 30604.

**ORIGINS '95, July 13-16 PA**

This convention will be held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, Penn. Guests include Margaret Weis, James Lowder, and Scott Douglas. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® events and an auction. Registration: \$34.95 preregistered. Write to: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 1740, Renton WA 98057; or e-mail: andon@aol.com.

**GRAND GAME CON '95, July 15-16 MI**

This convention will be held at the Godfrey Lee Middle School in Grand Rapids, Mich. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$8 for one day or \$15 for both days. Write to: Leon Gibbons, 13910 Olin Lakes Road, Sparta MI 49345.

**QUINCON X '95, July 21-23 IL**

This convention will be held at the Signature Room in Franklin Square in Quincy, Ill. Special guest is Timothy Bradstreet. Events include role-playing, board, and card games. Other activities include an auction. Registration: \$12/ weekend. Single day rates vary. Write to: Greg Stille, 1818 Hilltop Drive, Quincy IL 62301.

**CON-DOME '95, July 28-30 \***

This convention will be held at Dtu-lyngby, Denmark. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and workshops. Write to: Henning Jorgensen, Stenas 20, DK 2670 Greve, Denmark.

**CONTINUUM IV, July 28-30 IL**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Hotel in Mt. Vernon, Ill. Guests include John de Lancie, Troy Denning, Todd Hamilton, and Phil Farrand. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an auction, art show, contests, and a dance. Registration: \$35 until June 28, \$40 thereafter. Gaming only registration available. Write to: CONTINUUM IV, 1617 Lyndhurst, Cape Girardeau MO 63701.

**CORPSE CON II, August 4-6 TX**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Shoreline in Corpus Christi, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, Japamation, and an auction. Registration: \$5 on site. Write to: GLCC, 5757 S. Staples #2802, Corpus Christi TX 78413.

**DALLAS GAME EXPO, August 4-6 TX**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Hotel Market Center, Dallas Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and a dealers room. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$7/day on site. Write to: Dallas Game Expo, P.O. Box 824662, Dallas TX 75382-4662.

**TOLCON XIII, August 5-6 OH**

This convention will be held at the Scott Park Campus at the University of Toledo, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, movies, an auction, and a painting contest. Registration: \$8 for the weekend, \$5/day. Write to: TOLCON XIII, c/o Mind Games, 2115 N. Reynolds, Toledo OH 43615.

**GAMEFEST XVI, August 9-13 CA**

This convention will be held in the historic Old Towne in San Diego, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include trivia, and figure painting. Registration: \$20 preregistered until July 31, \$30 on site. Write to: GAMEFEST XVI, 3954 Harney St., San Diego CA 92110.

**BUBONICON 27, August 11-13 NM**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson East in Albuquerque, New Mex. Guests include Harry Turtledove and Simon Hawke. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show, an auction, a dance, a costume contest, and a genre cereal taste-off. Registration: \$21 preregistered until July 21, \$25 on site. Write to: BUBONICON 27, New Mexico SF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque NM 87176-7257.

**MIGSCON XVI, August 18-20 \***

This convention will be held at The Hamilton Ramada Hotel in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers room. Write to: MIGSCON XVI, P.O. 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8L 8E9.

**RAILCON '95, August 25-27 CO**

This convention will be held at the Sherton Hotel West in Lakewood, Col. Activities include a Puffing Billy tournament. Registration: \$30. Write to: Train Gamers Association, P.O. Box 461072, Aurora CO 80046-1072.

**DRAGONFLIGHT '95, August 25-27 WA**

This convention will be held at the Bellarmine Hall on the Seattle University campus in Seattle, Wash. Events include computer, role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, an auction, and dealers. Registration prices vary. Write to: DRAGONFLIGHT '95, P.O. Box 417, Seattle WA 98111-0417.

# LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD



On the opposite page you'll find the final ballot for the ORIGINS™ Awards for gaming products published in 1994, the gaming industry's highest honor. The vote is open to all gamers everywhere. The staff of DRAGON® Magazine suggests you make a photocopy of the ballot, vote for your favorite games, accessories, supplements, figures, computer games, board games, and so on from 1994, and mail the ballot by the deadline, June 20. There are even spaces for write-in votes if your favorite 1994 product didn't make the final ballot. Congratulations and good luck to all the companies with nominated releases. The awards will be announced at the ORIGINS Game Convention this summer. May the best games win!

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**MAKE ONLY ONE VOTE IN EACH CATEGORY. ONLY THIS FORM OR A PHOTOCOPY MAY BE USED TO VOTE.**

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ORIGINS™ AWARDS FINAL BALLOT**

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**1. Best Historical Figure Series**

- American Civil War 15mm ..... RAFM
- Daimyo Samurai Figures ..... Reaper Miniatures
- Dark Ages 25mm ..... Old Glory
- Wild West 25mm ..... Stone Mountain
- Zulu Wars 25mm ..... Connoisseur
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Figure Series**

- AD&D Personalities ..... Ral Partha
- Legions of Steel ..... Global Games
- Magic: The Gathering ..... Heartbreaker
- Star Wars Miniatures ..... West End Games
- Takhisis- Ltd. Edition Dragon ..... Ral Partha
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Best Vehicular Series**

- BattleTech: Vehicles & Mechs ..... Ral Partha
- Full Thrust Spaceships ..... Geo-Hex
- Future Wars 1/300 Vehicles ..... Geo-Hex
- Great War Micronauts 1:2400 ..... GHQ
- Star Wars Vehicles ..... West End Games
- WWII 20mm ..... RAFM
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Best Miniatures Accessory Series**

- Grendel Resin Kits ..... Heartbreaker
- Mountainscape ..... Geo-Hex
- Ral Partha Paints ..... Ral Partha
- Ultimate Carrying Case ..... Global Games
- Warhammer Fantasy Banners ..... Games Workshop/Citadel
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Best Miniatures Rules**

- Blood Bowl ..... Games Workshop
- Critter-Tek ..... Crunchy Frog
- Full Thrust Spacefleet Combat ..... Geo-Hex
- Napoleon's Battles Expansion Kit 2 ..... Avalon Hill
- Star Wars Miniatures Companion .. West End Games
- Volley & Bayonet ..... Game Designers Workshop
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Best Game Accessory**

- Antiquities, Magic: The Gathering ..... Wizards of the Coast
- The Dark, Magic: The Gathering ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Legends, Magic: The Gathering ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Nuclear War Booster Packs ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.
- Principia Discordia ..... Steve Jackson Games
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Best Role-Playing Rules**

- Aria ..... Last Unicorn Games
- Castle Falkenstein ..... R. Talsorian Games
- First Quest: Introduction to RPGs, AD&D .... TSR Inc.
- Immortal ..... Precedence Publishing
- Kromosome, Amazing Engine ..... TSR Inc.
- Nephilim ..... Chaosium
- The Whispering Vault ..... Pariah Press
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Best Role-Playing Adventure**

- Cities of Bone, AD&D: Al-Qadim ..... TSR Inc.
- City by the Silt Sea, AD&D: Dark Sun ..... TSR Inc.
- Council of Wyrms, AD&D ..... TSR Inc.
- Harlequin's Back, Shadowrun ..... FASA Corp.
- Sarista, Talislanta ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Best Role-Playing Supplement**

- The Encyclopedia Magica, Vol. I, AD&D ..... TSR Inc.
- Grimtooth's Traps Bazaar ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.
- GURPS Lensman ..... Steve Jackson Games
- Lion of the North, Ars Magica ... Wizards of the Coast
- Masque of the Red Death, Ravenloft ..... TSR Inc.
- Planescape Campaign Setting, AD&D ..... TSR Inc.
- Submen Rising, Talislanta ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame**

- Age of Exploration ..... TimJim Games
- Caesar ..... GMT Games
- Colonial Diplomacy ..... Avalon Hill
- Kolin ..... Clash of Arms
- Maharaja ..... Avalon Hill
- No Better Place To Die ..... The Gamers
- Roads to Gettysburg ..... Avalon Hill
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Best Modern-Day Boardgame**

- Ardennes ..... The Gamers
- Australian Rails ..... Mayfair Games
- Enemy at the Gates ..... The Gamers
- Over the Reich ..... Clash of Arms
- The Rising Sun ..... Clash of Arms
- Second Front ..... Games Research/Design
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame**

- Battle Rider ..... Game Designers Workshop
- Bloodbowl 3rd Edition ..... Games Workshop
- CityTech 2nd Edition ..... FASA Corp.
- Roborally ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Talisman 3rd Edition ..... Games Workshop
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Best Card Game**

- Dixie ..... Columbia Games
- Illuminati: New World Order .. Steve Jackson Games
- Jihad ..... Wizards of the Coast
- On the Edge ..... Atlas Games
- Spellfire: Master the Magic ..... TSR Inc.
- Star Trek: The Next Generation .... Decipher Games
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. Best New Play-By-Mail Game**

- Lizards! ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.
- Forgotten Realms ..... Reality Simulations Inc.
- Middle-earth- Third Age circa 2950 ..... Game Systems Inc.
- Star Fleet Warlord ..... Task Force Games
- Traveller ..... Eclipse Entertainment Inc.
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Best Play-By-Mail Game**

- Duelmasters ..... Reality Simulations Inc.
- Illuminati ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.
- Middle-earth- Third Age circa 1650 ..... Game Systems Inc.
- Star Web ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.
- State of War ..... Game Systems Inc.
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Best Fantasy or SF Computer Game**

- Doom II ..... id Software
- MYST ..... Broderbund
- Tie Fighter ..... Lucas Arts
- Wing Commander III ..... Origin Systems
- XCOM UFO ..... Microprose
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**19. Best Military or Strategy Computer Game**

- Kingmaker ..... Avalon Hill
- Master of Magic ..... MicroProse
- Panzer General ..... SSI
- Sid Meier's Colonization ..... MicroProse
- SimCity 2000 ..... Maxis
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. Best Game Related Fiction**

- Arena, Magic the Gathering ..... HarperPrism/Wizards of the Coast
- Bred For War, BattleTech .... ROC/FASA Corporation
- Cthulhu's Heirs, ..... Chaosium
- Call of Cthulhu Fiction Anthology ..... Chaosium
- Elminster, The Making of a Mage, ..... TSR Inc.
- Forgotten Realms ..... TSR Inc.
- Siege of Darkness, Forgotten Realms ..... TSR Inc.
- Whispering Woods, Magic the Gathering ..... HarperPrism/Wizards of the Coast
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Best Professional Gaming Magazine**

- The Courier ..... Courier Publications
- Dragon Magazine ..... TSR Inc.
- The Duelist ..... Wizards of the Coast
- Pyramid ..... Steve Jackson Games
- Shadis ..... Alderac Entertainment
- The Unspeakable Oath ..... Pagan Publishing
- White Wolf Magazine ..... White Wolf
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**22. Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine**

- Alarums & Excursions ..... Lee Gold
- All of the Above ..... Lee Graham
- Berg's Review of Games ..... Richard Berg
- KA'GE (Shadowrun) .... Jim Long/AWOL Productions
- Mech (BattleTech) ..... Jim Long/AWOL Productions
- Zone of Control ..... John Kisner
- Write-In \_\_\_\_\_

Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

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# F o r u m

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments. You must give us your name and full mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed (we will not consider a letter submitted anonymously), but we will withhold your name if you ask us to do so. We will print your complete address if you request it.

I just felt I had to respond to Larry Sonders' letter in issue #215; it struck a chord (I almost choked on my breakfast when I started laughing). As my girlfriend remarked when I read the first paragraph to her, "He's better off without that player." A person who quits the campaign as a result of the DM's ruling is unnecessary baggage. He sounds like an egotistical and self-centered player, more suited to solo games where he cannot impair the enjoyment of others.

I'm sure that the incident was simplified for the sake of the letter, but precisely how does any mage *teleport* above a ship and then *levitate* safely to the deck? By my interpretation, only one spell may be cast per round. Casting *levitate* immediately after arriving at the other end of a *teleport* spell looks pretty dodgy. This cocky mage would still have been casting his *levitate* when he made an abrupt and intimate acquaintance with the deck—you can fall a long way between spells! Furthermore, the mage would have had to *teleport* onto the vessel since the spell description states: "a wizard cannot teleport into an area of empty space—a substantial surface must be there." Whichever way you look at it, our mage shouldn't have been in this situation in the first place!

Just how many people in a serious fantasy would go around with "I am 11th level" tattooed on their forehead or "1st level arrow-fodder" emblazoned across their chest? From the pirate captain's point of view, anyone could land in the midst of his crew, courtesy of a magical item, claiming to be a Wizard of Might. How does he know how powerful the supposed mage was? It seems perfectly logical for him to call this arrogant fool's bluff, risk-

ing two dispensable crew members in doing so. Pirates aren't exactly known for being squeamish when it comes to risking the lives of their underlings. A seasoned scourge of the high seas is more than likely to test a visitor's mettle than to surrender his vessel without a fight.

We are not dealing with a superstitious tribe that have never seen anything more impressive than a shaman's trances or his limited repertoire of tricks. Pirates will have faced many dangers far more impressive than a blustering buffoon stupid enough to drop in on them without first displaying some proof of his prowess. Fighting boarding actions, facing the Imperial Navy's bolt-throwers, or riding out fierce storms at sea will have hardened a pirate crew to the point where a levitating mage is a laughable threat. Being struck dumb with awe might be applicable if the crew were simply unable to believe the nerve of the fellow!

Sheer weight of numbers would be on the pirates' side. When you have 40 companions and a tough captain, mob rule, peer-pressure, and fear of your leader's retribution are powerful motivators. Some robbed character who has dropped onto your deck and told you to "surrender or else" comes a poor second. Without any evidence of his ability to kill and maim in ghastly ways, what does a pirate do: obey orders or face keel-hauling? Perhaps when a dozen comrades have been frazzled or turned into parrots, the crew members will reconsider their position on the matter.

Finally, does the world in question have a background that emphasizes the power of mages? Are they rare and powerful enough to inspire awe? Do tales recount horrific fates that befell those who defied the wielders of magic? Or are mages two-a-penny—a threat which a pirate crew might expect to face from time-to-time? It is almost unfortunate that most fantasy campaigns fall into the latter category. As a result, players lose any sense of wonder when magic is used, taking it for granted, even becoming blase in the face of enchantments. "Oh, it's another cloud castle, let's jump on our brooms of flying and sack the place!" It's as if the player belonged to the former category (magic is a rare thing to be feared) and suddenly found himself in a campaign world where casting spells is widely accepted.

To answer Mr. Sonders' last paragraph: no rule, written or otherwise, says that low-level PCs should always fear high-level ones, or that a high-level PC need not fear low-level characters. High-level groups

have been overrun by large groups of kobolds, or experienced severe setbacks by disciplined hobgoblin crossbow troops. Even competent adventurers can lose confidence if their main fighting strength is lost to some unfortunate chain of events. Just takes a little luck (good or bad), an error of judgement, or a flash of brilliance can turn any encounter on its head. No PC or DM can go into a situation certain of its outcome.

On the other hand, a sufficiently notorious individual could instill just the reaction our mage desired. But in this example, did the pirates know about the mage beforehand? Had they heard tales of his daring exploits and terrible power? If they had, the player might be justified in expecting the pirates to surrender. This is true regardless of whether we are dealing with a powerful mage or a renowned warrior. If the coastal ports abound with rumors of a fearless adventurer, dressed just so, armed in a particular way, who has personally brought pirate crews to justice, then any crew might be nervous when someone answering his description turns up in their midst! On the other hand, a relatively low-level crew of 50 pirates might hope to make a name for itself which would, in turn, instill fear in its potential victims!

Larry ironically asks at the end of his letter whether incompetence, cowardice, and stupidity are the exclusive province of low-level folk. There should always be a fair share of fools to provide humor, but they don't all have to be low-level—just look at the real world to see how many high-powered idiots there are! At the same time, high-level heroes and villains all have to start somewhere—the next pirate deck-hand you meet could be a Blackbeard waiting to happen!

Nigel Espley  
West Midlands, UK

This letter is in response to Donald Haverson's remarks in issue #216 regarding the AD&D® magic system.

I've been playing RPGs for 10 years now. In that time span I have played fantasy games that use spell-point or fatigue-based magic. I even created an alternative spellcasting system for the AD&D game, which I abandoned shortly thereafter. It is my firm belief that in their abundant wisdom, the designers of AD&D created the best system. Here's why:

First off, with the AD&D system you know what spells you have and how many times you can cast them. When they are gone, they are gone until your wizard gets the necessary sleep. Simple. With a

# CHANGELING

The Dreaming

The gates of Arcadia, the original paradise,  
are closed to us.

Only the cities of humanity remain.

Without any awareness of our true nature,  
humankind crushes us beneath its banal heel.

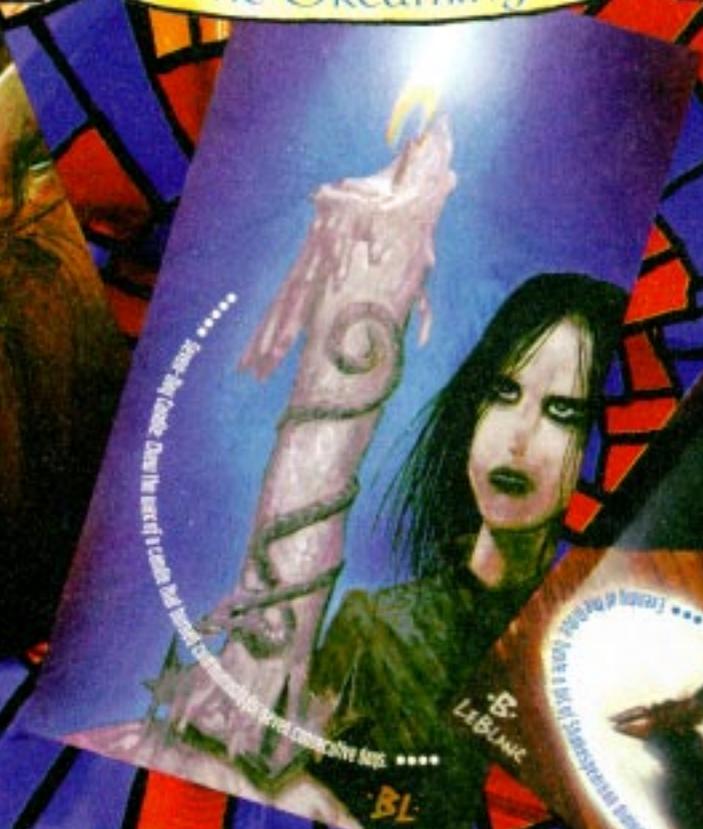
Joy and laughter are gone;  
only the Dreaming remains.

The journey is now complete. We've entered the sensual world of *Vampire: The Masquerade*; crushed the corrupting minions of the wyrm in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*; come to understand the paradoxical nature of reality in *Mage*; and experienced the dark heart of death in *Wraith: The Oblivion*.

Now, join us in the final story, the final view of the *World of Darkness*.

# CHANGELING

The Dreaming



Coming in June. Over 260 full-color pages. Also be on the lookout for Changeling Cantrip Cards, a card-based faerie magic system reflecting the chaotic and unpredictable nature of fae powers, available in July. Full cantrip card rules will be included in the main Changeling rulebook. Also be on the lookout for the full color Changeling promo in stores in May.



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fatigue-based system, wizards must keep track of time to regain lost Strength or fatigue points, which to me is monotonous, and must calculate out modifiers for reduced Strength or fatigue. A point or fatigue system is alluring to some gamers, because a wizard can cast many spells per day, as long as he doesn't become fatigued or drained. In the games I've played, this led to wizards with ridiculously high Strength or Constitution scores, who could dish out or take large amounts of damage while simultaneously blasting away with spells. As a player, that's fun for a minute. As a DM, it's no fun at all.

The AD&D system forces a wizard to choose spells for the day wisely, and to use them wisely. What fun is it to have your wizard *knock* open every locked door the party runs into, with minimal cost to fatigue? What about the thieves and fighters in the group—they like to open locked doors as well! A wizard able to cast any spell in his repertoire at will diminishes other PCs' interactions in trying situations. There is nothing more challenging to a serious role-player than a wizard with "useless" spells in a dire situation. In those situations, all the wizard's cunning and guile shine brightly, and the most memorable things occur.

Robert Melvin  
PO Box 29  
Represa, CA 95671

Kudos to "Paths of Power" by Wolfgang Baur and Steve Kurtz in issue #216! This is just the sort of thing to add mystery and variety to the wizard class in the AD&D game, because it means that not every PC and NPC mage will have the same magical powers available. More than ever before, research will be necessary to get a good handle on one's enemy.

Speaking of research and information-gathering, it seems that users of path magic who concentrate on illusions (such as the Path of Deception and the Path of Shadows) have the most to lose if their precise powers are known. After all, if the enemy knows that a certain wizard can't really cast *fireball* or *lightning bolt*, or summon animals, monsters, elementals, undead, etc., then any such illusions that he casts will be automatic failures. The party would also be more cautious about picking its way through his stronghold, seeing illusion-concealed booby traps on every stretch of floor (of course, this could slow them down enough to give the wizard a chance to get away or rally his garrison). Leaking information to the adventuring public that he knows illusion magic at least could be to his advantage. And if he can cast lethal spells like *fireball*, and leaks information to the effect that he can't, then parties may stand in the open without taking cover from his magic, secure in the (mistaken) belief that "there's nothing there."

Gregory W. Detwiler  
Williamsburg, PA

I am writing in response to Gary Wilson's letter in issue #216. I have also been playing AD&D games for about four years. Because the paladin is one of my favorite classes, I have faced the same questions during my years of playing and DMing.

I read your letter and I think I might be able to help. You said that the paladin is too generic, but it's not when you really think about it. They don't just represent a generic "good," but rather the specific ideals of Lawful Good. In fact, the paladin should be the epitome of Lawful Good.

If you look at it this way then it might help to explain your other questions. Although a paladin is usually allied with a government (whether it be a theocracy or not) and may worship a deity, the paladin is restricted by a higher meaning. The paladin should be considered a power of Lawful Good. He should not be forced to serve the vanities of one authority, even if that authority is divine in nature. Her beliefs in Lawful Goodness should transcend such ties. Instead, she should be a protector and enforcer of all the of the Lawful Good alignment. Therefore, a Paladin could never be chaotic good because chaotic actions and even chaotic thoughts go against the nature of a paladin.

I also think it's important to point out that paladins are alignment extremists. That's why it's important for a paladin never to do chaotic acts or stray even a little bit from the ideals of lawful good. That's why only the most dedicated can play paladins properly. If the paladin does stray from the ideals of lawful good, he immediately loses all paladin privileges and abilities until he atones for his misconduct.

You might argue that since the lawful good alignment has elite warriors, why shouldn't the other alignments have them. Well, you've come to the right place, because DRAGON Magazine printed an article on paladins ("A Plethora of Paladins" by Christopher Wood, issue #106). It featured a paladin class for each alignment. For example, the Lyan class was the paladin of the lawful neutral alignment. It had completely different abilities, such as using a 1d12 for HD, casting magical or clerical spells, and bonuses when fighting chaotic creatures. Each different alignment had a paladin class with abilities and hindrances corresponding with the alignment. Although DRAGON Magazine recommended them for NPCs only, with some small precautions to maintain campaign balance, these paladins can easily be incorporated into almost any campaign.

Alex Plocki  
New Kensington, PA

I was glad to read the "Paths of Power" article and have incorporated it in my campaign, but it suffers from one major omission: what about bards? I suggest the following progression for bards, as an addition to table A.

---

Level of Bard	Max # Paths for Bard
1	1
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	3
6	4
7	4
8	5
9	5
10	6
11	7
12	8
13	9
14	10
15	11
16	12
17	13
18	14
19	15
20	16

---

Bards pick up a lot of information in their travels, and so learn many paths. A bard may cast from an extraordinarily high number of paths each day in relation to the number of paths they know because of their generalist natures (they use wizard's Table C).

In addition to this table, bards would make the following adjustments to the "basic" rules. 1). Bards cannot skip steps in a path (their understanding of magic isn't as developed as a wizard's). 2). Bardic "colleges" teach special Bardic paths which assure that paths exist that a bard may "master." These paths all end with 6th level spells and may contain spells not known outside of bardic circles. Only "retired" bards ever engage in any kind of spell research; active bard characters never waste their precious time on such endeavors. Elven minstrel/mages or mages who are sympathetic to bards might well develop bard spells. 3). Bards may also study with wizards or wizard guilds to learn paths from them. 4). Bards may still learn "rogue" spells, spells which are not tied to a path that they know (if they happen upon one in a book or scroll) . . . however, this spell must be memorized when used and is not a part of any path, nor forks can be taken from it, it cannot be forgotten. It counts against the number of spells a bard may know, and cast a day. If a bard later learns a path in which that spell is included, it is treated as a path spell.

Bards otherwise follow all rules as set out for wizards. Two sample paths just for bards follow, using spells from *The Complete Bard's Handbook* (PHBR8).

**The True Path of the Bard:** *alter instrument* (1, PHBR8), *charm person* (1), *sleep* (1), *magic mouth* (2), *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter* (2), *improved magic mouth* (3, PHBR8), *tongues* (3), *wall of sound* (3, PHBR8), *shout* (4), *emotion* (4), *Leomund's lamentable belaborment* (5),

*dream* (5), *mass suggestion* (6)

**The Performer's Path:** *alter instrument* (1, PHBR8), *ventriloquism* (1), *hypnotism* (1), *sound bubble* (1, PHBR8), *magic mouth* (2), *rope trick* (2), *alter self* (2), *levitate* (2), *pyrotechnics* (2), *water breathing* (3), *minor creation* (3), *instant audience* (3, PHBR8), *conjure cabinet* (4, PHBR8), *advanced illusion* (5), *legend lore* (6)

Note that bard paths tend to be spell heavy, containing several spells of each level. Bard colleges know that their students will not have the same access to spells afforded wizards ("What!" the master mage cried, "I don't have time to waste on teaching you dabblers . . ."), and the colleges also want to prepare their students with enough magic to fork into other paths as often as they desire, as befits a true "jack of all trades". Many colleges exist which provide paths which are suitable for the different bard kits.

Steve  
via e-mail

Some friends and I began playing the AD&D game way back in 1980, and have enjoyed countless hours of adventure, all set in my own game world. The AD&D game is a wonderful diversion and a most splendid way to pass the time. But as a veteran DM (and a lover of clerics), I feel compelled to respond to Melody Alder's comments in issue #210.

I must agree with Adam Bickford's astute evaluation of the cleric. Apart from the statistical standpoint, there are other important points to make about the hidden strengths of this superior class.

Regardless of alignment, the cleric is the most capable of dictating the goals and purposes of his faith, especially at higher level. He can foresee the future of his religion in whatever realm she chooses to adventure in. Indeed, I feel he also must do his best to influence the actions of other player characters and NPCs.

A well-played cleric can shape the events of his world to a degree that is almost beyond fantasy. For example, consider a lawful evil high priestess: the next time those soldier boys line up for their dose of healing, ask of them, "What have you done for me lately?" I'm not talking about merely relieving the warriors of excess cash, either. A sword-slinger on death's door might well be forced to accept a quest in change for healing.

On the other hand, a lawful good high priestess may be able to stop a war and persuade the powers-that-be to support her temple in return. Even in battle, priests are formidable, especially with the nifty *chant* and *prayer* spells. I think even ungrateful PCs will sit up and take notice if they can more easily hit an opponent.

During 15 years of gaming, our cleric has shone brilliantly as a mover and shaker. At high level, even one withheld *cure* spell can change the world forever! What's the sense of risking your neck if unwise, short-sighted PCs don't under-

stand their position in the "grander scheme of things"? Only a cleric can understand this, and it is always his duty to make certain these roughnecks see things his way. Give these clods faith, and they will serve you (and your god). Prove to them who really does the healing.

As a character class, I see little, if any, need for expansion, for the class is complete as is. There is no substitute for good role-playing when you feel the stats aren't with you. That's the beauty of this wonderful game system: stats and dice do not a character make! Most of all, keep the faith.

Floyd Adams III  
P.O. Box 579  
Elmer NJ 08318

I was talking with a couple of role-playing friends, and I would like to share one question with other players. Everyone knows about the 10% bonus experience for having a 16 or higher in his prime requisite. *Why? What is the point?*

Why does a fighter with a 16 strength get 10% more experience than one with a 15? Don't you think it is easier to kill an opponent with an attack bonus or a damage bonus? I think you should get bonuses for having a lower prime requisite, because it is harder to kill a monster, pick a pocket, learn spells, or get bonus spells. Many thanks if you can answer this.

CLS Innis  
Collinsville, IL

There's been a lot of talk lately about "dark games" or "mature games," in the gaming industry. It seems that people are comparing apples and oranges when they are throwing these two expressions around, as if they meant one and the same thing. I don't think they do. Let me define both terms in the context of role-playing games.

To me, darkness in an RPG refers to the game's setting. Consider some of the RPGs that have used the word "dark" in their titles or descriptions: the entire subgenre of "dark future" RPGs (the various cyberpunk games are still the best examples), Hero Games' DARK CHAMPIONS\* setting, and GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY\* game, among others. The newest of these, the DARK CHAMPIONS setting, was released in 1993. (As you can see, dark isn't exactly a new concept.) All these games share a grim, often desperate situation, world, or campaign environment. However, the actions that the PCs take, the kind of missions they accept, and the variety of deeds they perform are all quite similar to the actions, missions, and deeds that PCs in other, "lighter" RPGs take. You can call the mission "a corporate extraction" in a dark future game, but how are the mission goals (and the actions the PCs take to achieve those goals) different from the goal of rescuing the princess in the evil wizard's tower in a light RPG? All that's different is the setting. Dark doesn't have

to do with *what* the PCs are doing, only *where* they're doing it.

To further my definition, let's look at the fantasy genre. Of the available campaign settings for the AD&D game, I consider both the DARK SUN® setting (there's that word again) and the RAVENLOFT® campaigns dark. They are both bleak, somber settings. Neither would be on my list of top 10 vacation spots. But are they dark?

A good synonym for darkness in fantasy is "low fantasy." Low fantasy is grim, gritty, and action-oriented. Low fantasy fiction includes Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd & The Gray Mouser* stories, the *Thieves' World* anthologies, and Robert E. Howard's Conan tales. (Some people would consider some of the above examples sword & sorcery fiction, but that's splitting hairs.)

Most horror RPGs are dark—it's almost part of the definition. In fact, Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game, can be considered one of the industry's first dark role-playing games.

On the other hand, a mature game has adventures dealing with complex subjects such as crime and corruption, adult themes such as sex or violence, and even social issues such as abortion or conservation. In mature games, these themes permeate every aspect of the campaign's stories, including the characters themselves, rather than being stuck in the background. Mature games are defined by their plots. The actions PCs take are based on the decisions the players make for their characters. In a mature game, the decisions are much more complex than in other RPGs. The world is not black and white, but filled with an infinite number of shades of gray—just as in real life. Mature games carry stories that contain multiple choices, each with multiple outcomes. Each option carries with it consequences that the PCs must deal with—no wanton looting and pillaging allowed here. (What I'm *not* talking about when referring to mature subject matter is hack-'n'-slash gaming. Whether you're playing a berserk human warrior, an undead being in a blood frenzy, or a psychotic killer hopped up on goofballs, don't think that you're playing a mature game just because there are graphic levels of violence or sex in your campaign. I'm talking about role-playing here, not indulging in a festival of lust and gore and calling that "mature.") Simply put, mature games require complex decision-making by the game's players.

Mature RPGs available now are the Storyteller series from White Wolf, and Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU, the NEPHILIM\* game, and Atlas Games' OVER THE EDGE\* RPG. Of these, the Storyteller games merit further discussion. Not only do they deal with mature themes, they also are written for an older audience. The language or artwork in Storyteller game products have occasionally ignited some controversy. While I'm not sure such language belongs in any RPG product, it's not my decision. I'm not trying to slam these games; I currently play in a VAMPIRE campaign, in fact. What

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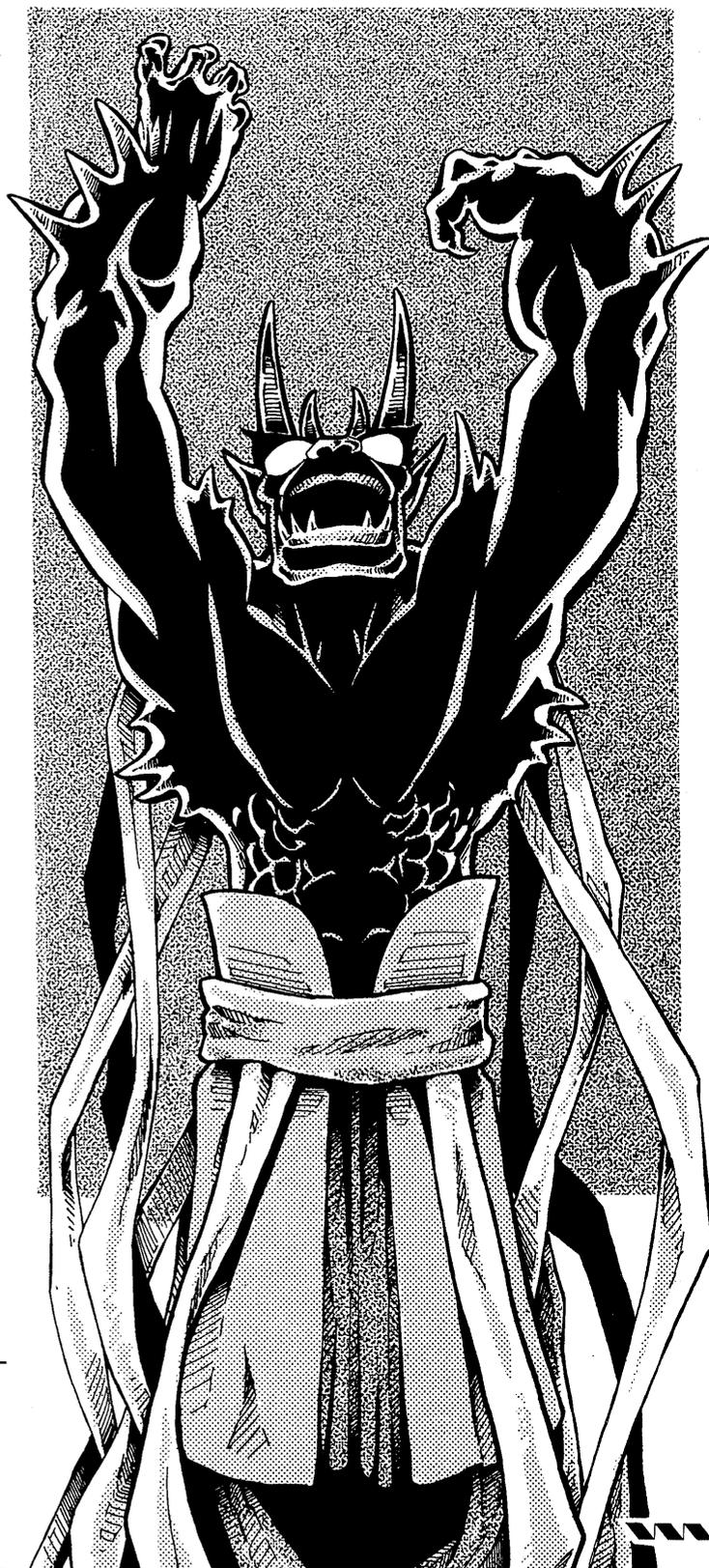
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I'm saying is that these games may not be for everybody.

On the other hand, mature themes can be dealt with in a more traditional manner. For example, the AL-QADIM®, PLANESCAPE, DARK SUN, and RAVENLOFT campaign settings all deal with mature issues (we just don't swear). Hey, you're thinking, didn't he say that the DARK SUN and RAVENLOFT campaigns (and the CALL OF CTHULHU game, for that matter) were dark settings? Yes, I did. Can a game be both dark and mature? Yes. In fact, RPGs that incorporate mature decision making in a dark setting can lead to the most intense role-playing possible, and these settings and RPGs are among the most successful in the industry. (What does that say about us?)

It is possible to play a mature game in an immature fashion (looting and pillaging, as mentioned above), just as it's possible to run a mature campaign using almost any rules system (with the possible exception of humorous RPGs). It's up to you and your group, really. I don't intend to preach about how you should play RPGs. Play the game that's fun for you; it is your campaign, after all.

Stephen Carter  
Cleveland OH

I would like to tell all you AD&D game experts out there about something that is giving me trouble. You see, I am a player, and have been for about three years (I'm only a teen). I fell in love with the game the second I started (as a 1st-level wizard with a 13 intelligence). Then my parents kicked me off Prodigy (where I played over the modem) because I was running up a huge phone bill. I despaired for about a year until I started reading some of these magazines and saw that you didn't have to play over the modem. Unfortunately, when I walked into school and asked around for a gaming group (or club) I found that no one in Wading River had even heard of the game. Once again I despaired until I asked some friends if they knew anyone who played. They didn't, but after I coerced them into playing a quick made-up game with me, they started to play themselves. I became the DM (I was the only one who knew anything about the game) and we started to play. Or maybe I should say, tried to play.

Since I had played on the modem I had no idea of what I should do. I went out and bought the Players' Handbook and DUNGEON MASTER® *Guide*. They helped greatly, but now I see that they are just not enough. I have the *The Tome of Magic*, the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome, the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting and the FORGOTTEN REALMS *Atlas and Player's Guide*. I have PHBR 1, 2, 4, and 5. I am now trying desperately to start a campaign in this setting. Unfortunately, I am just not a DM (yet). I have a little creativity, but not enough to get the players to like the game enough to really *want* to play. I

almost drag them along with my pure love for this game.

Well, now that you know my life story, let me get down to my problem. I was wondering if anyone can give me tips on how a DM becomes a DM. I have played in one adventure in my entire life (on Prodigy, with no access to any rulebooks) and now I am supposed to become a DM. I am sending out a plea to anyone who has any idea of what it is like to be a DM. What are your favorite house rules, how do you make it fun for the players, how do you make sure that in the THACO system they can't figure out magical item pluses just by rolling the dice to hit a monster? How do you make dungeons creep and crawl? How do you make cities bustle? And most importantly, how *do you teach players how to roleplay their characters?*

Usually my players are just too embarrassed to do anything but say, "My character walks up to the man and says, 'Hi, where's the temple?'" Then I respond with, "Well, it's up about two street turns." They reach the temple and heal (by just saying, "Are we healed yet?") and then walk back to the inn. I give them a description of the inn with its patrons and the like, but instead of role-playing and buying a drink they just say that they get the point.

DMs who play the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign: I would especially like to know your house rules since they might have to do with the actual Realms campaign. Thanks in advance for giving me your insights on my problem.

Mike Clair  
Woodchuck Hollow Lane  
Wading River, NY

When starting a new campaign, players—especially new and inexperienced players—are often disoriented by their characters' hometown, a place they have supposedly lived in for 16 to 18 years! Even with a briefing and packets of information (as suggested by Eric Noah in his article "Right from the Start," issue #208) the players often aren't confident when moving around town.

To ease them into the process their hometown can be loosely modeled on the players' own world. If the players are over 18 (21 for American readers), they probably frequent a pub. This pub can easily be converted to a low-beamed tavern, with suitable changes such as the doorman becoming a retired fighter. The barmaid becomes a good-natured halfling and regulars become the usual assortment of humans and demihumans, each with quirks that make them familiar yet sufficiently distinct. PCs would also have a better idea about who to approach for information since they already have an insight into each NPC's personality and fields of expertise, just as if the PCs had known them for years.

Other pubs can be involved, those with a reputation for richer clients may become

the "regular" for the Mayor, merchants, and snobby fighters, such as the cavaliers or the royal bodyguard, who wouldn't want to be seen with the "great unwashed". On the other hand, pubs with a seedier reputation could become the local thieves' den, a place to find contacts with the criminal underworld or to hire thugs and assassins.

Local buildings could also feature. The townhall becomes the local seat of power for the mayor or, if the PCs live in a wealthy city, the court of a baron or even the king. Most towns also have a central church. This becomes the basis for a temple dedicated to the area's major deity. Other, less central, churches are transformed into the site of more specialized temples, for example, the temple may be deemed to be in the elf quarter and therefore it would be dedicated to a god suitable to the surrounding populace.

Lastly, unusual constructions can be incorporated. A nearby ruin can become part of the locale's history, as well as a possible site for ghosts that must be laid to rest by adventuring clerics. Clock towers are perfect for a wizard's residence (just replace the clock face with a large telescope that points to the heavens). Maybe a society has its own meeting hall; in Britain Masonic lodges are relatively common and are easily changed into the base of a secret society, either benevolent or malign, that needs to be investigated at the request of a mysterious stranger. The commonplace can be adapted to fit into a fantasy context, and with a little further thought your town can be changed to fit a science fiction setting. Even elements from the players' favorite films can be incorporated, Watt Dabney from *Jabberwocky* or Inigo Montoya from *The Princess Bride* have both appeared in recent adventures in my campaign, as have characters from *Highlander*.

All these things make a town seem familiar and help the players' integration to role-playing seem less of a shock. As a result, players can concentrate more on developing their inter-character relationships, and they can advance in the campaign with an idea of where to go for help.

Philip Crawley  
Darlington, England

I play a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, and my problem is that my players are simply invincible. This is partially my fault, since I handed out a 1d100 hp damage sword and some 50% magic resistance armor to the party's fighter. This was not too much of a problem, as I simply invented very strong monsters and later simply took these amazing artifacts away. But the problem is that the players have found a way around almost every situation and I have no logical reason to disallow these things.

For example, the paladin has acquired a powerful mage, whom he has paid vast amounts of money to make potions to

*Telgrin gave the big knight a contemptuous glance. A dim light flickered momentarily from within the crystal sphere atop his staff, and he made a small gesture—really only a fluttering of two fingers.*

*Something happened then, but Alexander was not sure what it was. It appeared that the air itself rippled about Telgrin in some obscure and indefinable way, then gathered itself into a peaked vee of distortion, which flew across the room and struck Brian full in the chest. The knight gave a choked cry of alarm, as he was thrown high into the air and hard into the wall behind him. For an instant he appeared to be pinned there, several feet off the ground. Then the force that held him relented, and he fell heavily to the floor. He groaned, curled himself into a ball, and did not move again.*

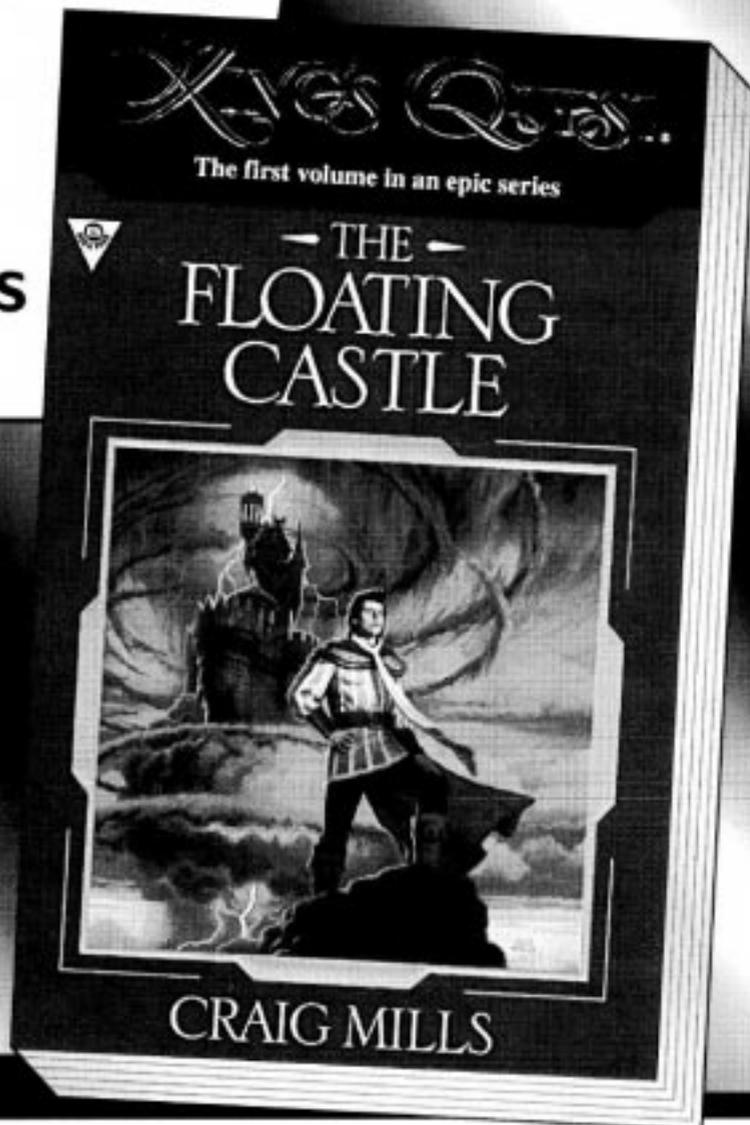
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raise all his ability scores to 18. The wizard is having a field day with his *wish* spell. When his Strength gets low he wishes to be as strong as a titan (Strength 25) and after aging he wishes to be younger. He has simply wished to ignore the negative effects of magical spells and items, so he can ignore the *wishes* spell's downsides entirely. And death is hardly meaningful for a party with a cleric who is *resurrecting* people every day, with *wishes* on hand for those who fail survival checks.

I would like to know if other DMs have advice or suffer from this themselves. The MC monsters are simply too weak for PCs able to deal out 32d8 hp damage with a single *Abi-Dalzim's horrid wilting* or to stand firm against monsters such as greater mummies casting out *creeping dooms* and death knights wielding *swords of life-stealing*.

I would also like to know if a DM is meant to design his own items and artifacts, as I cannot find anything in the rule books about this subject. After a few false starts (the infamous 1d100 sword), I have designed many spells, items, and monsters that have given us all a good session, and was wondering if this was, in fact, an intended practice!

Joe Walker  
United Kingdom  
Ω

## Play With Me

Continued from page 8

worlds we played in by probing and asking.

None of us knew that September would be dead little more than a year later, the cancer that killed her already eating away at her, inside. Like all first loves, she'll live forever, laughing, in memory.

I still try to DM the way she did, all these years later, though I've accepted the fact that I'll never have September's looks. I've tried to hold on to what we had, though: love, honor, and friendship.

Love is what the Realms has always been about; not just grand romantic passion, but simple, decent folk doing kind and noble things for others, up to and including laying down their lives for their friends.

As for honor, I still feel—project after project—that it's an honor to share "my" world and dreams with gamers everywhere. I am, and will always be, grateful to TSR for doing so, from the pages of DRAGON® Magazine #30 onward.

And that leaves us with friendship. The most precious thing the Realms have given me are good and true friends, from Dave, Ken, and Tim to Victor, Andrew, John (the splendid roleplayer), Ian (the first Lore Lord of the Realms), Jim, Anita, and Cathy of my stalwart players; to creative folks who've shaped the Realms with me: Jeff Grubb, Steve Schend, Rob King, Karen Boomgraden, and

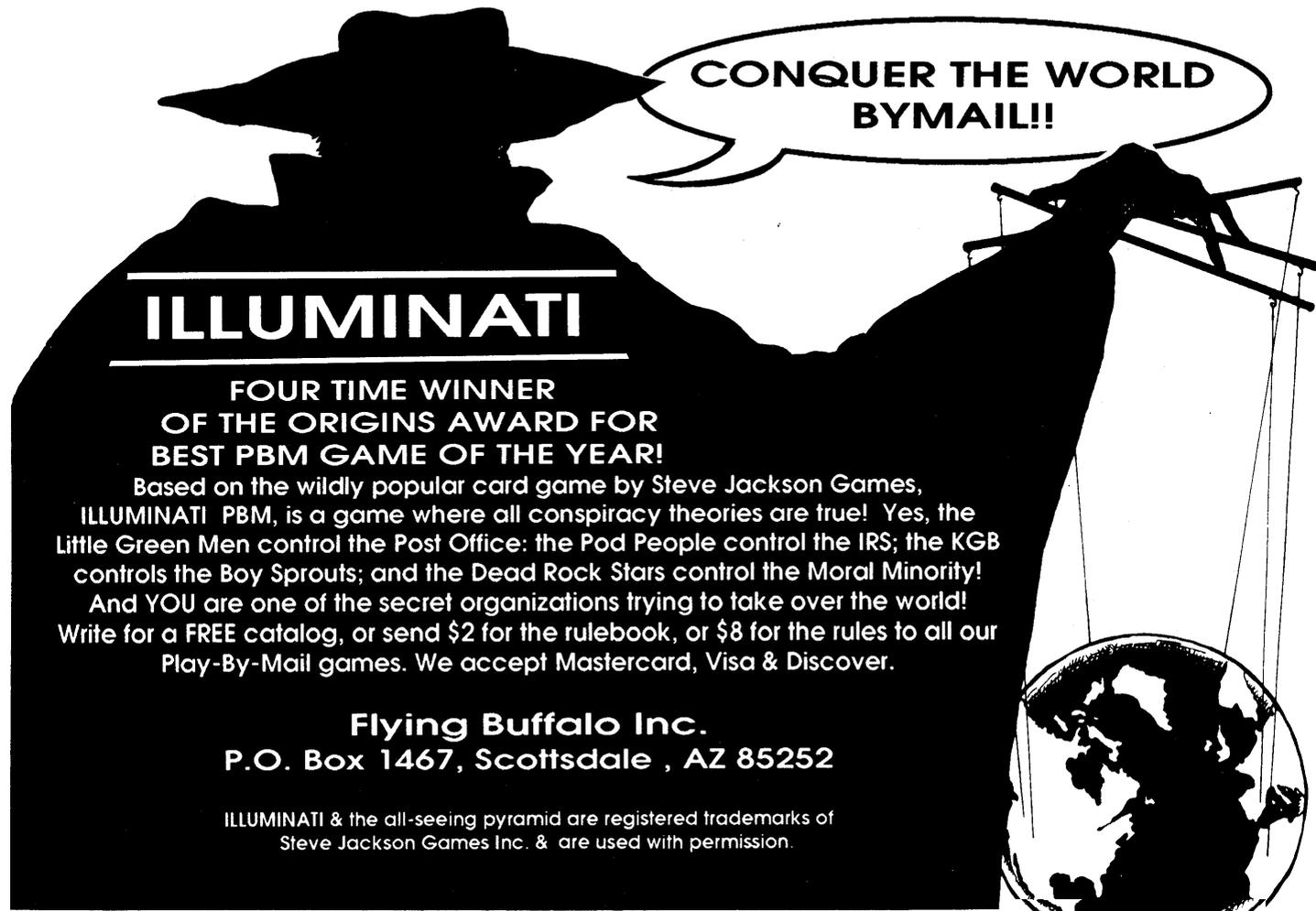
Julia Martin (among many, many folks at TSR), and fellow scribes Bob Salvatore and Elaine Cunningham; to the gaming friends I've met and made all over the world, from "Uncle" Wes, Grant, Leslie, Craig, and Nicole in Australia (and hello to all at Mack Campbell's Bookshop in Toowoomba!), to Chris and Leo in Sweden, to Chris and Lisa in Dallas, to Steve and Jenny in Peterborough, to Mike and Roxy in Pennsylvania, to Erica in Co-bourg, to Terry, Steve, Helen, Lori and Doug in Houston, to Alex, Cheryl, and Merle in Toronto. The list can go on for pages. You have all made my life brighter, and you are why I keep on writing instead of being the (richer) doctor or lawyer my folks wanted me to be.

Besides, for me, it's become a duty: *someone* has to be Elminster . . . and I've mastered the bawdy banter.

And if I sometimes get tears in my eyes when I'm running yet another Realmsplay session, it's because something has sent me back to that sun-dappled fern bower under the trees, and September's clear voice calling, "Swords bright!" in farewell, as she started her walk back to the bus.

I'll never see her again, but in the Realms, I can meet her every day. Farewell, September—and well met! Ω

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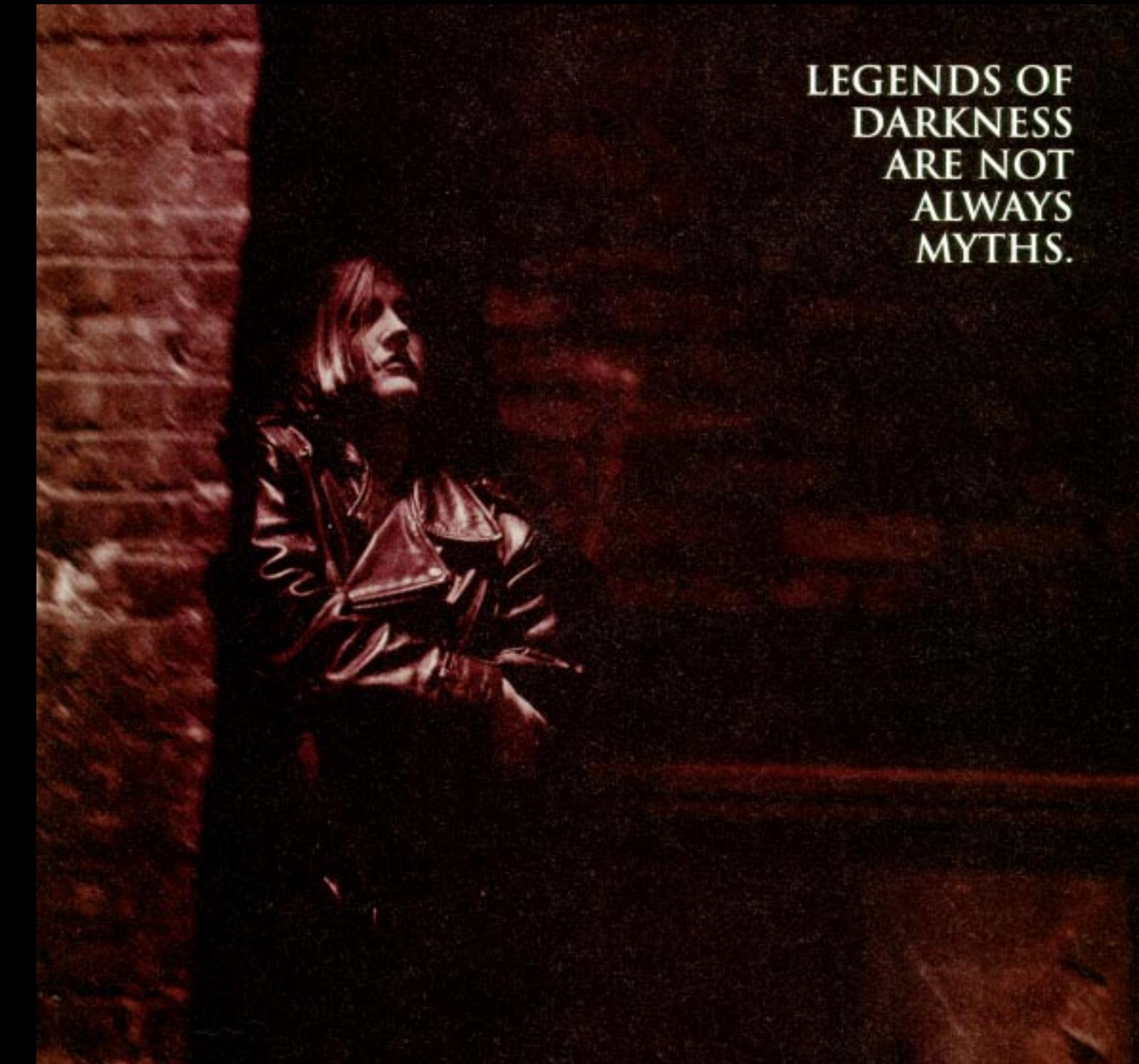
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# Magic Resistance, Step by Step

by Skip Williams

If you're having trouble deciding how magic resistance ought to work, don't worry, you're in good company. Magic resistance is widely misunderstood, and has been giving DMs fits since it was introduced back in the original D&D® game.

The first version of the game was a set of three slim booklets in a nondescript brown box. One of the monsters included in the set was the balrog, which had a 75% chance to resist spells cast at it. At the time, no other monster in the game had that ability and DMs didn't quite know what to do with it. Most people treated the balrog's magic resistance as a special saving throw, rolling 1d100 instead of 1d20 to see if a spell cast at a balrog worked or not. Of course, this meant that a balrog that successfully resisted a *fireball* still suffered half damage from the blast. Eventually, however, word got out that magic resistance was something that a creature enjoyed in addition to a saving throw, and that successful resistance made the creature immune to the spell.

These days, the sheer diversity of magic in the AD&D® game makes adjudicating magic resistance something of an art, but it's an art anyone can master.

## The Steps

No matter what the circumstances, you can decide how magic resistance works by following three basic steps:

**Step One:** Decide if the magical effect can be subject to magic resistance at all. Only spells and spell-like abilities from creatures and magical devices are subject to magic resistance. Breath weapons, gaze weapons, special attacks (such as disease, energy drain, or paralysis), magical combat bonuses, and psionics are not. A fear effect from rod of lordly might is subject to magic resistance, because it is a spell-like effect. The rods combat bonuses (such as the +2 bonus from the rod's mace form) are not.

**Step Two:** Decide if magic affects the resistant creature directly. Magic resistance has no effect unless the energy created or released by the magic actually goes to work on the resistant creature. If the magic acts on anything else (the air, the ground, the room's light) and the creature is affected as a consequence, there is no

magic resistance roll.

Creatures can be harmed by a spell without being directly affected. For example, a *continual light spell*, harms a drow elf because drow are sensitive to light and suffer considerable penalties when exposed to it. *Continual light*, however, usually is cast on the area containing the drow, making it bright, not on the drow itself. So, the effect is indirect.

**Step Three:** Decide what happens to the magic if a magic resistance roll is called for and it succeeds. The result of a successful roll depends on the type of magic involved. For purposes of magic resistance, we'll split magic into just four types. (See Chapter 9 of the *Players Handbook* for details):

*Individually targeted spells*, which are completely negated if the resistance roll succeeds.

*Area-effect spells*, which have no effect on the resistant creature if the resistance roll succeeds, but are not negated. Other creatures and objects within the area of effect are still subject to the spell.

*In-place spells*, which collapse and cease to exist if the resistance roll succeeds.

*Permanent spells*, which have no effect on the resistant creature if the resistance roll succeeds, but are not negated. The permanent spell continues to function and other creatures within the area of effect remain subject to the spell.

There, now you know everything you need to know about magic resistance.

## Troubleshooting

Having problems? Here are the difficulties most commonly encountered at each step:

**Step One:** The most frequent problem here is deciding what is a spell or spell-like effect and what isn't. All spells are potentially subject to magic resistance. If the user memorizes it and casts it, it's a spell. Beyond that, anything that works like a spell is also subject to magic resistance. Use your common sense. Does the effect in question *seem* spell-like? If so, it probably is. (Sometimes it pays to get literal. If a monster's description contains a list of spell-like abilities, then everything in the list is spell-like.)

A creature can have some abilities that are subject to magic resistance and some

that are not. For example, an androsphinx's priest spells are subject to magic resistance, but its roar is not (it's more like a breath weapon than a spell). An aboleth's enslavement power is subject to magic resistance, but its mucous cloud is not (the cloud is produced in the aboleth's body). A cleric's spells are subject to magic resistance, but the character's undead turning ability is not (unlike a spell, undead turning works only under certain specific conditions).

**Step Two:** The chief difficulty here usually is deciding whether the effect in question actually works directly on the target. Many effects are not subject to magic resistance because they are indirect. The easiest way to decide if an effect is direct or indirect is to consider the school of magic involved.

*Evocations:* These spells are almost always subject to magic resistance. If an evocation spell inflicts damage, it is either an individually targeted spell or an area effect like *ice storm*, depending on the spell.

Wall spells are in-place effects. They are subject to magic resistance if they inflict damage, entrap, or restrict movement.

*Enchantments/Charms:* These are almost always subject to magic resistance and are treated as individually targeted effects unless the spell enchants an object that is then employed against a creature—these are indirect spells. An *enchanted weapon* spell, for example, is never subject to magic resistance. Enchantment/charms that effect several creatures simultaneously are treated as individually targeted effects, but only the portion targeted at a resistant creature can be negated.

*Conjurations/Summonings:* These are almost never subject to magic resistance unless the spell conjures some form or energy, such as a *power word*, *stun* or a *prismatic spray*. The former is an individually targeted effect, the latter is an area effect. Spells that summon creatures are never subject to magic resistance. A few conjurations fall into a gray area. *Evard's black tentacles*, for example, can be treated as a summoned creature (and therefore not subject to magic resistance) or as an in-place effect. Pick one and then stick with your choice.

*Abjurations:* These are sometimes subject to magic resistance. The target crea-

ture must be harmed, changed, or restricted in some manner. Perception changes, such as non-detection, don't count.

*Illusions:* These spells are almost never subject to magic resistance. Illusions that inflict a direct attack, such as *phantasmal killer* or *blindness*, are exceptions.

*Alterations:* These usually are subject to magic resistance, especially if they transform the target creature. Alteration spells are not subject to magic resistance if they are targeted on a point in space instead of a creature. *Transmute rock to mud* and *wizard eye* change a creature's surroundings, not the creature itself, and are never subject to magic resistance.

*Divinations:* These do not affect creatures directly and are not subject to magic resistance, even though what they reveal about a creature might be very damaging.

*Necromancy:* Most of these spells alter the target creature's life force and are subject to magic resistance. Necromancy spells that summon creatures, such as *summon shadow*, or detect creatures, such as *detect undead*, are not subject to magic resistance.

**Step Three:** This step usually doesn't give people much trouble, but beware of individually targeted effects masquerading as area effects. Spells such as *magic missile*, *hold person*, *hold monster*, and *slow* affect several creatures within a limited area. Nevertheless, they are individually targeted spells, though a successful resistance roll still applies only to the portion of the spell directed at the resistant creature.

Area effects are not negated by a successful resistance roll. A baatezu caught in a *lightning bolt* while crossing a bridge over a bottomless pit can avoid the spell's effects, but the bridge can't.

Wall spells are in-place effects (unless they are permanent); if a resistance roll succeeds against a nonpermanent wall, the whole wall collapses. This can be quite terrifying for a mage who *thought* he was safe and sound.

#### Miscellaneous Notes

A magic-resistant creature's own abilities, spells, and magical items always work normally; magic resistance never interferes with magic that comes *from* the resistant creature. Also, magic resistance extends to a creature's items. If its resist-

ance succeeds, the creature's items are protected, too. Magic resistance can be voluntarily lowered whenever the resistant creature wishes. Doing so takes some concentration, and cannot be done while the creature takes any action other than moving at half normal speed. Once resistance is lowered, every spell directed at the creature that round works normally.

Magic resistance works in addition to a saving throw, if the resistance roll fails, the creature is entitled to a saving throw (if one applies). A creature that has voluntarily lowered its resistance fails its resistance roll automatically, but it still gains any saving throw it normally would be entitled to.

A special note about wall spells: If (like me) you're uncomfortable with the thought of magic resistant creatures running around collapsing wall spells, I suggest that you treat all wall spells as permanent effects. Magic resistant creatures can walk through them if their resistance rolls succeed, but the wall does not collapse. If the resistance roll fails, the creature cannot try to penetrate the wall again that day.

Ω

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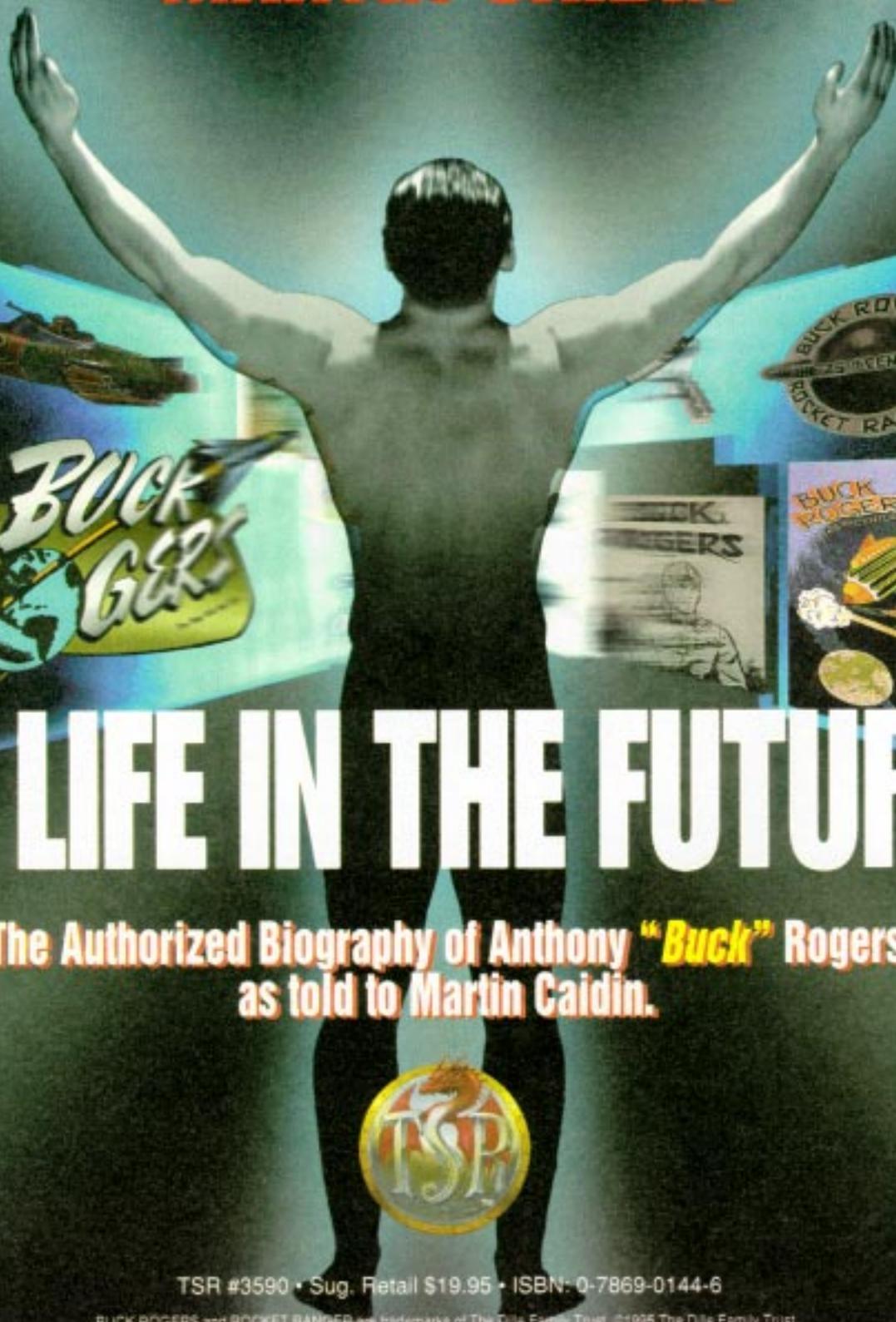
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## Second-Class Citizen

This month we're going to look at a pair of Mac games—you know that other computer platform. Of course, as Crusty Old Ken Rolston (who looks at everything on a Mac) knows, the Mac is a perfectly fine platform that is vastly under-appreciated by the general masses of humanity. Of course, Ken would say this but he's on vacation this month, so that just leaves Paul and Zeb to be crusty this time. (*All right, this is a feeble attempt to prove that we really are broad-minded and liberal and not just oppressive PC snobs.*)

However, the sad fact for those Mac fans in the world, is that there just aren't as many games for their machines. Doing a little investigative reporting, I (Zeb) turned and asked Paul, and a bunch o' other folks (who know more about Macs than human beings with real lives ever want to know) just why there are so few Mac games compared to PC games. Here's what they said.

*PCs are evil.* There are lots more of them in the world and therefore lots of people available to sell games to.

*PCs are evil.* IBM chose to have an "open architecture" which allowed lots of people to monkey around with everything inside the box, and in the code, and create customized widgets to make their games just so, which is why it's impossible to load the same game your friend has on your machine without a degree from PC University.

*PCs are evil.* PCs use DOS. DOS is clunky, dumb, and not real complicated. DOS is easier to learn and manipulate than System Whatever, which the Apple people don't want you monkeying with anyway because it's a "closed architecture."

Enough of this. On with the reviews.

### Jump Raven

A Review by Paul Murphy  
for Macintosh

A Paramount Interactive CD-ROM  
Requirements: Color monitor, CD-ROM drive, 8 MB RAM (6 MB free)

#### Apology

*Let me just say that I'm in a bad mood. It happens, even to the best of us. When you're in a bad mood, you probably do stuff you regret later, like drive too fast on the highway, or say something you don't mean to a co-worker. When I'm in a bad mood, I tear apart a game I'm reviewing.*

*So, I'd like to apologize, right now, to the creators of Jump Raven. I'm in a bad mood and I'm gonna savage your game. I'm sure I'll feel bad about it tomorrow, if that's any consolation.*

# EYE OF THE MONITOR



Cosmology of Kyoto (Yanoelectric)

#### Overview

*Jump Raven* is an SF game set in New York City, sometime in the next century. You are a mercenary. You ride around in a cool, high-tech hovercraft, armed with a variety of neat weaponry. You and your co-pilot wander the city, blowing the heck out of evil skinhead eco-terrorists, rescuing pods containing an arkload of genetic material. Sounds interesting, eh?

It should be. The premise has everything you might want in a fun, violent game: greasy punk villains, a politically-correct cause, a fast car (hover-car, that is), and

loads and loads of firepower. When I opened this baby up, I was really looking forward to murdering hordes of mohawk-topped bad-guys. The opening sequence was up to specs, too.

#### Opening Sequence

Let's get one thing straight, right up front: despite everything you might have heard, I am *not* automatically against five-minute-plus opening sequences to simple arcade games, complete with complex story-lines, loads of extraneous characters, and really, really expensive animation and special-

effects. If done right, they can add a lot to the game.

*Jump Raven's* opening sequence was done right. We get to fly around a cool-looking Manhattan, see really crass advertisements—for Bazooka Hut and Mucus-Off, among others—and generally have a good time. The music is cool, the animation impressive, and the credits are no more than usually offensive.

My one objection to the opening sequence is that we're not told right up front how to skip it. You can pound on the Escape, Delete or Enter keys all you like, click the mouse-button till you're blue in the face, and nothing happens. Later on, you learn that you can hit Ctrl- (control and period simultaneously) to get through any annoying sequences, but by then you've irretrievably lost five minutes of your life reading slow-roiling credits.

By the time the game started, I was in a bad mood already.

## Briefing

Once you've survived the credits, you get to enjoy the briefing. A lovable old character with some kind of pet rodent on his neck tells you what's up, helps you pick a co-pilot, and introduces you to the Weapons Lady.

It's not too bad, really. Once again, the animation's pretty good (in the faces, only the eyes and mouth are animated while the rest of the head and torso are still, harking back to the old, innocent days of cheap TV animation). The writers had some fun with this stuff: the characters are fairly neat, and the conversations are fun as well. It all took just a little too long for me—but maybe that's just 'cuz I was already in a bad mood.

In any case, you'll eventually get through the briefing, clamber aboard your machine, and head off into the Bronx (sorry!) on your first mission.

## How it Looks

*Jump Raven* has a kinda neat-looking interface.

The center of the screen is the pseudo-three-dimensional display. Your hovercraft is in the foreground. It is surrounded by a futuristic Bronx (sorry!), complete with tall, good-looking buildings, roads laid out in a rigid grid pattern, and no garbage at all. Not as accurate as you might like, but still functional and attractive.

The top left corner of the screen contains a video monitor, where your co-pilot and some other characters tell you stuff. Below that is a panel with three buttons: Navigation, Hover, and Weapons. Here you assign your co-pilot control over one or more systems.

The bottom edge of the screen is the weapons display, showing your various weapon-systems: laser, rocket, missile, bombs, etc. You click on a picture to activate that system.

The right side of the screen displays a

bunch of other info: an ammo status board and a directional display for finding enemies, pods, repair docks, fuel trucks, and so forth.

As I said above, this display is basically pretty and functional. Kudos to the screen-design guys.

## How it Works

Okay, you're sitting there in the Bronx, right? Now what? First, you assign your co-pilot a job or two: weapons (firing the guns), navigation (steering the vehicle), and/or hover (hovering).

So naturally, right at the start, you're teed-off: the game hasn't even started yet and you've got to give up control of an important system to an NPC. Why? Poor game design is why. The designers couldn't be bothered to design a vehicle simple enough for you to control in its entirety: to fly the damn *Raven*, you require the assistance of somebody else. How irritating.

Anyway, you look over the choices to see what you're gonna give to the co-pilot. You naturally decide to hold onto weapons because blowing up stuff is what you're here for; similarly, you want to hold on to navigation, because driving is fun. So the co-pilot gets hover.

Now you're ready for combat. You click on the lasers icon, because it's all the way to the right and you have no idea what any of the weapons do anyway, and it's a fine place to start. Eventually, little red blobs appear on your directional finder, announcing the impending arrival of bad guys. You zoom toward them, using your keyboard to turn left and right and go forward. Soon little sprites appear in front of you. You put your cursor on 'em and when you click the mouse-button, green laser-rays shoot out from your craft.

## Blowing Up Stuff

Imagine this: You put the cursor on a stationary sprite ahead of your craft and press the button. And you miss. Hmmm, you think. Wonder why I missed? So you press the button two or three dozen more times, keeping the cursor firmly on-target. And you still miss. This is unfortunate. You say a couple of bad words.

Eventually, through trial and error, you discover that, in order to hit something, you must place your cursor *above* the target! Always—even if you're not moving and your target's not moving. It's just like Robocop after he's shot up by the entire Detroit police force: your targeting system is always off!

Naturally, you respond by hurling the CD across the room, through a waiting open window. Then, remembering that you're on deadline with this stupid review, you go outside, brush off the CD, and restart.

Meanwhile, all sorts of baddies are ambling around the screen, moving toward you, shooting you, moving away in a sort

of Brownian motion. You get bored with the laser, and switch to other weapon systems. They all seem to do something, you're not sure exactly what. The rockets make a nice "Spang" noise when they hit; the missiles seem to blow up stuff real good, but have virtually zero accuracy—that is, I haven't yet figured out where to put the cursor to make them hit.

Then there are these jeep-like things, see? They stay on the ground, and shoot at you with machine-guns or something. You shoot back at them with your laser, and find to your chagrin that you can't hit them at all, no matter where you aim. So you switch to rockets, missiles, etc. . . . nothing works.

Finally, you remember that the weapons-system all the way to the right, the bombs, is specifically designed for ground targets! Phew! So you switch to the bombs to take out the pesky jeeps. And you can't hit 'em for beans. Ever. You blow up dozens of bombs, and the jeeps stay there, grinning evilly at you. Frustrated some more, you leave the area and go blow up more flying guys.

Eventually, you zoom around the city, rescuing some pods and blowing up some flying things, both of which give you a nice cash bonus. But, at the same time, you're taking damage. Weapons systems go out, you run out of fuel and ammo, and so on. A variety of repair-replenishment vehicles show up, you dock with 'em, and get fixed and stuff—if you can afford it.

Sooner or later, though, you'll run out of money before clearing the Bronx of villains and rescuing all the pods. Then the game is over. If you're on deadline, you restart and try again. If you're a consumer, you take it back to your software store and demand a refund.

## Other Stuff

*Reward Screens:* How the heck should I know? I played this game for two bloody days and was never able to clear the Bronx! Maybe the reward screens are really cool; you'll have to ask someone else. (Incidentally, this is another graphic game-design failure: you should *always* give the customer an easy early victory. This sucks him into the game, and tricks him into putting up with future bad design decisions . . .)

*Music:* Very well done indeed. You're given four different rock styles to choose from (excellent decision!); each is good. Well done.

*Installation and Stuff* (Remembering that I'm working from the Mac here): Not bad. You're given three versions of the operating system, each of which requires a different amount of RAM. Thus, you can load the version that'll work best on your machine. Cool.

*Help:* This robot guy gives you assistance when you click on the help button. He's cool, and he fully explains all of the buttons and screen areas and stuff. He doesn't

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provide strategic or tactical assistance, though, so don't ask him.

## Conclusion

*Jump Raven* just ticks me off, see? As a grizzled veteran crusty old game-designer, I'm fully aware of how much time, trouble, blood, sweat, toil and tears went into this game. Dozens of highly-skilled folks—programmers, animators, artists, designers, musicians, etc.—busted their butts for months and months to make it. Yet it's a failure. Once again, a computer CD-ROM game fails, because the producers forgot that the most important part of a game is *game-play*.

I don't care how good a game looks or sounds, how cool the animation and special-effects are, how easy it is to load or save: if it isn't any fun to play, it's a failure. So there.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go take a couple of aspirin and lie down with an icepack on my head until the next review. See you.

## Cosmology of Kyoto

Reviewed by David "Zeb" Cook

Supervised by Dr. Kazuhiko Komatsu, associate professor of anthropology, Osaka University for Macintosh

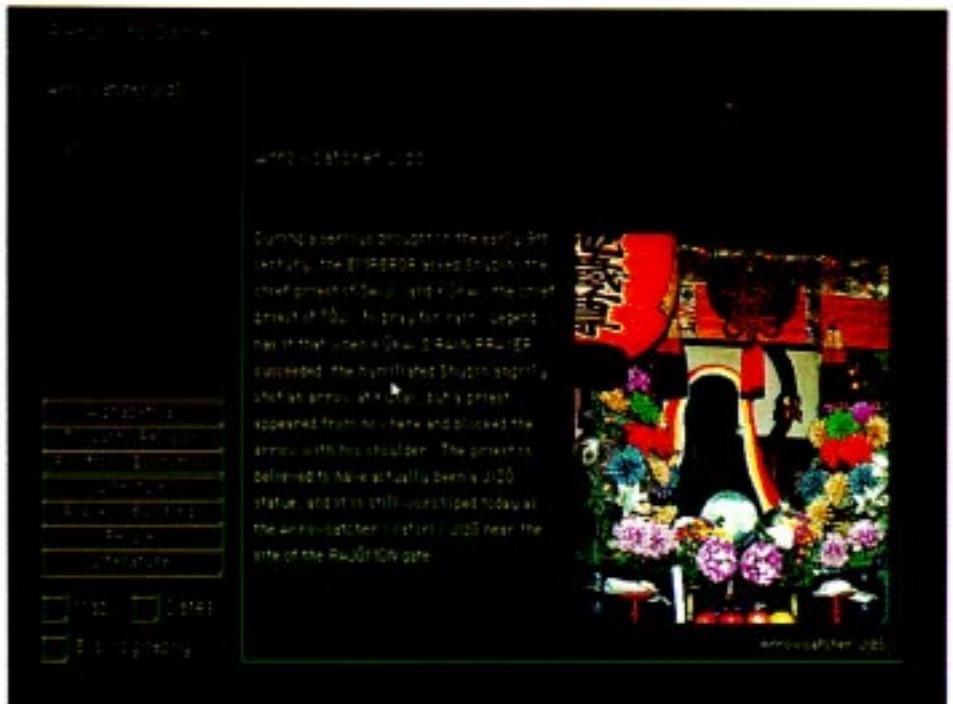
Requirements: System 6.07 or later, Quick-time 1.5 or later, 4 MB RAM, 13" color monitor, CD-ROM, KanjiTalk (optional)

In the ancient days of Japan, the world was more than just the world of night and day or work and rest. It wasn't enough for a peasant to rise with the sun and work all day or a nobleman to remember all the correct forms of etiquette needed survive in the court. These simple rituals were not enough. Safety and success required an intimate understanding of the traditions and taboos of the other world—the world of the spirits . . .

*Wait a minute! What is this? Does DRAGON magazine share office space with the Journal of Asian Studies? Did somebody switch the manuscripts? Is some baffled professor about to lecture his Comparative Religions of the Pacific Rim class in "101 Ways to Make a Better NPC"? Wouldn't you like to be there when he did?*

Well, sorry, no such luck. *Cosmology of Kyoto* is a Mac title from Japan. Part game, part history lesson, and part software toy, *Cosmology of Kyoto* is a unique gaming experience. Those looking for an adventure game unlike any they've ever seen might want to take a look at this CD-ROM, because *Cosmology of Kyoto* is unlike anything else out there.

Consider the typical adventure game: In the *Typical Adventure Game*™, the standard by which all others are measured, your goal is to go out there defeat everything in sight and not get killed. In *Cosmology* your goal is to get killed—over and over and over again. In the typical adven-



Cosmology of Kyoto (Yanoelectric)

ture game, you have encounters with hideous monsters and vile wizards. In *Cosmology* you learn Buddhist rituals, tryst with secret lovers, and avoid shape-changing foxes. In other adventure games you're an apprentice wizard, a brave hero, or an exceptional person put to the test. In *Cosmology* you're just an ordinary person—in fact you don't even have a name or a bag of special skills. Other adventure games boast of their varied locales, creative worlds, full animations, and rich graphics. *Cosmology's* stories, taken from history and folklore, are told through cartoon-like characters brought to life with the same realism as the animations in a Monty Python episode.

In fact, there's a lot not to like about *Cosmology*. The interaction is limited. It's hard to know just what you're supposed to do to "win" the game. Worst of all, the CD-ROM load times are appallingly long (though this is in part the fault of the machine). In the time it takes to change screens, you could sometimes brew a cup of coffee.

So what makes this game so appealing? Clear and away, it's the basic concept. *Cosmology of Kyoto* is both a game and a cultural lesson all at once. Now, as the designer of *Oriental Adventures* for the AD&D® system, I'll admit a certain fascination with the Far East, but what other game says that winning is to attain the Pure Land of Buddhist belief—a place you can only reach by dying? Of course, if you die with too much karma, you're just as likely to be reappear in one of the Hells or—my favorite—be reborn as a dog. (The screen goes to black and white and about the only thing you hear is yourself whimpering.)

The encounters you have are equally fascinating. There's not much of a story to follow, so you don't spend a lot of time running from place to place collecting this cookie to give to that monster. However, you meet a lot of people and see a lot of strange things and they're all *true!* Well, sort of. All the encounters are taken from the history, folklore, and legend of Kyoto in 1,000 AD. At the time, Kyoto was the capital city of Japan, home of the emperor and his court. Life in Kyoto ranged from the pinnacle of refined culture to the meanest beggars in the streets. Still, as the slim booklet makes abundantly clear, a major concern of life in Kyoto was dealing not just with your next-door neighbor, but also with the immense collection of spirits, ghosts, goblins, and demons that wanted to inflict harm on the city, its people, or the emperor. Many of the encounters retell familiar tales from Japanese folklore, and it's fascinating to match your own knowledge against the discoveries you make. Many of the encounters are completely cryptic: What can you make of the tea-kettle spirit that suddenly runs into the center of the road and buries itself before your eyes? Or the swath of demon footprints that just as suddenly appear out of nowhere? Or—and this is truly choice—the beautiful woman who lures you into the woods only to change into a fox and spray you with its . . . well, the screen goes yellow at that point.

Fortunately, you're not left adrift. The other part of *Cosmology* is the Encyclopedia. Every encounter, every building you can enter, even every street you can walk down has place in the Encyclopedia. For each entry, a snippet of the history, story, or culture relates to the game, and pro-

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Cosmology of Kyoto (Yanoelectric)

vides a picture and links to other topics. Wondering about the story behind those footprints that just appeared? Look it up if you're curious. If you are sent to the Hell of Hungry Ghosts, you can switch to the Encyclopedia and find out just what tortures await you (which you'll get to see on-screen later) and what kinds of sinners made their way there. From there you could learn about the other hells or the concept of reincarnation. Or you could go back to the game. In fact, the Encyclopedia can be used entirely by itself, without ever opening the game. The CD-ROM can even be used for aspiring speakers of Japanese, since all the encounters have digitized speech, all in Japanese. For the rest of us, *Cosmology* shows English translations of everything that is said.

*Cosmology of Kyoto* is frustrating, flawed, and fascinating. The play is slow and deliberate, sometimes outright plodding. Through large parts of the game, players may feel lost and aimless. Interaction is often limited to watching little stories unfold. Accessing screens isn't always logical or easy. Throughout it all, though, the wonder of the setting and its approach outweighs these irritations. There are too many fascinating things to discover, from haunted houses to backgammon-playing demons.

Ultimately, *Cosmology of Kyoto* is best viewed as less a game and more a software toy, one of those things you plug in and fiddle with. Once you forget about winning and indulge your curiosity, the CD-ROM's strength truly shines. There are too many little discoveries to make. You could even use it as a resource for your own role-playing game, borrowing en-

counters and background. Indeed, the ultimate would be to set a campaign in Kyoto using the CD-ROM as your game world. Almost all the material is there—the box even includes a street map of ancient Kyoto.

So look, forget about winning and explore. What's the worst that could happen to your character? You die? Reincarnation does give you a certain freedom after all.

#### Quick Notes

**Marathon:** First there was DOOM\* and it was good. And it was for the PC only. And there was much sadness. Then there was MARATHON\* and it was for the Mac. And there was much joy. MARATHON is DOOM for the Mac. Pretty much. Oh, it's got goofy-looking aliens, and hostages to rescue, and takes place on something that looks like a space station, but the same idea is there. Played solo, it just ain't DOOM, but MARATHON can network up to eight players. And we all know how easy it is to link Macs together, right? ☺

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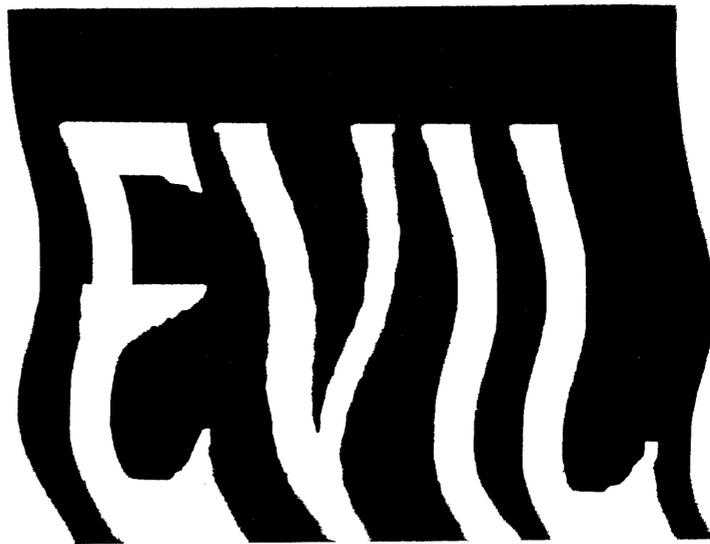
# The NATURE

by Michael T. Kuciak

How  
To  
Make  
Villains  
Really  
Mean

Of

Artwork by John C. Luck



*Morgan and his band of adventurers strode into the throne room and knelt before the wizened king.*

*"We have come in answer to your call, milord," Morgan said. "What is this blight your messenger spoke of, and who is behind it?"*

*The king raised his head and looked Morgan in the eye.*

*"An evil wizard has thrown a curse upon the land . . ." he intoned.*

*"Oh, great, another one," Morgan groaned, rolling his eyes. "What a surprise. Oh, well, what's this one's name?"*

One of the biggest keys to great adventure is a really nasty villain, one that players will go out of their way to confront and, with any luck, defeat. In too many games and adventures, however, the villain is nothing but a grocery list of powers and minions, a cardboard cut-out that the players fight because there is nothing better to do with their time.

To fire the players' interest and imagination, a good villain is in order. This villain must be vile enough that the players will want to throw a wrench in his plans even if their characters are not getting paid to do so. But how does one go about making an archvillain that the gaming group will love to hate?

The two key tools for making a genuinely despicable antagonist are fear and hate. As a species, we hate what we fear, and we fear what we hate. If you can

create a character the group is afraid of, but despises so much they will still go after him, then you have succeeded in making an outstanding villain.

## Fear

Fear is a good thing. Fear keeps the players on their toes, makes them wring their hands and worry. Real fear helps players suspend their disbelief and identify with their characters. Fear makes for good roleplay.

But fear is elusive in role-playing games. It is very hard to instill fear in players sitting around a table with their friends in a well-lit room. Getting players to scream and jump is nice, but that is just a part of fear's potential. Fear is getting players to worry about what will happen to the characters they value so much, to wonder how they will ever beat their adversary, or to fret when they cannot seem to get out of a sticky situation.

Here are some things villains can do to make your players afraid:

**Invulnerability.** A good GM makes opponents challenging, but not so tough that the players cannot defeat them. Indestructible villains lead to bored and frustrated players. Every once in a while, though, the group should meet an adversary who is very tough to beat, or who may be stopped only in a certain way. The characters may run like rabbits at first, but just watch them sit down and fiendishly plot their opponent's demise as soon

as they catch their breath.

For instance, I ran a CHAMPIONS\* campaign with a group of malicious heroes known as the Wrecking Crew. They had some tough fights, but they always stomped the bad guys in the end. It became a pattern, and anything predictable is in danger of going stale.

One day the heroes ran into a group of villains called Anselum Defilus. Anselum Defilus had fewer members than the Wrecking Crew, and the villains were only marginally more powerful. However, through complementary powers and teamwork, Anselum Defilus smoked the heroes like a cheap cigar. Twice. My players hated these villains more than anyone else, mostly because they were afraid of being beaten again. The Wrecking Crew eventually managed to beat Anselum Defilus by tracking down the individual members and pounding them when their friends weren't around to help.

Even in the case of nearly invulnerable opponents, the villain must have some flaw or secret vulnerability that allows the heroes to beat the villain; if the villain is truly indestructible, there is no point to playing. Even Smaug, the great dragon in *The Hobbit*, had a chink in his armor.

**High Intelligence and Cleverness.** How many times have you seen a monster or master villain described as a "genius," even though all he does is sit in a tower or dungeon, waiting for the PCs to come and smash the place up?

I've seen this happen much too often, and it is entirely preventable. How is the average GM supposed to run a character who is more intelligent than he is? Simple. Assume that a genius can figure out almost exactly what his opponents (the PCs) are doing at any given time.

What made Grand Admiral Thrawn of Timothy Zahn's Star Wars trilogy such a deadly opponent? An uncanny ability to predict and act on the plans of others through infallible logic and study of the art of his opponents' culture. Zahn wrote Thrawn as a genius so he didn't have to resort to goofy plots and overly-complicated plans.

High intelligence can make a party jumpy and jittery, always wondering if the master vampire has yet again been able to guess their plans and lay a trap. Just like invulnerability, though, a genius villain can become frustrating if taken too far. When the players are just about to give up, let the villain make a mistake. Even geniuses slip up. If the PCs are quick to exploit the mistake, their final plan may succeed.

**Phobias.** If the players are afraid of something in real life, use that fear to your advantage. By this I don't mean locking people in dark rooms or dumping live spiders on the gaming table. However, villains who embody or play on your players' personal fears will strike a chord.

Maybe one of your players has a fear of

snakes ("Snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?"). Send the party up against the snake cult from *Conan the Barbarian*, or the Children of Yig in *Call of Cthulhu*. If the PCs are captured, drop them all into a pit full of venomous snakes, then describe the experience in excruciating detail. I guarantee your herpephobic player won't hate any villain more than rotten snake worshippers.

Another way to play on phobias is to introduce a villain with the ability to read minds and generate illusions. Several examples exist in super hero and fantasy games, but the fear these villains engender is often expressed as "temporary damage due to system shock" or some other rules-heavy cop-out. One would imagine that an opponent with this power would be feared, but most players laugh at them because they are not played correctly. These villains can customize the fear for every member of the party and spread the hate around evenly. By really getting into the role and exploiting the players' real-life insecurities and phobias, you achieve maximum gaming impact. Play it to the hilt.

Remember to keep it tasteful, though. Some people have such strong phobias that even role-playing against the objects of their fear is too much. If you know or find out one of your players has such a strong phobia, be mature and leave it

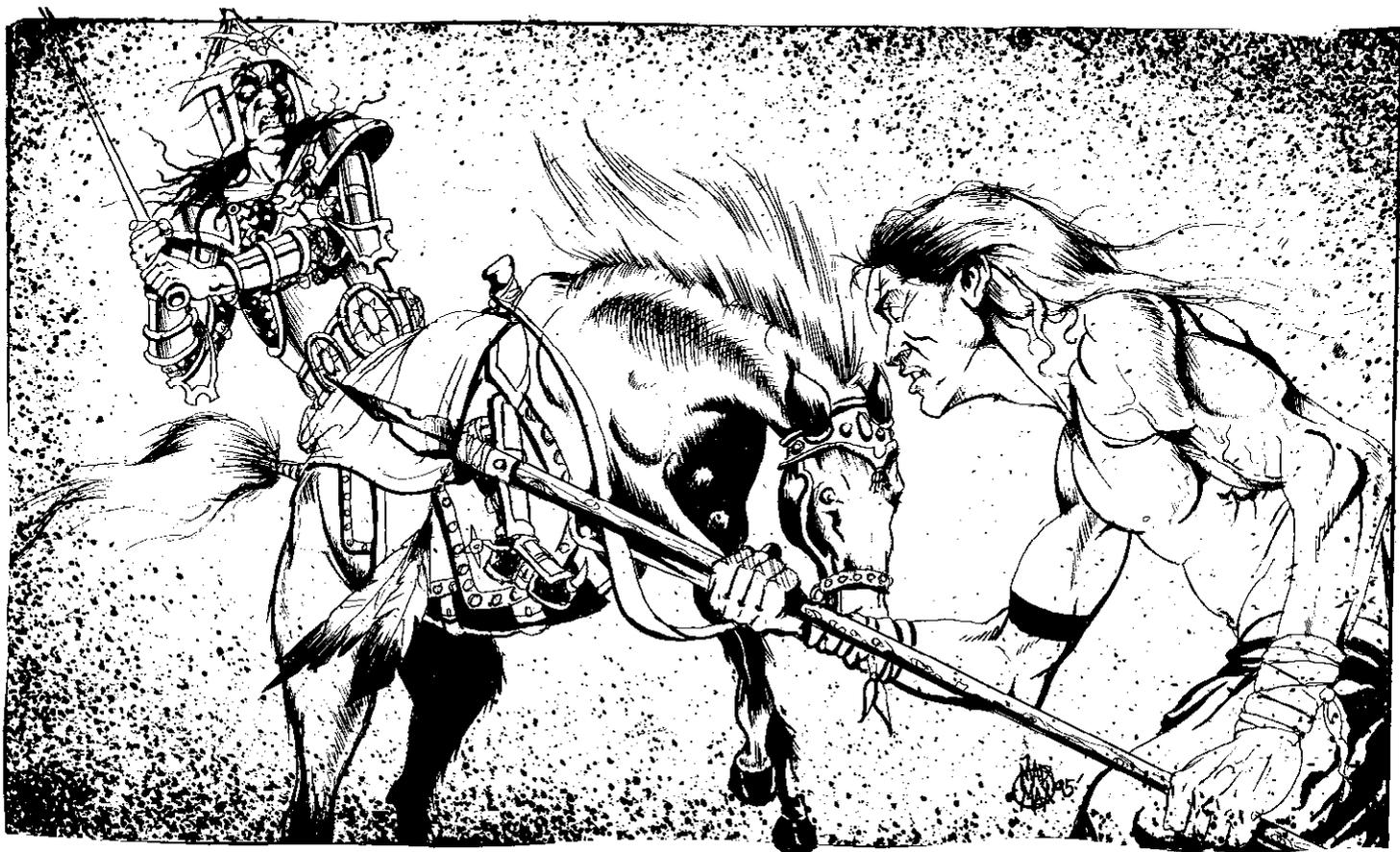
alone.

**Insanity.** Many people are afraid of insanity, and for good reason. The insane are not predictable and don't always mesh with our expectations. They live in a world of their own and play by that world's rules. In fact, it has become a cliché for villains to be described as insane.

Almost all of Batman's enemies are insane; that's why they go to Arkham Asylum instead of jail. They are dark and frightening because their thoughts and actions are unpredictable. Why are the Malkavian Kindred of White Wolf's VAMPIRE\* game and the Black Spiral Dancers of the same company's WERE-WOLF\* game so shunned and feared? Because they are one and all off their rockers.

Homicidal and sadistic impulses are evidence of insanity, not the disease itself. Take your players' crazy opponents to the outer extremes of the wild, the bizarre, the nonsensical, and the frightening. Remember, the insane follow logic just like anybody else, but it is a twisted, private logic. If the PCs can figure out what the pattern of their madness is, insanity can be a useful tool to defeating the villain.

**Friends and Power.** George Orwell's novels *Animal Farm* and *1984* are two of the most frightening books I have ever read. Political power can, in many ways,



Artwork by Max M. Leon

be more deadly than magical or physical power.

Let's say the PCs are part of the special law-and-order task force of a fantasy city. They find out Abdeluh the wizard has committed murder and plotted against the king of the city-state. The PCs get their gear together, wander out to the wizard's secret tower where she lives by herself in the middle of nowhere, and fix Abdeluh's wagon. A nice, clean-cut, black and white scenario. Whether they win or lose, the powers of goodness are on their side.

Now, let's just say that instead of Abdeluh living alone in the middle of the desert with only her familiar to keep her company, she lives right in the middle of the city that the players are trying to protect. In fact, Abdeluh is the court wizard, and has done many things to make her popular with the royalty and city as a whole. Besides that, she wields huge political power.

Without casting any spells, Abdeluh can defeat the PCs. She can get them fired, destroy their reputations, send the king's own guards or assassins to arrest or poison them, confiscate their possessions, imprison their loved ones, and generally make them miserable.

Why is this frightening? Because as a GM, you have made it absolutely clear what will happen to the PCs if Abdeluh finds out they know her plans, much less are plotting to act against her. The party

will have to skulk in shadows and walk on eggs the whole time they are rushing to save king and country. One wrong move and the jig is up.

Perhaps the party is fighting against the new, totalitarian regime. Or they must stop a very popular political or religious figure, a la George Stillwell of Stephen King's *Dead Zone*.

With politically powerful opponents, the stakes are always high. If the party does not succeed against conventional villains, they can always track the bad buys down again later for a rematch. With popular, high-ranked villains, the PCs get one shot. If they miss, the villain can crush them by picking up the phone. Now that is fear.

**Paranoia.** When the PCs have no one to trust and nowhere to hide, they have much to fear. They will be afraid when the enemy has them surrounded and controls the situation. The players will fear their character's well-being when they doubt the most trustworthy of NPCs.

Why would the PCs fear everybody they meet? Plenty of reasons. The villain may have mind control powers. There may be a fat reward for the party, and everyone wants to cash in. They may be wrongly accused of a heinous crime, as in *The Fugitive*. The town, country, or world has been invaded by aliens like those in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, or by the RAVENLOFT® realm's doppelganger plants.

The villains may be numerous and able to shape-change: for instance, the PCs may face a plague of vampires or werewolves.

Whip Up fear through the players' paranoia. Burn them again and again and again. Hound them and surround them. Have the party's best-laid plans turn into deadly traps as their closest friends (or the people they thought were their friends) turn them in. Let the master villain repeat verbatim, things the PCs said in private. Rattle the cage, and keep rattling.

The Technocracy of White Wolf's MAGE: THE ASCENSION® game is a powerful and terrible foe because they can replace anyone with a genetically or cybernetically constructed spy. The PCs, literally, have no one they can trust except each other, and even then maybe not.

While they are fighting, the party should hate and fear everyone around them. When the party finally beats the villains, the players should feel the weight of paranoia lift from their chests.

**Horror Show.** Most people know fear from the usual horror books and movies: dark nights, strange noises, supernatural creatures, and so on. In certain sessions when everyone is in the right mood, those tired standbys can actually work, and boy, is it a lot of fun.

Just like phobias, use whatever frightens the players the most. If your players are big fans of Clive Barker, throw in bizarre,

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grotesque villains to your heart's content. Let them hunt vampires, Great Cthulhu, or ghosts. Put the party in haunted houses, awaken the dead, trot out the psycho killers, juggle severed heads. Do whatever floats your boat and has even a slight chance of actually scaring your players a tiny bit. Go to town and have a blast. In horror, it pays to go overboard with description.

All of these things are useful in regular games, but really to scare your players, it won't do to sit around a table in a well-lit room with the TV on in the next room. Dim the lights, light some candles, play in the basement or the attic. Softly play disquieting music. Do whatever you want, but try not to ruin the mood by getting too corny. A little bit of props and stage-dressing can go a long way.

## Hate

Hate is a strong word, and such a strong emotion can bring people to the furthest, most harmful extremes of behavior. Hate may be a nasty thing, but it can sure make role-playing games a ton of fun.

As a GM, you must do everything in your power to convince the players to hate your villains. Ideally, they should despise even the most powerful of villains so much that the PCs will travel to the ends of the earth to thwart him. Make the players hate this villain so much they talk badly about him even when you are not playing, so much they draw pictures of him and throw darts at it. They must feel strongly enough to be willing to use up all of their character's powers, items, favors, connections, and blood just to bloody the villain's nose once.

When a truly hated villain is finally defeated, the players feel an incredible sense of satisfaction. They jump out of their chairs, yell, and high-five. The players know for a fact they have done themselves and the gaming world a great service by defeating this villain. How many evil wizards and orc kings can you say the same about?

Here's how to convince the players to loathe a villain:

**Loved Ones.** Watch the PCs get steamed when the villain threatens their favorite NPCs. Let the bad guy kidnap their children, kill their best friends, enslave their grandparents, or possess the mind of dear, old uncle Joe.

To get the players riled up, though, you have to play the NPCs as real people who everybody genuinely likes or admires. You cannot just say, "Bob, your character has a very sweet, old aunt, and Strahd von Zarovich just kidnapped her," and expect anybody to really care. Play out scenes where the PCs talk with these people and get to know and like them. Have the NPCs do consistently nice things for the party, and help them out in times of trouble. Work up some actual good feelings about these imaginary people. *Then* kill them. G'wan, it's fun.

**Heinous Crimes.** Villains, as a group, are people who are expected to do very nasty, despicable things. Things no one would even think of doing. Things that make villains less than human, that make them a blight on society.

A few times I have played in games where the villains did nothing terribly wrong. Every once in a while I run across an adventure where the main bad guy is a bandit chief or something. Now, what player is going to get angry about a guy who steals from merchants?

Make your villains memorable as the meanest of mean, the lowest of low. The bad guys should torture peasants, burn crops, spread lies, ruin reputations, release plagues, and steal candy from babies. Because role-playing is a game, it takes more to upset the players than it would take in real life. A villain must do something very, very bad for the players to care whether he gets his just desserts or not.

**Bring it Home.** Try naming a player who truly, honestly gets upset when an evil wizard curses the land, or steals a king's powerful magical item. Go ahead, try.

Now, name a player who gets upset when the wizard casts a curse on their characters, or steals their most powerful magical items. A PC who would not blink an eye to watch an entire city burn down might gnash his teeth at the sight of his own house on fire.

Unless your players are all excellent role-players and the whole group is an order of paladins, no one cares when the villain does mean stuff to other people. It just gives the PCs an excuse to beat him up. When the villain's guns turn to the gaming group, however, watch the temperatures rise. If the villain does something vile to the PCs and they still don't care, let him keep stealing, bullying, and harassing them until they do. Be malicious until the group is riled up, then keep going.

When the party treks off into the wilderness or flies off into space after the bad guy, they will have a personal reason for seeing the villain brought to justice.

**Personal Hatreds.** Always keep in mind what upsets the players in real life, and carve your villains to fit that hated image. If your players are concerned about the environment and ecological destruction, dust off the Giant Evil Corporation from any of the cyberpunk games or Pentex from WERE-WOLF: THE APOCALYPSE.

Give your villains the exact qualities that you know your players hate in other people. Arrogance, racism, sexism, closed-mindedness, lying, bullying, selfishness, greed, immaturity, or stupidity can all make the PCs really want to get their hands on that bad guy. Perhaps while their characters are beating up the villain, the players are imagining someone from real life getting their due. If so, you are doing your job as a fiendish GM. That is what

escapist entertainment is all about.

Again, be tasteful and mature about playing on your players' emotions. If a player is upset, hold back on the villainy a bit. There's no point in losing friends by driving players away.

**Betrayal.** There is one, sure-fire, big gun way to get your gaming group to hate somebody—pull out all stops and betray them in the most heinous manner possible.

If the party rescues the damsel in distress, watch their reaction when she implicates them in crimes, blames them for deaths or failure, or accuses them of being part of a larger plot all along. If the heroes save a reporter from certain death, let the weaselly reporter promptly turn around and expose their secret identities for an easy Pulitzer. Make them find out that their mentor is evil and manipulative, and has been playing them for fools since the beginning of the campaign.

There is nothing, nothing, nothing at all that makes players' blood boil than a nicely-crafted betrayal. They will stop at nothing to give what they got, to even the score, to serve up a plate of revenge.

Hate and fear are best used in conjunction. A single trait to make the players hate or fear the story's villain will work nicely. Blend two or three together with a strong character and you will have a memorably despicable villain. Let's look at some examples.

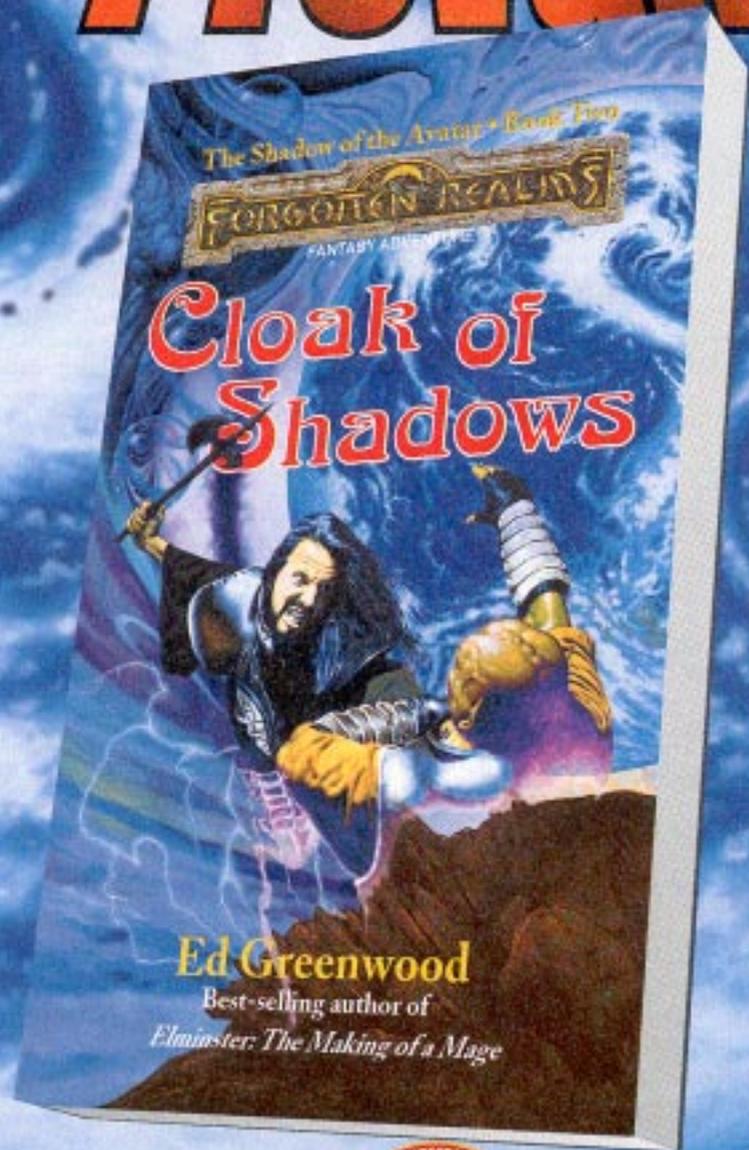
Why are Nazis such great villains? Because they controlled a totalitarian state with a nearly unbeatable military force and committed unspeakable atrocities in the name of a racist and insane leader. As you can see, the traits mix well.

Try mixing and matching fear and hate ideas. Greed, arrogance, and insanity? Sounds like Batman's arch-enemy the Joker.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is another stand-out villain. Dracula was not just a Wallachian knight, he was a cruel and despotic ruler who put both his worst enemies and most loyal followers to the stake by the thousands and dined to the sounds of their tortured screams. Four hundred years later, he traveled to London to kill and possess the women closest to Harker and company. When they struck back, Dracula dodged and tricked them every step of the way, all the while arrogantly flaunting his incredible undead power. As icing on the cake, the whole story drips with the best horror show conventions. Wow, what a villain!

Bring out the best in your bad guys by giving them a style and character all their own. Make each adversary distinctive, sinister and easily recognizable, so the PCs react strongly whenever the villain or his minions show up. A word, a phrase, an image, a *modus operandi* — these will bring flesh and blood to that cardboard cutout, and make your next NPC a full-bodied, three-dimensional, monstrosly evil villain your players will love to hate. Ω

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# RUMBLINGS

in the gaming industry



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## Hear Us Roar!

The July issue of DRAGON® Magazine will contain a special 60-minute **audio CD** filled with sound effects and music to enhance game play. Included are sample tracks from four new TSR releases: *Mark of Amber*, *Savage Baronies*, *A Player's Primer to the Outlands*, and *A Light in the Belfry*. This special edition goes on sale in late June; the CD will also be sent to all subscribers.

A conspiracy is afoot to make the **X-Files** see the light of day as a collectible card game, supposedly backed by the big-money boys at **Topps** trading cards. Development is underway (probably at a top-secret lab). No word on a release date; obviously, the government is covering something up.

**Heartbreaker Hobbies and Games Inc.**, in conjunction with **Target Games** in Sweden will be developing a new collectible card game based on last year's hit film *The Crow* sometime this summer. They're also working on a game based on the new James Bond film *Goldeneye*, due to be released simultaneously with the film's premiere this fall. It's probably just a matter of time until we see the Barney card game, folks.

Heartbreaker is also working with **Bucaneer Games** on a new collectible card game of intergalactic expansion and conquest, tentatively titled **Super Nova\***. It will be released this summer.

In more card news, **Mag Force 7** will

release a collectible card game based on the best-selling CD-ROM computer game **Wing Commander III, Heart of the Tiger\*** (which featured Mark Hamill, among others). Designed by Don Perrin, the man behind the **Star of the Guardians\*** card game, and former TSR designer Jeff Grubb, the game cards feature photo-realistic paintings of the computer game's Hollywood stars. The game will be sold in a single-deck format and will be available this summer. Rumor has it that **Mark Hamill** will be Mag Force's guest at this year's GENCON Game Fair.

**Acclaim Comics** will publish two new comics this summer. The first is a **M:tG\*** comic called **Fallen Empires\***. The comic, written by Jeff Gomez and Kevin Maples, incorporates the M:tG\* game system into the storyline and focuses on the foreshadowing of events found in the **Fallen Empires** \*expansion set.

Jeff Gomez is also writing **The City Knights\***, a comic series set in the heart of New York City's 1970's punk scene. **The City Knights** is penciled by Val Mayerik and will feature covers by game industry veteran **Timothy Bradstreet**.

**Andrew Greenberg**, developer and creative engine guiding White Wolfs VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE\* RPG, announced he is leaving White Wolf to join HDI, an Atlanta computer game company. HDI is best known for the games *Hammer of the Gods\** and *Merchant Prince\**.

White Wolf will release the fifth and final volume of the Storyteller series early, unlike previous Storyteller games, all of which premiered at the GEN CON® Game Fair. The **Changeling: The Dreaming\*** RPG is due out in June, with gamebooks and a novel to follow later in

the year. The game uses Cantrip Cards as a supplemental magic system and feature artwork from Brian LeBlanc and **Tony DiTerlizzi**.

Board Enterprises will finally release **The Book Of Wishes**, a long delayed supplement for the **Legend Quest\*** game system. This is one of the largest spell books ever released for a role-playing game; it adds four new spell classes to the game and contains information on the nature of magic and how it works. The book will be available in July.

**Spectrum Holobyte** announced that their **Star Trek: The Next Generation "A Final Unity"** computer game for PC CD-ROM will be available sometime this summer. The game incorporates full 3-D simulation, five major worlds with eight stars, and approximately 15,000 lines of dialogue spoken by actors, including eight principals from the TV series.

**Gold Rush Games** has hired Chris Avellone, sometime DRAGON Magazine author, as an assistant editor. Chris will be working on *The Gamer's Connection\**, a quarterly gaming magazine, and will also be involved with game design and book editing. Good luck, Chris!

In more magazine news, **Steve Jackson Games** has named **Scott Haring** as managing editor. Scott will continue to edit **Pyramid\*** magazine and supervise the editorial and production staff at the company. Scott announced that beginning with the May/June issue, *Pyramid* will expand to 96 pages and add more color. The new issue will also feature two preview cards from WotC's newest M:tG\* supplement, **Ice Age\***. **Games Magazine** is entering the world of fantasy game conventions in a big way at ORIGINS '95 convention in Philadelphia on July 13-16. *Games* will be joining forces with the **Live/Wire Conductor Corps**, the group that puts on the **Safe House** and **Star Trek** interactive game events at the **GEN CON Game Fair**, to debut *The Maze of Games*. This event will turn the entire ORIGINS convention hall into a giant maze of complex puzzles and fantasy characters. Players will search through a multi-level maze to find an evil wizard's treasure.

Wizards of the Coast's **Alter Ego Design Group** hopes to redefine roleplaying with a new game system called **EVERWAY\***. The game promises to introduce some new concepts to gaming, including the use of images to guide game play.

EVERWAY\* is set in the mythical worlds of legend and fairy tales. Players use "Rimage" cards to create characters while gamemasters use them as springboards from which to launch adventures. In addition to the Rimage cards, the game also uses a Fortune Deck, rather than dice, to determine the fate of the characters. The game is due out this summer. Ω

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

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Energy

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# THE ECOLOGY OF The Bird Maiden

## Mufti's Two Masters

by Paul Culotta

Artwork by Karl Waller

Ah, but it was warm, and Mufti eagerly looked forward to reaching the oasis. It was there that he would replenish his waterskins, refresh himself, and water Mandrake. The sturdy war camel had been pushed hard during this chase. Given the freshness of the trail, it seemed likely that it would end soon with finding the woman and child in the oasis. And it was there that Mufti would have to defeat the genie who had stolen the two females; it seemed unlikely in this heat that they would travel during the day.

As Mandrake kept up his steady pace, Mufti pondered the character of his foe. Some genies were known to be cruel and uncaring, but one who stole a noble merchant's wife and child through enchantment was certainly to be despised. And the fact that this magical opponent could not be seen meant that it would have to be dealt with carefully. But the most grating aspect was the genie's blatant pride. To leave a note to the husband bragging of the theft had to be the height of vanity. Did not the Loregiver teach that the intolerant who mock those beneath them shall choke on their own self-righteousness? This genie apparently felt no guilt about violating Her teachings, and that, above all else, was a threat not only to the family in this matter, but to all inhabitants of the land. Yes, Mufti concluded, this genie would have to be destroyed.

Which was why the merchant Suleman had sent for a faris, one who would not only undertake the mission without fear, but one who would destroy the magical thief and return Afta and her daughter without any thought of despoilment. Mufti had volunteered readily along with several others of his class, but Suleman had chosen him—due, no doubt, to Mufti's greater accomplishments and his carefully cultivated reputation for purity of heart.

Just on the horizon the warrior spotted the dim outline of the oasis. He stopped, mopped the sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his aba, and concentrated. Yes, it was the oasis, not a mirage. No doubt the genie could see him by now as well, and battle would soon be joined. There was no opportunity or need for approaching subtly. While surprise would have been an advantage, in the end either Mufti's skills at fighting blindly would prevail or they would not. Fate would decree the result.

Yet one should not tempt Fate sorely, the warrior reflected, and he commanded Mandrake to kneel. After dismounting, he kept his eyes shifting about for any telltale signs of an approaching unseen enemy. He drained what was left in one of his last waterskins and kept looking. But there was nothing that gave any indication of an invisible enemy anywhere. No sudden sifting of the sands, no break in the heat waves, no sound, nothing. Well, oh magical

one, you want me fully clad, eh? So be it. My thirst for water is now quenched. Now my hunger for justice must be satisfied.

Mufti reached among the bundles secreted on Mandrake and unlimbered a carefully wrapped heavy package. Untying the knots, he took out a shirt of fine steel chain mail and, after a few quick glances all around, he put it on, suspecting that now would be a prime time for the genie to strike. But nothing happened, a little to his disappointment. Had the genie suddenly rushed in, it would have discovered that Mufti had grasped a sharp dagger concealed within the armor and had kept it in his hand the entire time, ready for instant use. The warrior sighed. Ah well, the genie apparently wanted him to come to the oasis. He pondered the matter some more. Since the wife and child probably would not remember the details of the fight once the enchantment was lifted, there was no sense in taking a chance. He reached into one of Mandrake's bags and pulled out a finely crafted bandolier that he slid over his chest and tightened. In it were three finely honed daggers, each one having a sunburst nicely etched into its blade, and they were joined by the fourth that had been hidden in the chain shirt.

All along Mufti had worried about being ambushed by his invisible opponent, but the genie now giving him the opportunity to get fully protected and armed was unsettling. All during this chase, it had not made the slightest appearance—no observations, no tracks, nothing. To be sure, everyone Mufti had questioned had seen the woman and child, and their tracks were quite visible once he had picked them up. But no one had seen anyone (or thing) with them. Perhaps the genie could fly and be invisible, an uncomfortable thought that caused him to scan the sky as well as the ground.

There—up above was a bird of some sort lazily circling. Peering intensely, Mufti finally recognized it, a desert owl up looking for a desert rat or snake for a mid-afternoon feast.<sup>1</sup> Hmm . . . could it be the genie in disguise? Mufti rebuckled his weapons belt nonchalantly, keeping his head turned just enough to keep the owl in sight, but it made no move toward him. Perhaps it lived in the oasis and felt disturbed by the genie's presence?

Certainly the owl would not have been uncomfortable with Suleman's wife, Afta. From everything he had heard from the farmers in the river valley, she was a

Level	Bird form	AC	MV	HD	THACO	#AT	Dmg
2	Parakeet	9	1, Fl 24	1/2	20	1	1
3	Swallow	8	1, Fl 30	1-1	20	1	1
4	Parrot	6	1, Fl 30	1+1	19	1	2-4
5	Falcon	5	1, Fl 36	1-1	20	3	1/1/1
6	Owl	5	1, Fl 27	1	19	3	1-2/1-2/1
7	Eagle, Wild	6	1, Fl 30	1+3	18	3	1/2/1-2/1
8	Eagle, Giant	7	3, Fl 48	4	15	3	1-6/1-6/2-12



kindly lady, a kahina who had stopped along the way to cure a diseased oxen, share her water with an overheated farmer, and set the broken leg of a boy who had fallen from an apple tree. She had even spent an entire day with a village, instructing them how to better irrigate their fields.<sup>2</sup> So strange that the genie would have allowed her to do so, or perhaps it was that magical being's way of sneering at any pursuit by allowing such a clear trail. The latter was the more probable reason—otherwise it could have just taken the wife and daughter in its arms and spirited them all away, Mufti mused.

But Suleman's words of warning still remained with the faris. Afta was powerful in her own right and the magical garment the genie had placed on her, a veil of some sort, could make her a dangerous opponent as well. The upset husband had been most insistent: above all Mufti must remove the veil and bring it back along with wife and daughter.<sup>3</sup> He had given the warrior a potion, one that he said would put the kahina and her daughter in a deep stupor. It was necessary, he said, because there was no telling what would happen or what the desert priestess would say once the veil was removed. Better to drug them. Mufti had suggested to Suleman that he simply destroy the veil on the premise that destruction of the enchanting item would negate the charm, but the fat merchant had replied quickly, "No, just bring it back. I would give it to the College of Wizardry for their research and use."<sup>4</sup>

Mufti unpacked his steel helmet from another bag and strapped it in place, then untied the shield carefully secured to Mandrake's saddle. His final steps were to pull out the carefully slung lance, then remount his camel. A few nudges in the side got the beast up and trotting toward the oasis. Time to get this done and over with. At least the sun was to his back. Still there was no sign of the genie; even the owl had flown away. Mufti entered the oasis unopposed.

It was a fine place with a clear pool of sparkling water surrounded by numerous date and palm trees, and most of the ground was covered by a nice mat of green grass. There were several piles of rocks and boulders here and there. Mufti had been to this haven three times before in his travels, and it looked as normal and as peaceful as before.

Except for the girl who sat by the pool. She was dressed in a fine aba and sat cooling her feet in the water, her sandals beside her. Laying a few feet away was a spear, another aba, a wooden case with a handle, and another, slightly larger pair of sandals.<sup>5</sup> The girl looked at Mufti as he trotted up, and he was taken aback—the dark eyes behind the veil showed no surprise, relief, or fear—only a penetrating curiosity. It must be the daughter, Fatira, he decided—her body was far too unshaped and young (about ten years old) to be that of the mother. But where was the

mother? And, above all, where was the genie? Mufti kept one suspicious eye on the pool. The girl just stared at him.

"Little one, where is your mother?" he finally asked.

"Off," was her only reply.

"Off? Off where? And where is your abductor?"

The girl cocked her head, her eyes looking confused, then asked in return, "Our ab-duc—our what?"

"The one who took you and your mother away. Come, you can trust me, I am here to take you back to your father," the warrior replied, looking all around for any sign of danger. But all he saw was the owl again, fifty paces away sitting upon a boulder, busily tearing something apart and eating its fill.

The girl got to her feet, put her hands on her hips, and gave him a piercing look and a surprising scornful rebuke: "You mean to take me and Mother back? To my wonderful, loving father, who only talks about how he can't wait for a few more years until he sells me? If I were you, I would leave before Mother comes back, mercenary! She promised me we would never return! Now you just better go away before she gets back!" With that, she picked up the spear and pointed it threateningly.

The large war camel snorted and grumbled—it was not smart to make such a display to his master—but Mufti kept a tight rein and muttered some words of restraint. Well, the daughter was enchanted as well, just as Suleman had suspected, and it seemed to be a powerful charm since Fatira did not have the dim faraway look in her eyes that he had witnessed in those who had fallen prey to unscrupulous sorcerers, priests, and genies. Perhaps the genie had used two veils, one for the mother, and the other for this child?

Suddenly the girl screamed in terror, dropped her spear, and ran.

Mufti's reflexes, developed from years of training, immediately kicked in. In one fluid motion, he jerked Mandrake about, dropped his lance, and pulled one of the daggers from the bandolier. With uncanny speed, the dagger went sizzling through the air and buried itself in the wide open mouth of a large, toothsome, spotted canine. It staggered back, choking and gasping, and fell, rolling spastically in the grass.

Five more of the creatures were running quickly toward the warrior, shrieking a high-pitched racking laughter that resounded throughout the oasis.

"Run!" Mufti yelled over his shoulder, then added, "Climb a tree!" Then a second dagger found its mark, buried to the hilt in the chest of another of the monsters. The beast stopped, looked down helplessly at the dagger, and collapsed.

Cursedly powerful genie, Mufti thought. There was no time for another throw as the beasts were upon him, and he pulled the scimitar from its scabbard. Mandrake

responded to the quick nudges from his master and charged left, trampling another of the howling, devilish beasts under his large hooves. As Mandrake turned, Mufti slashed at the one that was jumping up to pull him from the saddle. It fell back, headless. But there were too many. One of the last two jumped up and caught Mandrake's neck in its jaws. And the last one vaulted up the back of the camel and knocked Mufti from his saddle. He hit the grass of the oasis with a thud, and there was an incredible burst of pain in his ankle, and the scimitar fell from his hand.

Instinctively, he rolled and slashed sideways with another dagger, but it only nicked the snout of his assailant, which jumped back with a shriek. Then Mufti tried to stand, but it was impossible. Something was wrong with his leg, and he was forced to fight on one knee. Breathing hard, the desert knight quickly surveyed the scene. The one who had knocked him from Mandrake was bleeding from the snout, but was approaching menacingly, no longer laughing but growling. A few feet away was the beast that Mandrake had trampled, but amazingly it was up, apparently unharmed. It shook itself, and then moved toward Mufti as well. Thirty paces away his prized war camel was thrashing about with the beast's jaws firmly clamped on its neck, and a sickening flow of blood was staining the grass. It was not a good shot but Mufti had to do something, so he threw his blade and just as quickly pulled out his last dagger. The monster on Mandrake was hit in its thigh, and the blow was enough to make it bark in pain, which unlocked its jaws. Mandrake staggered away, but collapsed just a few feet later. Mufti could see that it was a horrible bite, and knew that his camel would not last long. But the hyena left him alone, and loped over toward Mufti.

Mufti wondered whether he would survive this fight. Three angry hyenas (a little bigger than normal, he noted) faced him, and he had not even faced the genie yet! Mufti unsnapped the holder for his ceremonial hatchet and got it in his left hand. Then he quickly faked a throw with the dagger and scrambled on all fours for a tree as the beasts scattered momentarily. It was enough for him to get there and put his back to the tree, but the movement caused pain beyond words in his ankle.

The three hyenas recovered from the ruse, and approached slowly, laughing hellishly, and Mufti did not know whether it was in respect for his ploy or just to unnerve him. Not that it would take much at this point, he thought. One quick rush en masse would take him out.

As if they had been reading his thoughts, the largest gave a quick yelp and all three lunged toward the crippled faris. At the same time, Mufti heard a singing (a woman's beautiful voice, he thought),<sup>6</sup> and he raised his last knife to throw. But the dagger never left his hands. Instead the two palm trees at his back suddenly came

to life like writhing snakes, and his arm was knocked aside. Then the warrior found himself wrapped tightly by a thick trunk, which wound around his body and over his face. What in the name of Kor—but he thought no more as the breath was squeezed out of him and he blacked out. The last thing he heard was the hyenas shrieking in panic. They were laughing no longer.

“Are you all right?”

Mufti shook his head slowly, groaned, and opened his eyes.

Kneeling over him was a woman in a plain tan aba, her nose and mouth covered with the strangest veil he had ever seen. It seemed to be made of light brown feathers tightly woven together. Her eyes were dark and curious just like the girl’s had been, and Mufti suspected that if the veil were removed, the face would be beautiful. Her hands, elegant but strong looking, offered a cup.

He grunted his assent and sat up to drink—only to be reminded of his ankle by a blinding flash of pain. Despite his training he gasped and nearly fainted.

“Here, drink this, it will help the pain,” she said. “It is all I can do until I regain my spells.”

Breathing shallowly (his chest hurt too!), Mufti sipped, then gulped from the cup. A sweet taste, far better than he expected.

“My thanks,” he croaked, “but why waste your potion, lady? Certainly the genie will kill me for slaying his beasts?”

She looked at him curiously, and started to answer, but then saw there was no need. The potion had done its work as the warrior slumped to the ground unconscious.<sup>7</sup>

Suleman al Fataq stretched, yawned, and belched loudly. One of the harem girls woke up, wrinkled her nose, and closed her eyes again, pretending to be asleep. The other one was not as smart: she turned over to see what was making bullfrog noises, and Suleman saw her.

“Do you have something to say, desert blossom?” asked the merchant, grinning widely, exposing his crooked teeth from behind his thick lips.

The woman shook her head vigorously. No woman in her right mind ever did anything to annoy the mountain of flab that was master of this house. His jolly appearance could quickly become a terror to whoever offended him, and in these circumstances it was best to say nothing.

And this morning she was lucky, because Suleman was in a good mood. He roared with laughter as he smacked the buttocks of the lady who was trying to appear asleep, and howled hysterically as she bounded out of bed with a cry of pain.

“Go, both of you, and get Mustafa to prepare my morning meal and coffee!” he chuckled. “And tell Hassan to make sure the house is clean! Today your mistress returns, and I want the place to look presentable? He snickered nastily as the two

women quickly gathered their night clothes, bowed, and left.

Ah, what a great day this was going to be, thought Suleman. His chubby, ringed fingers reached into the box of sweetmeats that was always at his bedside, and he plopped a few into his mouth. Chewing thoughtfully, he considered himself lucky. The story had worked, and the faris was returning with Fatira and Afta in chains, no less! Oh, how sweet his vengeance would be. Licking his fingers clean, the merchant poked his other hand into the box, grabbed another fistful of snacks, and then lumbered off to the eating room. May as well start with a good breakfast, he thought. Then we will receive the faris, get the veil, and pay him off. And finally, to top the day off, we will have some real private quality time underground with his beloved (he smiled as his mind lingered on that description) wife. The rivers of Zakhara would turn to ice before she ever got close to her veil again.

As his spies had said, the faris arrived a few hours later, with wife and daughter chained securely, their veils removed, and looking quite drugged. They were escorted into the courtyard where Suleman was enjoying his midmorning snack of glazed duck, honeyed artichoke hearts, and sweetened coffee.

“Ah, Mufti al Kaban, exalted faris of the land, I welcome you!” cried the merchant, not bothering to get up from his comfortable, pillowed lair, where he was being fanned by an attractive, lithe, dark-haired girl. “Come, sit, and enjoy a few delicacies I’ve saved for such an occasion. We must share salt and celebrate your success!”

“My thanks, Suleman,” replied Mufti, “but I must get to my next mission quickly, and I would just as soon receive my reward and be on my way.”

“Of course, of course,” cried the merchant enthusiastically, gnawing the last morsel of meat from a duck leg, “but really, first let me hear of your success! Did you destroy the genie? Where did you find them?”

Mufti sighed. This was not going to be easy. “Very well, you deserve to hear the story, but first I should like to be paid,” insisted the faris.

Suleman chuckled, then choked briefly on an artichoke heart. Coughing and laughing, he said, “Really, Mufti, you sound more like a beggar from the bazaar than a holy warrior! But you deserve it as much as I deserve to hear about the story. Oh, where is the veil?”

The faris produced the feathered garment and handed it over, and Suleman took it, stuck it in a pouch, and rubbed his hands with glee as his eyes gleamed triumphantly. Then he pulled a jingling sack from behind a pillow and tossed it to Mufti. Finally, he cleared his mouth with a swallow of coffee and spit it out over his shoulder. It splattered right on the feet of the girl with the fan, and she did not flinch.

Mufti looked inside the sack, but did not bother to count the dinars. It did not matter. The contract was completed. And now he could deal with this pig.

He sat down cross-legged in front of Suleman and stated dryly, “I don’t know why you are inquiring about a genie. There was none.”

“Hah! I knew it!” the merchant exclaimed. “Once the genie saw you, Mufti al Kaban, renowned faris warrior, coming after him, I knew he would flee! Lucky for him, too. But oh yes, there was a genie, don’t you recall it left a note?” the merchant added.

Mufti’s voice was cold: “The only luck involved was that your wife saved my life from a pack of hyena-men who happened to come to the same oasis where I caught up with her.”

Suleman stopped eating, and looked at the faris carefully. “Truly? Well, perhaps she did so to defend herself and the child. Hmmm. Well, no matter, I am glad you are safe, and that you captured her. I see you drugged her as I instructed, and that is good, too. Well, uh, I am sure the genie left once it saw you. Perhaps Afta will remember something once the potion wears off and will let me know. Here, let me give you this as a bonus for your trouble and let you be on your way,” he said, taking a jeweled ring off one of his fingers.

“No, that’s quite all right, Suleman,” Mufti said, holding up his hand, signaling refusal. “In a way, I am already on my next mission.”

“What?” asked the merchant stupidly.

“After she saved me, Afta told me the most incredible story. She indicated that she was a slave to her husband who had power over her by keeping her veil, the one I have just given back to you. She also said that as long as the veil was parted from her, the holder became her master. And she said that her current master, you, Suleman, inflicted atrocities upon her and her daughter too unmentionable to name.”

“That is none of your business, faris!” roared Suleman, waddling from the couch, and shaking his finger. “You agreed to this mission and swore your word to accomplish it! Nothing can change that! Now, get out!”

“That is exactly what I told her, Suleman,” replied Mufti soothingly, holding his hands open while remaining seated. “Even though she had saved my life, even though she nursed me and my wounded mount back to health, and regardless of the fact that her husband might be cruel and inhumane, I advised her that I could not be broken from my oath.”

Suleman relaxed a little, and nodded. “Good. Then we are agreed that what happens in a man’s house is his own business. Well, you may be on your way.”

“Well, if you please, remain,” the warrior stated flatly. “You insisted on hearing the story so I shall finish it. I did not believe her until I put the pieces together. There was no genie, there never was. The note



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*Julie Bell and Boris Vallejo*

was a hoax, similar to the tricks you perform on your competitors, and I remember you had me dine with you when we first talked. It is apparent to me now that you probably put something into my drink or my food to get me to believe such an incredible tale. Once I had agreed to the mission and given my word to complete it, you knew that something like this could happen. Thus, you gave me a potion to keep her and her daughter drugged."

"Yes," grinned Suleman, "but she is my wife, and an oath is an oath, whether by contract or by marriage. We have no further need for your services, faris, so if you please?" and he pointed toward the back door that led to the alley.

"Of course," Mufti stated, and he got up to leave, but then added, "but I did make an oath to her as well that you need to know about. I promised her that upon completion of my contract to you that I would ask that you release her from the vows of the marriage you have forced upon her by possession of this veil, and I do so now. You know that she is not only a creature of the wild, but a caring person who ministers to the land and its people. Her knowledge is great, and her ability to render assistance is considerable. Why keep her in this gilded cage when her knowledge and learning could be shared with the people? Please, Suleman, go to the qadi with her and declare that this marriage should be dissolved. She will agree readily and it will be done. You will have done a great service to her, yourself, and the Land. She will want none of your property. What say you?"

Suleman laughed heartily and long. He fell back on his pillowed couch and it creaked dangerously. Tears came to his eyes and he slapped his fat knees. Then he sat up and cried, "You self-righteous donkey! She is mine, I captured her fairly, I married her legally, and that is that! You have kept her promise to her. You asked me to release her, I refused, and that is the end of that! Now get out before I summon the mamluks to remove you from the city!"

"That is your final answer?" asked Mufti gently. "There is nothing I can say or do to change your mind?"

"No, now go!" shrieked Suleman.

"Very well," shrugged the faris, and he took the bag of money, and turned to leave, leaving the helplessly drugged wife and daughter standing there.

And as he did so, his hand slipped inside his aba and removed a dagger from a bandolier. A moment later, he whirled around, and a dagger with a sunburst on the blade hissed through the air of the courtyard.

"Tell me, grandson, do you think this was all really worth it?"

"Yes, grandfather," replied Mufti. "You will find this document in order. It deeds the household and all of the goods of Suleman al Fataq from his widow to our

servant, Anwar. What we have gained far outweighs the loss. We have needed such a place for some time."

The old man brushed aside the document, then asked, "But, grandson, what of the woman and her child? Were they really drugged?"

"Yes, grandfather, they were. It was hard to convince her to allow it, but by the time we had left the oasis, we were firmly agreed that she had to have her freedom and that I had to fulfill my oath. It was the only way to accomplish our goals without both of us losing our honor. I trusted her fully, and once I convinced her that I was a holy warrior and told her of my training, she gave me her trust. Without drugging her, we might have been discovered by a sorcerer or hakima hired by the fat one."

"And where did the mother and child go?" asked the old man.

"Off to the mountains,"<sup>8</sup> replied Mufti. "She said that she had to take her daughter to receive training in the ways of her kind. I offered to accompany and guard them on their journey, but she refused, as I knew she would. Ah, what a wonderfully independent creature!"

"Independence!" snorted the grandfather. "If Kor could reveal total knowledge to me, I suspect the Old One would tell me that my grandson's lust for independence, especially being freed from keeping the garb of a faris, was the real motivation behind this incident!"

Mufti smiled. "Oh exalted one, I believe Kor speaks through your lips as he has for many years. Yes, being a faris was getting tiresome. Please tell me that I do not have to continue."

"Hah! You made your own wish come true, did you not? The city is still in an uproar over the killing of the fat toad and his six guards by a faris! How could you pose as one now? Mufti al Kaban will be searched for by mercenaries and bounty hunters all the way to the Isle of the Elephant."

"Ah, you are wise, grandfather," cooed Mufti.

"And you are impudent! But," he added with softness in his voice, "you are one of our best, and it is indeed time for a change. I think you should learn to cut hair and trim beards. There are certain people in Huzuz we want to keep track of, those who seem to be, well, unfriendly to the scholars of Kor's mosque for reasons yet to be divined. Are you interested?"

"Exalted one, I am yours to command," replied Mufti, bowing.

"Very well, go out and talk to Latifa. She will teach you the ways of the barber and brief you on your new background and mission. May the knowledge of the Old One protect you on this, your new life."

"Yes, grandfather," replied Mufti, bowing again, and he left the tent.

The old man laid back on the pillows in his tent and looked at the deed again. Justice had been done and there would probably be a day when the bird maiden

could be called upon to return a favor. And what a wonderful home Mufti had procured. Posing as a faris for five long years, he had brought in much useful information. It would be interesting to see how well he would do in the Grand Bazaar of Huzuz posing as an enterprising barber. As a faris, Mufti had to rely on his brawn and fighting skills. This new role would require a lot more wits. If he did well, it would probably be time to consider even greater things for him among the Wrath of the Old. Yes, with followers such as Mufti, the future of the Order always would be bright with the blood of those who opposed it.

The Grandfather of Assassins smiled happily, looked at the deed again, and reached for a pear.

## Notes

1. The bird maiden is a creature unique to Zakhara, the Land of Fate. It is always female, just like the swanmay living in the northern lands of Toril, and in some respects quite similar to that creature.

Like a swanmay, a bird maiden may *shapechange* to bird form. While the former can transform only into a swan, the bird maiden can change into a variety of bird forms, depending upon her level.

It is important to note that as the bird maiden rises in level, she may elect to take the form for that level or any form of a lesser level. For example, a 6th-level bird maiden could *shapechange* into an owl or any bird form allowed for a 2nd- through 5th-level bird maiden.

There are other differences between swanmays and bird maidens. A swanmay is a ranger while in human form, while a bird maiden is a kahina, with all of the powers of that class (See *Arabian Adventures*). Another important difference is that swanmays are always good-aligned, while a bird maiden may be of any alignment. Most bird maidens (80%) are of neutral alignment, while 10% are good and 10% are evil. Whatever the alignment, it always has a neutral tendency (i.e., neutral good, true neutral, or neutral evil). It is rumored that evil bird maidens are able to *shapechange* into ravens, blood hawks, and giant vultures.

2. Good and neutral bird maidens see themselves as protectors of living things and guard against those who would despoil the land. Hence, they have a tendency to help and teach those who respect the land. Their protection applies to sentient beings as well, in line with the tolerance extended to all by the teachings of the Loregiver. Hence, a bird maiden would teach irrigation to farmers to help their crops grow, but she would ensure that the system would not harm the lake or river life being used as a water source.

3. The power of a bird maiden resides in a shawl, veil, or other significant object of clothing that is made of feathers. This

*Continued on page 94*

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# ROLE-PLAYING reviews

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## Deal me in: A look at collectible card games

If you haven't noticed the rise of collectible card games . . . well, how are things on Mars, anyway? In the wake of the MAGIC: THE GATHERING\* game, card games have been multiplying like promises in a Presidential campaign. A few anxious readers have wondered if the popularity of card games foretells the death of role-playing, since, after all, gamers have only so much money to spend, and they seem to be squandering it all on booster packs. And they wonder if maybe they should be investing a few more dollars themselves, considering the skyrocketing prices of hard-to-get-cards.

Well, relax. Role-playing is here to stay. If you need convincing, try counting heads at the next GEN CON® game fair. Card games pose no more threat to RPGs than video games or computer games or dart boards. It's a big hobby, and there's room for everyone. And if you plan to get rich from the rare MAGIC cards you've stashed away in a shoe box, you'd probably be better off with mutual funds. Collectibles whose scarcity is determined by the manufacturers rather than the passage of time have a way of losing their value pretty fast. Just ask collectors of 1980s comic books.

As to the play value of card games, there are a few gems and a lot of junk—in other words, they're no different from RPGs. If I were reviewing MAGIC (as Allen Varney did in DRAGON® issue #201), I'd give it maybe five pips, good but not spectacular. Though the trading card concept qualifies as a stroke of genius, the rules themselves are serviceable but hardly revolutionary, indebted not only to games like DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®, but also to the COSMIC ENCOUNTER\* and RUNEQUEST\* games. Then again, it's easy to pick on pioneers. Someday, I bet the current version of MAGIC will look as crude as the D&D did in its first incarnation. (Anyone remember those cheesy little pamphlets?)

If you're Oded on MAGIC, consider the alternatives discussed below. All are as engaging as MAGIC and just as easy to learn. Best of all, they won't bankrupt you. A couple of starter decks and a few booster packs—an investment of \$20 or so—will give you all the cards you need to get your feet wet.

Two caveats:

First, while reading the reviews, keep in mind that your mix of cards might not be the same as mine. Just because I grumble about the lack of Enterprise crewmen in my STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION\* game deck doesn't mean you'll have the same experience. You might find Captain Picard in your first booster. (Don't count on it.)

Second, though I appreciate a good-looking deck, I have next to no interest in cards as collector's items. I'm aware, of course, that some players invest vast sums of money for so-called "killer decks" to enhance their chances of victory. I like to win as much as the next guy, but the day I shell out a hundred bucks for a Black



Photography by Charles Kohl

### Role-playing games' ratings

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

Lotus card for my MAGIC set will coincide with the day I sprout wings and fly to the moon. Besides, I've got better things to spend my money on—like role-playing supplements.

### STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION\*

Starter deck: 60 cards, rules booklet  
Booster pack: 15 cards  
Decipher, Inc. \$9.50 (starter), \$3 (booster)  
Design: Tom Braunlich and Rollie Tesh  
Graphic design: Don Burns  
Product management: Ross Campbell and Warren Holland

I am not now, nor have I ever been a fan of the *Star Trek: the Next Generation* TV show. Though I liked the Shatner/Nimoy original, the sequel struck me as a dreary rehash, burdened by recycled plots and dust-dry characters (you know you're in trouble when the android has more personality than the humans). My enthusiasm for the game, then, has nothing to do with a series that means about as much to me as *I Dream of Jeannie*.

My wife, on the other hand, is a die-hard *Trek*ster, who inexplicably prefers Picard's shiny dome to her own husband's luxurious locks. She spent the better part of an afternoon ogling the 300-plus cards acquired for this review, ooh-ing and ah-ing over the scenes from her favorite episodes. Not me—I barely know Mr. Riker from Mr. Rogers.

But I know a good-looking deck when I see it, and this one's terrific. In addition to a crisp image, each card features a paragraph of description, a summary of the pertinent rules, a set of statistical icons, and an eye-pleasing color field to indicate the affiliation (blue for the Federation, green for the Romulans, and red for the Klingons). A typical starter deck provides a good mix of all categories—including Personnel, Outpost, Mission, Ship, and Equipment—though in four starters I found only a single familiar face from the Enterprise (Deanna Troi). That's not a big deal in the context of the game, but if you're a die-hard like Mrs. Swan, you may be disappointed.

Each player begins by selecting six Mission cards from a deck of 60 cards. Some Missions involve problems on planets (a medical emergency on Beta Lankal, a scoutship rescue on Galorndon Core), others describe assignments in deep space (an investigation of a plasma streamer, a study of a time distortion in the Typhone Expanse). After the players arrange the Mission cards side by side to create a 12-card Spaceline, they conceal Dilemma cards (a ship-munching Microbiotic Colony, a radioactive relic from the Methar-Promellian war) under the Missions they think their opponents are most likely to investigate.

By deploying cards from his hand, a player assembles crews, chooses weapons, and launches starships. He then moves a

Ship card along the Spaceline until it arrives at a Mission he wishes to undertake. He flips over the first Dilemma, dispensing with it if he has right mix of Personnel and Equipment. If he fails, he can try again later with a different Ship or a new group of Personnel. When he resolves all the Dilemmas associated with a particular Mission, he earns a fixed number of points. Players continue launching Ships and attempting Missions until one accumulates 100 points and wins the game.

What distinguishes STAR TREK isn't just its streamlined game system, but its remarkable simulation of the elements of a good SF adventure. Say, for instance, the Federation player hears rumors of an ancient civilization site on Barradas III (represented by the *Plunder Site* Mission card). He deploys the U.S.S. Excelsior and a crew of five officers (by playing the corresponding cards from his hand). Once the ship is orbiting the planet, he beams down an away team of three officers, keeping two officers on board in case of a Romulan attack (a Romulan ship lurks on a Mission card two spaces away). Alas, the officers are attacked by a Minotaur Bowman (the first Dilemma card). Fortunately, the away team includes the medical and security officers needed to deal with the Bowman (and dispatch the Dilemma). Then, representatives of a matriarchal society appear (Dilemma #2) and refuse to cooperate with the male officers; the Federation team must return to their outpost to pick up more females (new Personnel cards). En route, however, they're attacked by the Romulans . . .

Interrupt and Event cards, functioning as subplots, add further complications. Events are played as part of a normal turn. Interrupts may be played at any time, even in the middle of an enemy action. Both types of cards translate incidents from the TV series into rule modifications. In the series, for instance, somebody called Masaka "attempted to transform the U.S.S. Enterprise into an ancient temple and grounds by rearranging its matter." In the game, the *Masaka Transformations* card requires the opponent to discard his entire hand and draw a new one. If a Klingon dies in an away team battle, the *Klingon Right of Vengeance* card doubles the strength of the survivors. Events and Interrupts move the game along at a breathtaking pace: A male officer is suddenly whisked away for a rendezvous with his girlfriend, the end of a Mission leads to an enemy confrontation, an unexpected encounter sends a ship careening to the other end of the galaxy.

Though the rules contain no serious flaws, Mr. Spock might raise an eyebrow at the lapses in logic. Some of the Missions must be undertaken by specific affiliations—why can't the Federation assist with the fever outbreak on Nahmi IV and why can't the Romulans hunt for artifacts on Barradas III? The basic rules allow opposing sides to use the same Per-

sonnel cards, meaning that Lt. Worf might have to battle himself. Combat involves little more than a comparison of weapon and shield ratings: straightforward but not particularly dramatic. And the starships seem to be made of Kleenex; if a ship loses two battles in the same turn, it's gone.

But these shortcomings are easy to overlook, considering the loving attention given to virtually every aspect of the *Trek* universe. Romulan and Klingon ships may use cloaking devices to move unseen. Tricorder cards boost the science aptitude of Engineers. Archvillain Q might pop up to erect a force field grid. And chicken-hearted captains may substitute holographic characters for flesh-and-blood crew members, handy in an environment with belligerent natives.

**Evaluation:** Ingenious, gorgeous, and addictive, STAR TREK has screwed up my family. Attracted by the nifty graphics, my three-year-old daughter confiscated the Static Warp Bubble card and refuses to give it back. At the local game shop, I caught my wife—a college instructor, a pillar of the community—elbowing aside 12-year-olds to get her hands on the latest shipment of boosters. As for me, I'm staying up late to catch reruns of the series—how can I sleep when I don't know what that Masaka thing's all about? (Uh, anyone have a Picard they wanna trade?) (Information: Decipher Inc., PO Box 56, Norfolk, VA 23501).

### STAR OF THE GUARDIANS\*

Starter deck: 60 cards, rules folder  
Booster pack: 15 cards  
Mag Force 7, Inc. \$9 (starter), \$3 (booster)  
Concept: Margaret Weis  
Design: Don Perrin  
Art direction: Margaret Weis

Long-time role-players will remember Margaret Weis as the co-author (with Tracy Hickman) of the first six DRAGONLANCE® novels and one of the chief architects of Krynn. She's also produced a shelf-full of books, including the *Star of the Guardians* series, from which this game derives. Unlike the novels, which feature a host of imaginative characters and doo-dads, the game concentrates almost exclusively on combat. That may be a letdown for fans of the novels, but war garners—especially those dissatisfied with the simplistic space battles of STAR TREK—should be delighted.

Though few of the cards are suitable for framing, they're attractive and user-friendly. Each consists of a colorful illustration, a block of text, and a some simple icons (stars stand for Bombing Factors, humanoid silhouettes for Personality Points). The color field indicates the category (gray for Fate, light blue for Crew). Each starter deck features a good mix of cards, including about 20 Ships, a half-dozen Weapons, and an adequate assortment of everything else. Booster packs add

weird, optional stuff like the Space Rotation Bomb (an Artifact card that forces an opponent to lose half his ships) and the Dark Matter Creatures (a Fate card that absorbs damage from the Space Rotation Bomb). No one can accuse Weis of lacking a sense of humor; one of the Personality cards bears a striking resemblance to a former editor of this magazine.

Nor can she be accused of verbosity. Most cards contain only a line or two of rules, some have no text at all. Where STAR TREK informs us that the Zibalian Class Transport is a merchant vessel used by traders like Kivas Fajo, STAR OF THE GUARDIANS tells us that the Destroyer Escort belongs to the Frey Class, and that's it (total words: four). The System cards, representing various planets and outposts, aren't identified at all (total words per card: one—and that word is "system."). But the generic approach detracts less than one might think. The absence of descriptive text serves—inadvertently perhaps—to focus attention on tactics. In a sense, STAR OF THE GUARDIANS is the card game equivalent of chess, substituting gatling lasers and destroyer escorts for pawns and bishops.

Taking the roles of rival warlords, players compete for galactic dominance by crushing enemy armadas. Each side starts with 25 Power Points, representing political strength. Certain cards generate Influence and Personality Points, spent to power special effects. Beginning with six cards drawn from their decks, players deploy System cards (to gain Power Points), then place as many Ship cards as they like in any of five columns (called lanes). Crew, Weapon, Fate, and Damage cards boost the combat effectiveness of Ships. When maneuvered into the proper positions in the various lanes, Ships may attack squadrons, fleets, and Systems, with successful attacks reducing the enemy's Power Points. When a player reduces his rival's Power Points to zero, he wins.

Despite a couple of fuzzy mechanics (it took me two games to figure out how to launch squadrons from planetary bases) and an occasional fudging of physical law (with only three ships per lane, this is an awfully small cosmos), the simple rules make for an intense contest. Resource management is a constant challenge; a player can never hold more than six cards, and most actions require spending points from a chronically short supply. Nervy players may try special tactics, such as Running the Flank (which gives a combat bonus to a ship in an outer lane) and Weapon Conduit (allowing all friendly ships in the same lane to combine attack strengths). With careful planning, a player might be able to pull off a Mind Link, allowing friendly characters to communicate telepathically. Though a typical game eats up the better part of an hour, the outcome usually remains uncertain until the last few minutes—presuming, of course, you're not playing with a wise guy

who's loaded his deck with killer Artifacts.

**Evaluation:** The high rating reflects my bias for fast, frill-free combat games. Don't expect a rich universe, a lot of whistles and bells, or personalities you can get to know (most of the characters don't even have names). But if your idea of a good time is wiping out war machines, welcome to paradise. These starships wither like toy soldiers in a microwave oven, making STAR OF THE GUARDIANS king of the stellar shoot-'em-ups. (Information: Mag Force 7, Inc., PO Box 1106, Williams Bay, WI 53191.)

### **GALACTIC EMPIRES\* game**



Starter deck: 55 cards, rules booklet

Booster pack: 15 cards

Companion Games \$9 (starter), \$2.45 (booster)

*Concept, layout, and design:* C. Henry Schulte

*Writing:* John M. Hammer and C. Henry Schulte

*Art direction:* Richard J. Rausch and Edward P. Beard Jr.

It's the gas men vs. the crab people for control of the universe!

*Star Wars* meets *Alice in Wonderland* in this science-fiction extravaganza featuring some of the wildest aliens this side of a drive-in movie. The premise: two factions representing a United Nations' worth of races fight to annihilate each other with starships, monsters, and natural catastrophes. Though the permutations are endless—and I've got the boosters to prove it—you can play a credible game with a single deck. GALACTIC EMPIRES ain't just loopy—it's cheap, too!

The stylish cards—a bit better-looking than STAR OF THE GUARDIANS, a bit worse than STAR TREK—are less notable for their graphics than for their staggering variety. Along with the expected Ship, Crew, and Equipment cards, we also get Ability, Hazard, Occurrence, Luck, Reaction, Monster, Base, and Terrain cards. The Empire cards alone represent more than a half-dozen races, including the Mechad (electromagnetic technologists), Vektreans (space pirates), Argonians (the gas men), Krebiz (the crab people), and Dragons (big lizards with sharp teeth). My starter deck also included a Warp Funnel, Meteor Shower, and Phaser Eel. Thanks to the judicious use of color, the cards are easy to identify. A field of mottled blue, for instance, designates Argonian vessels, while Krebiz fleets are a dusty beige. The rulebook explains the mechanics in detail, and a lengthy Q&A section addresses most of the ambiguities. Still, the editor could've benefited from a few more journalism classes, if only to spare us from sentences like: "Any additional rules, or rules which change when playing a Standard Game or one of the other playing structures defined later are noted within the specific rules for that playing structure."

EMPIRES involves both the prudent

deployment of assets and the management of a rather complicated hierarchy of points. Beginning with nine cards, drawn at random, players lay down as much Terrain as they can, which generates the Economy, Supply, Energy, Ammunition, Research, and Repair points needed to power other units and trigger various actions. Ships, for example, require Supply points to operate. Heavy weapons need Ammunition points, Repair points negate Ship damage, Research points destroy monsters. With the right cards (and the right points), players may arm weapons and launch combat fleets. Reaction cards, similar to STAR TREK's Interrupt cards, may be played at any time to transport a crew from a wrecked Ship or prevent an enemy doctor from curing wounded allies. If a player maneuvers past his opponent's defenses, he may assault the enemy Sector Headquarters; whoever has the last intact Headquarters wins.

Once you get a handle on which points affect which cards—I had a hard time remembering that Research points get rid of monsters—play flows smoothly. The barrage of decisions (do I spend my Economy points to activate the Clipper Frigate, or use them to patch the hole in the Scout Capsule?) keeps both sides focused. The relationship between power and terrain is reminiscent of the best features of MAGIC: THE GATHERING. Special rules, such as the Victory Celebration earned when a player blows up an enemy Headquarters, add an appealing irreverence.

But EMPIRES has a drawback, and it's a big one. Bookkeeping is a royal pain, not so much because of the amount (though it's excessive) but because of the method. Nearly every variable must be tracked with dice. You don't roll the dice; you use them as markers. If a Fleet Freighter suffers two points of damage, a die with its four-pip face showing is placed on the card. If the Freighter's shield suffers damage (instead of the vessel itself), the result must be noted with a *different* die. Dice also are used to keep track of Research points, the strength of Mechad electromagnetic fields, and permanent damage (as opposed to temporary damage). We're talking a lot of dice here, and none come with the game.

**Evaluation:** This one's a tough call. It's recommended only if (1) you're willing to put up with chunks of clunky writing, (2) you don't mind keeping track of all the points, and (3) you've got one or two bags of dice handy. With the freewheeling mythology and dizzying variety of options, you can easily lose yourself in GALACTIC EMPIRES' goofy pleasures—it's like diving into a swimming pool of jelly beans. There seem to be no serious problems with the mechanics, nor any clear paths to victory. After a week's worth of games, I still have no idea which empire has the edge. But I've got my money on the crab people. (Information: Companion Games, PO Box 392, Stamford, NY 12167.)

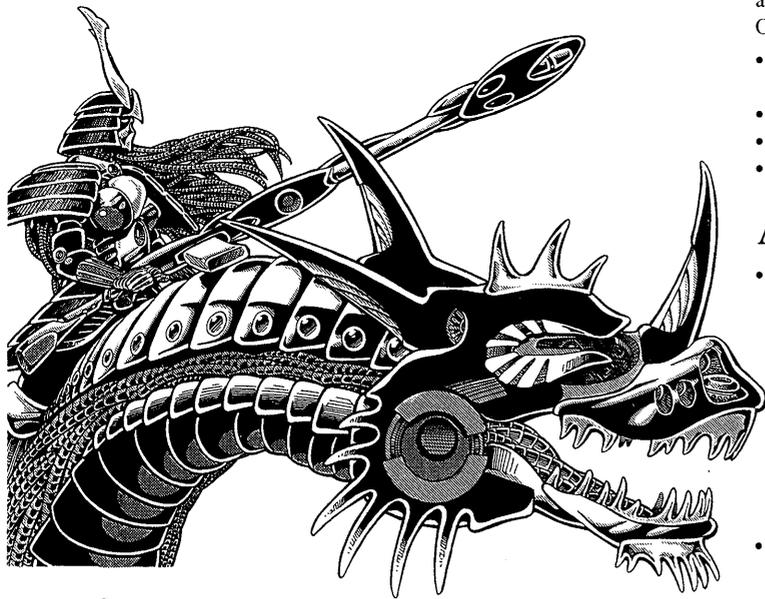
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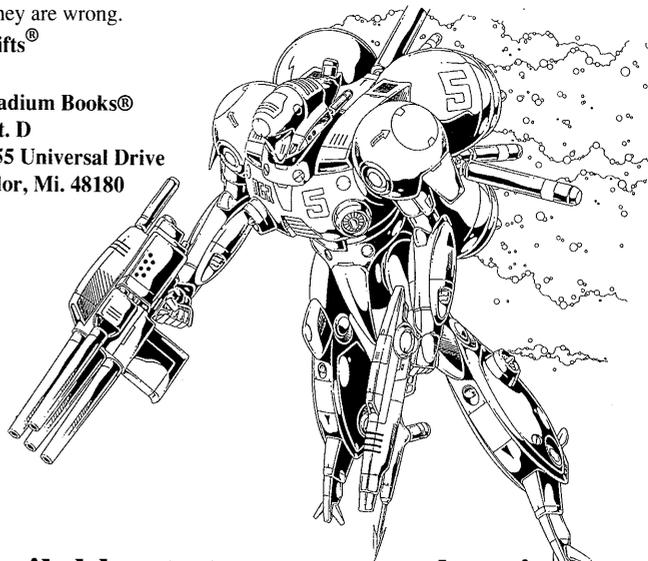
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**ILLUMINATI:****NEW WORLD ORDER\* game**

Starter deck: 55 cards, rules booklet

Booster pack: 15 cards

Steve Jackson Games \$10 (starter), \$2.25 (booster)

Design: Steve Jackson

Graphic design: Derek Pearcy, Jeff Koke, and Monica Stephens

The game that won't go away, ILLUMINATI arrived in 1982 as a deck of low-budget cards, then spawned a couple of expansion sets, mutated into an on-line game, and inspired a GURPS\* game supplement (an award-winner, no less). Now it returns as a collectible card game. Somebody's determined to keep it alive—the Sons of Cthulhu, maybe?

The Sons, along with the Discordian Society and the Gnomes of Zurich, are among the secret conspiracies who, according to ILLUMINATI, run the world. Everyone from Hillary Clinton to Dan Quayle to you and me are pocket change for these power-mad big shots, not an unreasonable premise if you've ever been jerked around by a personnel office or the IRS.

The cards, twice the size of their 1982 counterparts and infinitely more attractive, come in three basic flavors. Group cards, colored red, represent prey: personalities (Nancy Reagan; Elvis), places (Vatican City, Silicon Valley), and entities (Big Media, Inter-

national Community Conspiracy.) Groups are also assigned alignments, such as Liberal, Conservative, Violent, and Weird, to indicate their friends and foes. Liberal Hillary, for instance, is the natural enemy of Conservative Nancy. Resource cards, colored violet, include weapons (Hammer of Thor, Orbital Mind Lasers) and allies (Mercenaries, Loch Ness Monster). Blue Plot cards represent disasters (Car Bomb, Rain of Frogs) and events (Martial Law, Liberal Agenda). Plots and Resources modify actions of the Groups; the Hammer of Thor boosts the power of any Violent Group, the Liberal Agenda increases Hillary's chance of clobbering Nancy. Witty writing makes the cards fun to read, and a dose of cynicism makes 'em bite; anyone who kills Bjorne, the purple Viking dinosaur, earns an extra Plot card "as the thanks of a grateful world."

A player starts by choosing a conspiracy (like the Sons or the Gnomes) and placing the corresponding card on the table. He draws nine cards from his deck to form his hand, then begins building his Power Structure, a web of Groups and Resources controlled by his primary conspiracy. As the Power Structure grows, so does its strength; the stronger the Structure, the more formidable its attacks. A player wins by eliminating all enemy Illuminati, controlling a specified number of Groups, or meeting the objectives of a special Goal card.

Groups generate action tokens (repre-

sented by buttons, coins, or glass stones, not included with the game) that allow the controlling player to attack, use special abilities, or draw additional Plot cards. An attack may be attempted to either control or destroy a Group. To destroy a group, the initiator announces the target, the name of the attacking agent, and whichever of the attacking agent's associates are eligible to lend a hand. The initiator rolls two six-sided dice (not included); if the result is equal to or less than the difference between the Power rating of the attackers and the Power of the defender, the attempt succeeds and the target heads for the cemetery. An attack to control follows a similar procedure, except the roll must be equal to or less than the difference between the attacker's Power and the defender's Resistance. If the attack to control succeeds, the Group becomes part of the winner's Power Structure.

Incoming and outgoing arrows printed on the Group cards show their allegiance within the power structure. When a player takes control of a new Group, he lines up one of its incoming arrows with an outgoing arrow of its new master. Bizarre organizational chains are not only possible but likely. Prince Charles and Saddam Hussein might become lackeys of the phone company. The Moral Minority may recruit Hillary.

Modifiers, alignments, and Plots make the outcomes of attacks uncertain at best. If one of your cards duplicates a Group controlled by an opposing player, the duplicate acts as a "hidden agent," granting a + 10 attack bonus. Linked Groups with identical alignments improve their attack strengths by 4. If Bjorne stays healthy, he generates an extra action token for every Media Group under his command.

Ever-shifting alliances present endless opportunities for treachery. An Assassination card enables the owner to incinerate any personality on the table. Groups requiring too much effort to maintain can be bumped off by their own allies. California giving you trouble? Try a Terrorist Nuke or a Meteor Strike. Better yet, send in Bigfoot.

**Evaluation:** With its pointed satire and subtle tactics, INWO aims squarely at sophisticates; those who find STAR TREK too demanding need not apply. And owing to the unconventional mechanics, even experienced gamers may have trouble at first. (More examples of play, or a Q & A section like the one from GALACTIC EMPIRES, would've helped.) But resolute players who scrutinize the rules and grind their way through a few practice rounds will discover why ILLUMINATI has been so durable. Not only is it an inspired concept, it's an enlightening treatise on the fine art of backstabbing. What more could you ask from a deck of cards?

**Short and sweet**

*Encyclopedia Cthulhiana*, by Daniel Harms. Chaosium, Inc., \$11. *Encyclopedia*

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# Galactic Empires !!!

R/S1 ●  
**Clydon Scout Craft**

**Clydon Scout Craft:**

- Generates one research point per turn or allows the owning player to look at one randomly selected card in an opponent's hand each turn.
- Must be played independently when played in reaction mode.

✦: Phaser

Galactic Empires is a science fiction trading card game. While in command of Sector Headquarters you conquer terrain; deploy bases, ships, crew and special equipment; and cautiously avoid space monsters, hazards and other occurrences. The objective: Eliminate your opponents' Sector HQs, conquering the sector and eventually the galaxy.

Players choose which empire they will represent: Krebiz, Argonian, Corporation, Mechaad, Bolaar, Vektreaan, Indirigan, Dragon, Scorpead, Clydon, Tufor, and P.O.T. empires. More empires will be added to the game on a regular basis through additional expansion sets.

**Game Mechanics:** Each player uses his own deck of cards (Basic Game allows two players to use one deck). There can be as many or as few cards in the deck as you wish. Each turn consists of applying the output from your terrain to your bases & ships, playing cards from your hand, firing weapons and playing more cards.

**The Cards Themselves:** Each card is in dazzling full color from an assortment of different artists and illustrators. Each card has the rules needed to operate that ship, system, crew person, etc.

This card game is deceptively simple to learn. Even non-gamers pick it up quickly. But, more importantly, the game has all the rich flavor and history of the Far Side of the galaxy, the strategy of spaceship combat and a fantastic science fiction flair.

This game will be the easiest, most fun way of introducing new players to your unique hobby than anything you've ever tried before. And best of all, you will be able to start play within minutes. Don't be surprised if you find yourself playing Galactic Empires more than anything else!

C4 Lieutenant

**Lieutenant:**

**Illustration:** A human lieutenant in Corporate service.

- Causes one crew card of lesser strength at his location, to function as if that crew were strength 8.

Call Companion Games for Details: 1-800-49-GAMES or 607-652-9038

*Magica*, compiled and developed by Slade (R/T), Henson. TSR, Inc., \$25 per volume.

These reference books share a diligence on the part of the researchers that borders on the superhuman. The *Encyclopedia Cthuliana*, the more scholarly of the two, contains an alphabetized listing of nearly every entity, cult, and scrap of arcane lore pertaining to H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos published in the past century. Source material includes the fiction of Ramsey Campbell, Robert Bloch, and Stephen King, as well as scenarios from the CALL OF CTHULHU\* game. Inclusion of the latter may offend purists, but as compiler Daniel Harms notes, "nothing in the game is antithetical to the spirit of Lovecraft's work." The entries cover everything from the origin of the Shining Trapezohedron to the lineage of Hziulquoigmnzah, capped by a year-by-year chronology of the history of the *Necronomicon*.

The *Encyclopedia Magica*, no less ambitious, lists all of the AD&D magical items from two decades of TSR products—every boxed set, accessory, and magazine article. The entries span three volumes, available individually. I'm looking at volume two, *decoy dust to phylactery of righteousness* (misspelled on the title page), marveling at the diversity. Pick your favorite: *hat of stupidity*, *gloves of the octopus*, *fountain of dysentery* (yikes!). A must for Dungeon Masters who want to spruce up their campaigns, and for every TSR contributor who longs to see his masterpiece immortalized in an upscale format.

*Fianna Tribebook*, by Harry Heckel with Fallon Doherty and John Bridges. White Wolf Game Studio, \$10.

Of all the tribes in the WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE\* game, the *Fianna* are among the most intriguing. Lycanthropic bards, they communicate with songs and have even been known to crack jokes. This player's reference, number four in the *Tribebook* series, presents a thorough history of the *Fianna* and a nice selection of new gifts (like *warp spasm*) but downplays the culture. Where's the music? Where's the details about their oral traditions and compositional styles? (Any *Fianna* symphonies?) And the first-person approach makes for some awkward passages ("... we're a moody lot. Our passions burn hotter than those of other tribes. Be careful of them, or else they'll govern you and strip you of your senses."). Still, designer Harry Heckel keeps the energy level of the text so intense ("There is no greater glory than covering your claws with their accursed blood"), I half-expected the book to jump out of my lap and chase the cat around the room.

*The Deva Spark*, by Bill Slavicsek and J.M. Salisbury. TSR, Inc., \$10.

Nothing aggravates me more than an RPG adventure with a flabby climax; after

slogging through a books worth of fight scenes and dungeon crawls, I want to be dazzled. So bravo to *The Deva Spark*, a 32-page scenario for the PLANESCAPE™ setting. The final chapter is a knock-out, a sensational blend of surreal characters and obstacles, building to a climax of surprising impact. The rest of the trip's nothing to sneeze at either, though if I see one more AD&D adventure that starts in a tavern . . .

*Dangerous Prey*, by Nigel Findley, William Spencer-Hale, Kevin Hassall, Aaron Loeb, Andrew Lucas, Geoff McMartin, Bryan Nystul, Mike Nystul, and Chris Pramas. Pariah Press, \$15.

This solid collection of creeps for the WHISPERING VAULT\* game would be right at home in CALL OF CTHULHU or the drearier realms of the PLANESCAPE™ multiverse. So vivid is the writing, the pages practically ooze slime: "Upon entering the Flesh, the [Mitel et Abrean]'s fluid form acquires a muggy viscosity, turning it into a thick puddle that moves with terrible deliberation." Also looking for trouble are the corpse-like Locust, whose presence causes meat to rot, and the U'Glann, a three-armed werewolf with an appetite for entrails. The book also provides complete statistics and a chapter of helpful referee tips ("A bloody death is nasty, but a slow lingering wasting is nastier"). What's WHISPERING VAULT, you ask? Only one of the smartest, spookiest horror RPGs that ever clawed its way from a crypt. (Information: Pariah Press Inc., 5744 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60634.)

*Through the Cracks*, by Greg Farshtey, Matt Forbeck, Shane Lacy Hensley, Ron Seiden, Ed Stark, and John Terra. West End Games, \$15.

I'm not the world's biggest fan of the SHATTERZONE\* game, but I know a good SF adventure when it totters by. Shane Lacy Hensley's slam-bang "Kipling's Drift" sends the PCs to a remote asteroid for a rendezvous with virus-infected scavvies. John Terra's "Corona Incident" involves the investigation of a derelict ship, replete with twitching corpses and disgusting aliens. Though the remaining scenarios in this anthology aren't as memorable, they're well-written and easy to run.

*The Gamer's Connection*, edited by Mark Arsenault. Gold Rush Games, \$8 for a four-issue subscription, \$2 for a sample copy. Published quarterly.

Too many small press publications serve as repositories for whiny editorials and amateur hour fiction that wouldn't pass muster in an eighth grade English class, which is why *The Gamer's Connection* comes as a pleasant surprise. The 16-page tabloid is packed with news, features, and reviews, intelligently written and edited. The latest issue, number 22, contains an

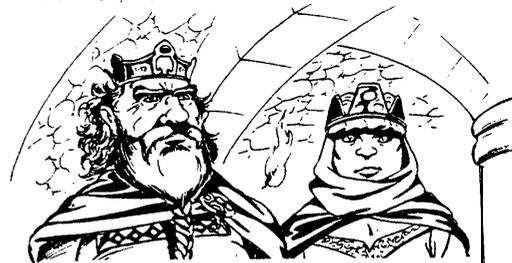
update on the Small Press Association, an essay titled "Marriage and Gaming," a generic time travel scenario, and a meticulously thorough convention list (nearly 80 entries). If you miss the glory days of *Space Gamer* magazine, or if DRAGON Magazine doesn't come out often enough to suit your tastes, consider a subscription. At two bucks an issue, it's a steal. (Information: Gold Rush Games, PO Box 2531, Elk Grove, CA 95759.)

TERROR T.R.A.X.™ game: *Track of the Werewolf* and *Track of the Vampire*, by Flint Dille and Buzz Dixon. TSR, Inc., \$15 each.

The audio equivalent of chose-your-own-adventure paperbacks, these CDs cast the listener as a hard-boiled private eye on the trail of supernatural bad guys. A Dirty Harry clone handles the narrative, sound effects and mood music set up the encounters, and a sweet-voiced computer sidekick lays out your options. For instance, after stumbling into a den of lycanthropes in *Pack of the Werewolf*, the sidekick says that you may "flee the shack (go to track 5)" or "fight the werewolves (track 8)". Half the fun comes from the over-the-top performances; at one point, we hear a victim on the phone screeching, "You've got to help me! I'm changing! I'm going to rip hearts and lungs open!" Because both discs feature the same production team, and more or less the same type of adventure, you can satisfy your curiosity by buying either. I lean towards *Werewolf*, the one with the lung-ripper. But that might be because of my performance in *Vampire*, which the sidekick matter-of-factly evaluated as "pathetic."

A former newspaper publisher, rock musician, and medical student, Rick Swan has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply. Ω

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



### Voice your opinion and make it count!

What issues are most important to the role-playing hobby? What solutions have you found for problems in your favorite game? Turn to this issue's "Forum" and see what others think—then tell us what you think!

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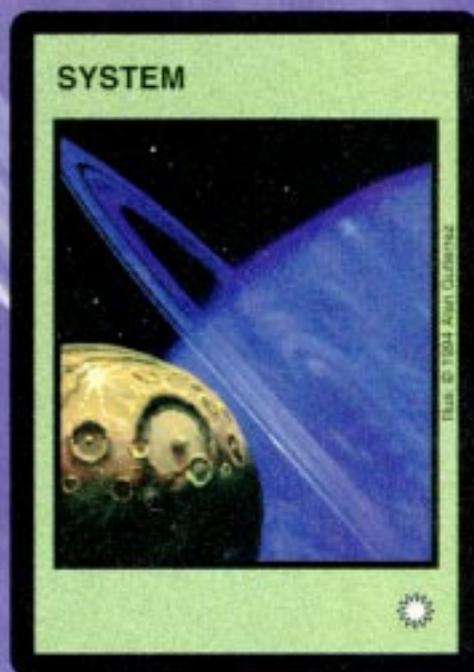
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stood quietly in the doorway, awaiting my time. My master sat on the cold balcony in the chill wind and looked across the way, staring with unfocused eyes at the canyon walls. "Davrin?" I finally said.

He turned slowly, pulling his blanket higher over his shoulder, his fast-graying beard and the few wisps of thin hair at the sides of his head blowing faintly in sharp currents of the winter air. His eyes latched onto mine like iron talons, and the corners of his lips twitched slightly upward.

"What is it, Garrett?"

"You have a visitor," I replied.

He turned back. The canyon's walls were blood red this time of day, stained so by the last dying rays of the sun as it set behind the castle. For a moment I thought he was going to ignore my comment. But finally, he spoke. "How long have you been apprenticed to me?"

I answered, knowing he was fully aware of the span. "Fifteen years."

"You are no longer a boy."

I cleared my throat. "I am twenty-two, no longer young."

"And your magic is now stronger than mine."

"Yes, Davrin. What is your point?"

"Why have you not left to search out your own fortune like the rest of my apprentices?"

I looked at him and considered my answer. The contour of his face stood out above the depth of the canyon. The lines chiseled in his cheeks were suddenly deep, like the shadowed crevasses that ran down the cliffs. How do I tell him that I am afraid, that I cannot rely on magic alone? How do I tell him that his strongest student cannot trust himself, that my nerves run unchecked when I think of leaving this castle? "There is more I can learn from you."

"What further lessons do you think I have to give?"

Bitter wind whistled over the exposed balcony, filling the momentary silence. "I will know when my time of leaving comes."

"My sons are already raised, Garrett. I cannot be your father."

"I do not expect that."

He nodded slowly but said nothing.

"Your visitor waits."

"I'm tired. You handle it." Using only his middle finger and forefinger, he waved me away.

"I think it would be best if you were to look after this caller yourself."

He breathed the mountain air deeply and released the breath through his thin nostrils. "Then, by all means, let us go." Davrin rose from his chair, leaning upon a gnarled staff that stood half a head's height above his bony pate.

I took his arm and guided him as we walked through the tower room and down the stairs.

I was never apprenticed in the formal manner. That is to say, my parents did not sell me or send me away to learn at the feet of a master of this particular trade. No. In fact, I would not know my parents if they were to announce themselves to my face. They left me to die in the

# The Time of Leaving

By Ron Collins

Illustrations by Dave Kooharian

streets well before I was old enough to earn my keep, while I was still merely a mouth to feed rather than an item with value for barter. Davrin took me in. He spared my life when I was tired and starving, when I weighed less than a well-fed dog and wore dirt and lice as my primary coverings. He was my savior.

He brought me home to his family, and they accepted me as one of them. Averett and Kile became my brothers. And Lorien, Davrin's wife, became my mother. Due to them, I never again knew the bitter ache of a stomach dried up in hunger. Thanks to them, I never spent another night huddled in an alleyway, shivering in the rain.

But life changes. Averett and Kile grew up and moved onward. And Lorien, too, moved onward, leaving the face of this earth to take residence in holier castles. After Lorien's passing, Davrin took to spending much of his time on the balcony, silently staring into the vastness of the open canyon, and withering slowly away. I felt his sorrow and I felt the emptiness to his life that she left behind.

Perhaps I remained with him for this reason. Perhaps I owed him something that I could not repay. But I knew better than to think this highly of myself. I remained because I was not ready. It was that simple, and that complex.

I would have considered my intentions further, but the visitor who awaited downstairs concerned me.

He was a slight man, this visitor. His hands were thin, his fingers sticking out of the overlarge sleeves of his tightly woven riding cloak at awkward angles, like cattails jutting out of a stagnant pond. I dare say that even a small man, such as I, could manage him well in a bare-handed fight. Yet, despite his frame, he carried himself in the way of a man familiar with power—upright and sure. His movements were bold and efficient, his language direct. And, most unsettling of all, there was something cold about the way his black eyes lit upon me as he spoke that drew my breath away, something that brought a tingle to my spine and bade me call my master to handle this case.

I wanted to tell Davrin about him. I wanted to warn him, to make sure he didn't underestimate this man who awaited our arrival. But Davrin preferred to draw his own conclusions. I would not give him these concerns until he asked for them—and his lips remained closed throughout our walk.

The visitor rose from the wicker chair as we entered the receiving room. It was a small chamber, dimly lit by globes of mage-light at each corner. Three chairs and a waist-high table filled the floor space. Shelves lined two walls, one set holding rows of leather-bound books, the other containing multicolored powders, rodent parts, and other spell catalysts.

"Good evening," Davrin said. His voice was stronger than it seemed a few minutes before. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting for so long. I am an old man, and my body does not move as fast as it once did."

"The wait was not overly long for someone who has already traveled two days."

"Any wait is too long for a visitor of mine. I did not catch your name. What may I call you?"

"Kenderick. Just call me Kenderick," our visitor replied.

Davrin's lips closed into a thin line as he moved to stand in front of Kenderick. He analyzed our visitor as he walked; I noted the subtle changes in Davrin's expression as he scanned Kenderick's clothing, deciphered his body language, and listened to his tone of voice. Kenderick wore a brown riding cloak and highly polished leather boots. His hands were clean and unmarked, and the hint of a golden belt buckle shone from where his cloak was unbuttoned. I could tell Davrin came to the same conclusion that I had. This man was of noble birth. And if his further study revealed the same answer as mine, Davrin would understand why I called for him.

"What do you want of me?" Davrin said.

"I have recently had a death in the family." Kenderick's voice was sharp, a razor's edge that made my nerves twinge as he spoke the word "death."

"That is always terrible to hear. You have my condolences," Davrin replied.

Kenderick nodded his head in return. "As a result, I have inherited an item that I'm told has some mystic power. But I can find no records that discuss what this power might be."

"Ah."

When Davrin went no further, Kenderick continued. "I want you to determine this item's magic and inform me of how to use it."

"Let me see the item."

Kenderick reached into a pocket and withdrew a small velvet pouch cinched by a leather drawstring. He untied the pouch and let a small stone tumble out onto his hand. The stone was dull in the mage-light, an opaque blue several shades darker than a robin's egg. I couldn't tell from my angle, but I thought one side of the stone had been carved.

Davrin looked at it in silence for several seconds and grunted. Then he shook his head. "No," he said. And he turned to walk toward the door.

"Pardon me?" Kenderick said.

"I won't reveal the magic on your stone. I'm old, Kenderick, and tired, too. I don't have the strength to spare for the magic you request . . ."

I was shocked at this. Davrin had never turned a customer away. And this reason was ludicrous. Searching an object for the presence of magic was a simple spell that required little effort.

". . . but my apprentice is my equal in talent. Perhaps you can convince him to help you."

The room was quiet for a moment. I looked at Kenderick and he at me. His eyebrows knit together and he raised his chin slightly, peering down his nose at me.

"Are you as good as your master says you are?"

I gave a sidelong glance at Davrin. What was he up to, I wondered? Why was he putting me in this position? It was a challenge, obviously. But what was this test's passing mark? "I can manage."

"Then will you take the task?"

"It is difficult magic," I said, using Davrin's charade to buy time.

"I have gold enough to make it worth your while."

I walked around the small table, putting it between Kenderick and myself, and turned to face him. There it

was, the uneasy hood to his eyes that made me summon Davrin to this case in the first place, the sharp stare that burned my cheeks and made me want to turn away. Whatever this man's story, one thing was sure: If Kendrick had inherited the stone, his relative's death was not accidental. I glanced at Davrin and saw that his eyes had narrowed and the lines in his face had deepened.

"Bring me the stone," I said. "I will perform your spell."

Kenderick walked to the table, never removing his gaze from mine. The stone clicked against the polished wood as he laid it down. There, I could see its carving—a frontal view of an eyeball thinly etched in the surface.

I picked the stone up and rolled it between my fingertips. It was smooth, even in the area of the etching.

I placed it back on the table and went to the shelves, searching for three items. I pulled a small jar of powdered owl beak from the top shelf, and another of dried bat eyes. I dropped a pinch of the powder and two of the bat eyes into the third item, a shallow clay bowl painted in quadrants depicting each elemental power.

Returning to the table, I fished a woven mat out of the drawer and rolled it out. It made a good setting for the bowl, large enough to catch spillage, but small and plain enough to ensure the bowl a prominent status. Using both hands, I smoothed wrinkles from the cloth.

I could hear Kenderick breathing as I picked up the stone and held it over the bowl. He bent closer as I dropped the stone into the mix. He smelled of his travels, and his closeness was bothersome, making me edgy and reluctant to continue.

Davrin, too, seemed to loom closer. He stood at the perimeter of my sight, watching like a mother bird perched on a nearby tree limb.

I splayed my fingers over the edge of the bowl and focused my thoughts. The bowl's coarseness seemed to grow into me, making my fingers take on a ceramic brittleness. Then my fingers became the powder, slipping into the wrinkles of the pair of hollowed bat eyes before finding their way to the stone. It was smooth and cold, perfectly formed.

I spoke a word of magic.

Heat rose through my arm. Green light flared through my fingers, casting sudden shadows across the room, passing through the flesh of my hand to reveal an eerie view of bones and ligaments, cartilage and tendons. I drew a slow breath to calm my nerves. This was the light of power, the light of magic. But it was a light that only sorcerers such as Davrin and I could see. I struggled to avoid an outward reaction, and returned my efforts to the magic at hand. As heat traveled up my arm and crossed my chest, the full power of the stone was unveiled to me. It was intense, almost more than I could bear.

Raising my gaze, I stared at Kenderick and saw the black, malignant root of darkness that he held inside him. It festered there, twisting and churning, glistening like a mass of maggots scavenging a corpse. Kenderick's soul opened to me, and I knew his most profound desires. His dreams raged through my mind. Kenderick was a baron, soon to rule a fiefdom. I saw his anger. I saw his distaste for the truth, his preference for quick resolution over in-

convenient justice. I saw the way common people would follow him, and the bloody results if they didn't.

These visions were the stone's doing. And I was afraid.

Now that I had seen the man, could I bring myself to give Kendrick the stone's power over others? Could I allow him to see into other's lives, to steal their dreams and turn those dreams to his favor? Could I live with myself if I did? I knew the answers to these questions as I asked them, but these answers only brought a sharper edge to my anxiety. This was the fear that had brought me to call Davrin here in the first place, I realized. He should be making this decision, not me. He would know how to comport himself; I did not. He would handle this tension; I could not.

I fought the power of these thoughts, and the grotesque form that Kenderick held within. I fought for my self-control, to avoid giving Kendrick a clue to my findings. As I withdrew from the stone, the images trickled away, and I concentrated on regular breathing. I moved through the powder and the bowl, quieting my heartbeat and struggling to overcome the nervous energy that came with knowing I would soon have to confront my fears.

Finally, I returned to my normal self, and the spell's energy faded. I looked at Kenderick. Even without the stone's magic, I could see the writhing darkness in his pupils.

"Well?" he said.

I swallowed and shook my head, wondering if my voice would waver. "There is no magic on this stone."

Kenderick paused for a moment. "None?"

"None," I lied again.

A sigh of resignation escaped Kenderick's lips. I glanced at my master and saw a thin smile on his face and a glimmer in his eye.

I stood quietly in the doorway, awaiting my time.

Davrin sat on the cold balcony in the chill wind and looked across the way, staring with unfocused eyes at the canyon walls. Those walls were dull brown this time of the morning, waiting for the sun to rise over the highest crests.

I didn't know how to proceed. I was here to tell Davrin that I was prepared to leave, that his work was complete. But despite his earlier prodding and my eagerness to make my leaving, I suddenly found the words difficult.

"Davrin?" I finally said.

"We lived here because Lorien loved these cliffs," he said before I could say more.

"They are beautiful," I replied. "Almost as breathtaking as she was."

He turned and looked at me. His frail body and his shrunken face seemed almost hollow, lifeless. But his eyes flared with a passion sparked by the mention of Lorien's beauty.

"She was my life," he said.

He turned back to the canyon walls. For a moment I thought he had forgotten about me.

Thoughts tumbled through my mind, colliding with each other and mixing themselves up. My heart pounded against my breast. My throat choked. I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to tell him what his guidance had meant to

me, to thank him for giving me a life. There was so much I wanted to say.

But as these words stuck in my throat, a memory wedged its way in. I remembered my youthful anticipation as I would wait in the castle for his return from distant lands, the warm look on his face as he burst through the doorway, and the smell of the woods on his hands and clothes when he greeted me with hugs of the same fervor as those he had for Averett and Kile.

What would my life have been without Davrin? Where would I have been without Lorien?

I gazed at him. His head shook with more than the cold. His lips were dry and creased, showing no signs of having been treated with the oils that Lorien would have made him apply. His hair blew about his uncovered head.

A new thought managed to struggle through my own selfish concerns. One so disturbing that it caught my breath and drew me harshly back into reality.

Davrin had never been alone before.

"When are you leaving?" he asked.

I swallowed and cleared my throat. There was only one answer to this question. My time of leaving would come when Davrin's came, and this was not it. "I am not ready yet."

He grimaced. "I have nothing more for you, Garrett. You should go and live your life. Leave an old man in peace."

"No, I disagree. There is much more I can learn from you."

Davrin pursed his lips.

I walked to his chair and knelt beside him, warming his cold hand in mine. "I'll make our breakfast in a moment. But first, tell me about when you first met Lorien."

He sat in silence for a moment, staring at the cliffs. Then he began to speak. As he described their first meeting, the sun crested the far ridge of the canyon. I raised my free hand and shielded my eyes, squinting into the light of a new day. Ω



## Bird Maiden

*Continued from page 80*

object is given to her at the end of her initial training. If she ever loses it, she loses all her powers as kahina and shape-changer until she recovers it. Unscrupulous men have been known to come into the possession of a bird maiden's feathered garment, and with the creature helpless, have forced her into marriage.

4. Destruction of the feathered token of the bird maiden always results in the creature's death with no hope whatsoever of resurrection.

5. When *shapechanged*, only a bird maiden's feathered garment and her body

transform. All other worldly goods must be taken off and guarded by someone else.

6. Just as mystics dance, bird maiden kahinas sing, and the verbal components of their spells are always sung in a sweet, warbling voice. They have major access to the spheres of All, Animal, Divination, Elemental, Healing, Plant, and Weather. They have minor access to the spheres of Creation, Protection, and Sun.

7. While bird maidens always have the nonweapon proficiency options allowed to kahinas, one proficiency they always possess is herbalism due to its connection with the land they are sworn to protect.

8. The place of training for bird maidens is said to be a place called the Crown of All Feathers. It is supposedly a great wooden fortress concealed among the clouds in high hills or mountains. There aarakocra teach the rituals, duties, and abilities of the bird maidens. It is rumored that a very special genie of enormous power guards this place and uses powerful illusions to keep it safe from the curious and unsavory. All bird maidens know where this place is, but no sort of magical compulsion or physical abuse can pry the location from them. Ω





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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, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., 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, "Sage Advice" looks at optional expansions to the AD&D® game and considers a few other questions from the mailbag.

**Wizards using the ghul lord kit from the *Complete Sha'ir's Handbook* have an ability called manipulation, which inflicts temporary damage on the user. What is temporary damage? Also, there is a reference to a process called "leaching" that allows the character to use magical items to avoid the hit point loss, but leaching is never explained.**

The damage a ghul lord suffers from a manipulation comes from the negative energy the character uses to power the manipulation. It is temporary only insofar as it can be healed by rest or spells—the character does not lose hit points permanently.

Leaching is a complete mystery to me, but here's a suggestion: Defensive items, such as *rings of protection*, *cloaks of protection*, and *bracers of defense*, can block the damage. Each of an item's pluses stops one point of damage; *bracers of defense* have one effective plus for each point of armor class improvement they bestow beyond armor class 10, so, for example, *bracers of defense* AC 4 count as +6 items. A ghul lord carrying several defensive items can choose which one to leach during any particular manipulation. If the manipulation is particularly powerful, the ghul lord can leach multiple items to block all the damage. A leached magical item becomes nonmagical for 1d4 melee rounds no matter how much damage it blocked. Each time an item is leached, it must save vs. magical fire or be destroyed in a wave of negative energy.

**Are the weavings used by mageweavers, also from the *CSH*, like**

**scrolls or like spellbooks? That is, are they consumed when used or are they just another sort of spellbook?**

A mageweaver's spell weavings are like scrolls in that they can be used only once. Unlike scrolls, a spell weaving can be used only by the mageweaver who originally wove it. If the mageweaver loses a spell weaving, he loses the spell it represents. A mageweaver's spellbook is a huge tapestry (or set of tapestries) that contains all the spell patterns that the character knows.

**Exactly how does a wizard using the Mystic of Nog kit (from the *CSH*) sacrifice spell levels when maintaining the *hands of stone* power? I understand that the character must devote one spell level to the power each time he advances a level, but the kit description says that spells have to be expended in whole spell units, you can't spend part of a 3rd-level spell to get a power that costs only one or two spell levels. So, only a 1st level spell slot can be used to maintain *hands of stone*. What happens to a Mystic of Nog when he gains a level and does not also gain a 1st-level spell slot? Also, the kit description mentions that an ability score can be raised higher than 18 temporarily. How long does the temporary increase last and how does the character pay for it?**

If a Mystic of Nog character doesn't have a 1st-level spell slot available to spend on maintaining the *hands of stone* power, he can't maintain the power and suffers the consequences (1d6 points of damage to the character every time he uses *hands of stone*). Players who choose this power for their characters should plan ahead and make sure that sufficient 1st level spell slots are available. If the DM is feeling kind, the PC may use the power at a lower level if the maintenance cost can't be paid. For example, an 8th-level Mystic of Nog inflicts 1d4 + 4 hp damage with *hands of stone* (1d4 + half the character's level, rounded up). If the character advances to 9th level, he could inflict 1d4 + 5 hp damage. If the character cannot maintain the power, the DM might allow him to inflict 1d4 + 4 hp damage with no damage to himself. If the DM was feeling really kind, he might allow the character to delay the

maintenance cost for several levels and make up the deficit with a higher level spell slot. For instance, the character from the previous example might not pay any maintenance for his *hands of stone* power until he reaches, say, 11th level. Under the suggested rule, his *hands of stone* power still would inflict 1d4 + 4 hp damage, but if he sacrificed a 3rd-level spell slot upon reaching 11th level the ability would be properly maintained and would inflict 1d4 + 6 hp damage.

I recommend that temporarily increasing an ability score above 18 cost five spell levels per point of increase. The spell levels should be taken from the slots the character normally has available for casting spells and are not lost permanently. The increase lasts one day or until the character rests and studies spells again.

**The movement rates for a clockwork mage's mechanical devices (from the *CSH*) seem to be a little short. Why would anyone bother with a device that only moves a couple of inches each round?**

In this case, the term "inches" is an erroneous reference to the original AD&D game, which used scale inches to measure ranges and movement rates. Just substitute "points of movement" for "inches" and everything will be fine. For example, for a cost of 50 gp, a mechanical can be given the ability to walk at a rate of 2. If the clockwork mage wants a mechanical that walks at a rate of 12, the cost is 300 gp.

**Are the two language proficiencies (languages, modern and languages, ancient) affected by the character's Intelligence score? How do you use the Number of Languages column from Table 4 in the *PHB*, and how does that affect the language proficiencies?**

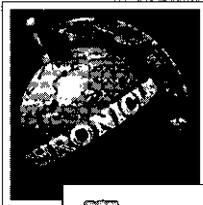
Most proficiencies require a check against a relevant ability score if the DM decides there is a chance of failure. Speaking a language can require a check against the PC's unmodified Intelligence score (see *PHB*, Table 37). Deciding whether a proficiency requires a success roll always is a judgment call on the DM's part. In the case of a language, no check is required when native speakers are conversing. If the circumstances are difficult, such as when a non-native speaker first hears an unfa-

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miliar dialect or a character has to do some fast talking in a non-native language, the DM might call for a success roll to determine whether the speaker stumbles over a phrase or otherwise misspeaks. A success roll might also be required when a non-native speaker tries to get vital information out of a native speaker who is excited or distracted (did he say run to the back or the runt is back?).

The Number of Languages column from Table 4 indicates how many different languages a character can learn. For example, a character with a 12 Intelligence cannot learn more than three different languages.

According to *The Book of Artifacts* (page 124), a wizard needs a *permanency* spell and an *enchant an item* spell to create a permanent magical item. Because the *permanency* spell is 8th level, a wizard with an Intelligence score of 15 or less cannot learn it (see *PHB*, Table 4) and cannot make permanent magical items. Is that right? Also, if the wizard were a half-elf, the character would have to have a 19 Intelligence or he could not reach 16th level, which is the first level in which a wizard can learn an 8th level spell. Right? Finally, if the wizard is an abjurer, invoker, or necromancer, the character cannot make permanent magical items because one of the two required spells falls in the character's opposition schools. (Abjurers cannot learn *permanency*, an alteration; and invocers and necromancers cannot learn *enchant an item*, an enchantment/charm.)

You are almost right on all three counts.

Yes, a wizard needs both an *enchant an item* and a *permanency* spell to create a permanent magical item.

Yes, a wizard must be at least 16th level to learn and cast *permanency*, which is an 8th-level spell available only to wizards with Intelligence scores of 16 or higher and access to the alteration school. (*Enchant an item* is a 6th-level enchantment/charm spell, which requires a 12th-level caster with an Intelligence score of 12 or more.)

Yes, a half-elf wizard needs an Intelligence score of 19 or more to reach 16th level (if the campaign is using the Exceeding Level Limits optional rule).

But no rule says a character who is creating a magical item has to cast all the required spells himself. The character can get another character to cast the spells for him, read the spells from scrolls, or use a *wish* to duplicate a spell's effects. Remember that any wizard can read wizard spells from scrolls, even spells from a specialist's opposition schools. (This a special property of magical scrolls and an important exception to the general rule that prevents specialists from employing magical items that produce effects from their opposition

schools.) Also, "Sage Advice" suggested last month that it's okay to add *enchant an item* to the evocation/invocation school. You can use the same logic to put *permanency* into the evocation/invocation school, too, but that's beginning to stretch things a bit.

**One of my players has recently discovered the svirfneblin from the Complete Book of Gnomes and Halfings. The svirfneblin can be accurately described as having incredible powers and virtually no limitations. Is it reasonable to impose the same sort of light penalties on svirfneblin as drow get?**

Sure it is. You might want to give svirfneblin some form of agoraphobia (fear of open spaces) instead. If they don't have a substantial roof over their heads, they suffer a -2 penalty to Dexterity scores and attack rolls, and opponents get a +2 bonus to saving throws when resisting spells cast by the afflicted drow). The *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book offers a more limited selection of powers for svirfneblin player characters (who have let their wanderlust and thirst for adventure interfere with their racial abilities).

**Where can I find basic game statistics for the various weapons and armor described in Encyclopedia Magica?**

Check out the *Arms and Equipment Guide* (TSR Product #2123) or the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* book (TSR Product #2149).

**In a campaign where individual experience point awards are used, can a character get an award for using an spell-like racial ability, such as the drow's dancing lights effect? What about psionic wild talents? Can a character get an individual award for using those?**

If you're talking about experience granted from *DMG* Table 33: Common Individual Awards, the answer is yes. If the player is clever, it makes no difference exactly what the character did, the character gets the award. For example, if a player with a drow character uses the drow's *dancing lights* ability to convince a group of monsters that reinforcements are coming, thus making the monsters flee from a situation where the party was in dire peril, then the player is entitled to a reward in the form of a few extra experience points for his character.

If you're talking about experience granted from *DMG* Table 34: Individual Class Awards, the answer is no. The character must use a class-specific ability to get the extra experience, not a magical item, proficiency, or racial ability.

**Does the 6th-level wizard spell invulnerability to magical weapons (from the Complete Wizard's Hand-**

book) also grant immunity to non-magical weapons (like the 5th-level *invulnerability to normal weapons* spell in the same book)?

No, but a wizard can have both spells running at the same time.

**Why have the names of some of the planes of existence changed?**

They haven't. What has happened is that the PLANESCAPE™ setting has revealed what beings who actually live on each planes call their planes. The AD&D game has adopted these "true" names in most cases. For example, the plane that people who live on the Prime Material Plane call the Plane of Concordant Opposition is actually called The Outlands by the people who live there. The plane always has been called The Outlands, but until recently very few people on the Prime Material knew that.

**What's the chant, berk? I have compiled a list of about three dozen creatures that are listed on page 128 of the PLANESCAPE™ MC Appendix but that I can't find anywhere.**

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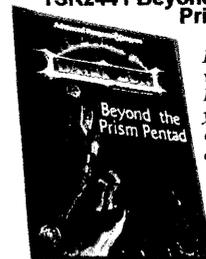
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Volume One, 2603 Planes of Chaos, 2607 Planes of Law, 2613 PLANESCAPE MC Appendix II, 9292 GREYHAWK® Ruins, 9294 Dragon's Rest. Some creatures are included in more than one product; in these cases I have included only the most recent listing.

**How many hit dice does a lich have? I find the hit dice listings for the various types of liches in the RAVENLOFT™ setting very confusing.**

If the lich was a spellcaster in life, it has 11 hit dice, plus one point for each character level it has beyond 11th. For example, an 18th level lich has 11 + 7 hit dice. If the lich was a psionist, it has 9 hit dice, plus one point for each level beyond 9.

**The item description for a vorpal blade says the sword can sever the head of a larger-than-man-sized opponent on a modified roll of 21-23. Now, in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome there is a size category for creatures called "larger than man-sized," covering creatures 7'-12' tall. The players in my game were very annoyed when I ruled that their vorpal blade could not sever the heads of huge or gargantuan opponents such as dragons. My players argue that the sword can sever any creature's head, and that the number to sever the head of any**

**creature larger than a man is 21-23. I contend that the sword can't sever the heads of creatures more than 12' tall. I don't think that a 3' sword ought to be able to slice the head off a creature with a neck 10' thick.**

Technically, your players are right. The phrase "larger than man-sized" in the item description refers to any creature bigger than a normal human, not just size Large creatures. This kind of usage is common throughout the game. For example, most weapons have two damage ratings, one for small or man-sized opponents and one for larger opponents. In this case, "small or man-sized" refers to size Tiny, Small, and Man-sized creatures; "larger" refers to size Large, Huge, and Gargantuan creatures.

Nevertheless, you are free to employ whatever house rules you think are reasonable. For example, if one reads the rules literally, a character armed with a vorpal blade and standing in a pit could behead a storm giant standing on the floor outside the pit—even if all the character could reach was the giant's big toe. Does that seem silly or illogical? I think so. On the other hand, magic does not have to be reasonable or logical.

Magic is fantastic and can bring about all kinds of effects without any logical physical causes—a spell that can turn a griffon into a goldfish isn't at all logical. It may be that when a vorpal blade severs a neck

there is a brilliant magical flash and a cloud of smoke. When the smoke clears, there's the opponent's head lying on the ground; the sword might not even be bloodstained. And there's nothing wrong with that if that is the kind of game you want to run.

I suggest, however, that you allow vorpal blades to sever any opponent's neck only when there is a reasonable chance that a blow from the sword could touch the opponent's neck at some time during the melee round. For example, if a character hacks at the tip of a sleeping dragon's tail, the creature's head is many feet away, and there is no chance to sever its neck. On the other hand, if the dragon is trying to bite the character wielding the vorpal blade its neck is within reach at least some of the time. Remember that combat in the AD&D game is abstract; a vorpal blade doesn't necessarily cleave off a creature's head in a single blow. The character might strike the target's neck several times during the course of the round. Or perhaps the sword does strike off a head with a single swipe—there's nothing that says that a vorpal blade can't temporarily grow to an enormous length to get the job done or that it can't emit a plane of magical force that does the really heavy duty cutting.

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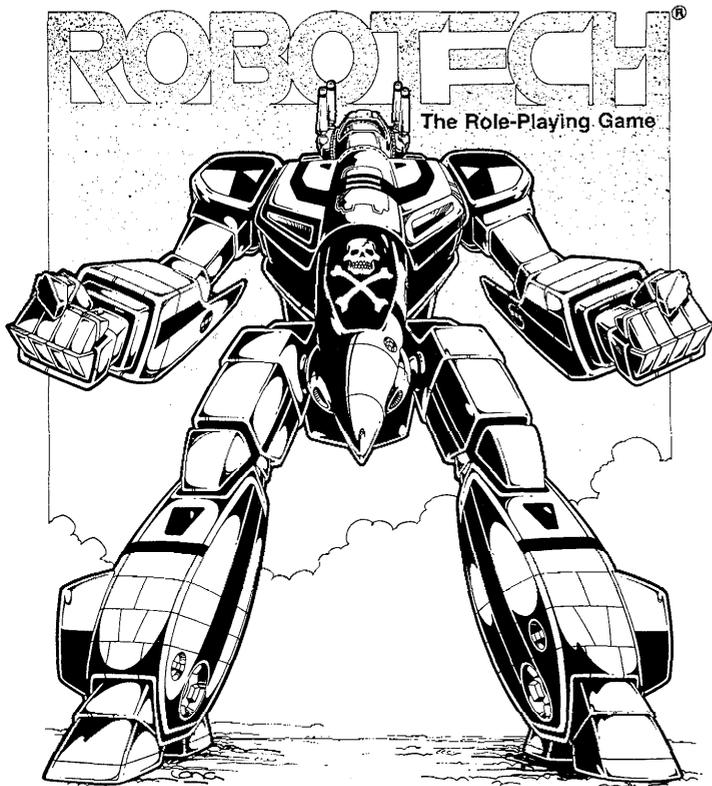
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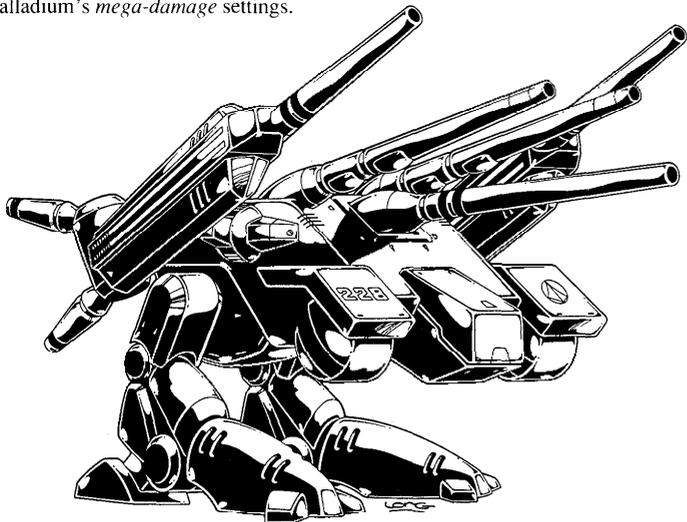
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ONE WHO  
KILLED  
CHARLIE!

OH... YEAH.  
I MEAN, YEAH, I'M  
THE ONE! WHAT'RE  
YOU GONNA DO  
ABOUT IT?

HOW'S  
THAT?

PERFECT, BEAKER. JUST PERFECT.

HEH.  
WHEW!  
WHEN YOU  
FIRST CAME  
THROUGH  
THAT DOOR,  
I THOUGHT  
YOU WERE  
GONNA...

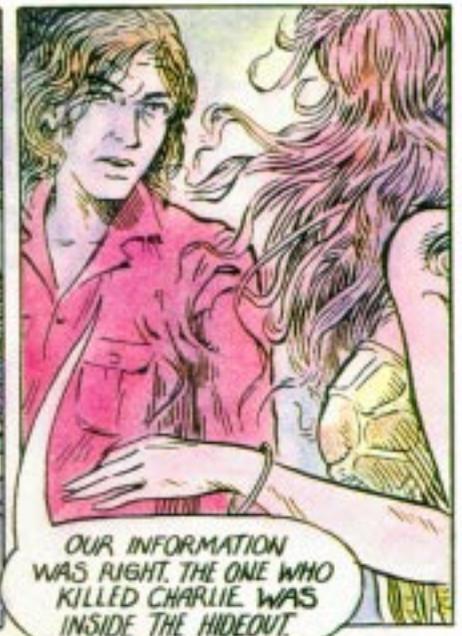
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KRAK!

URP!

SORRY,  
BEAKER

KKKK...  
KRAK





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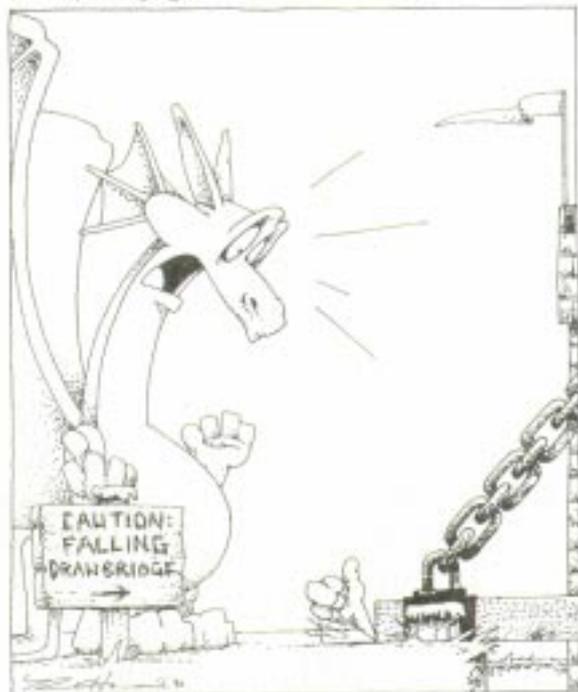


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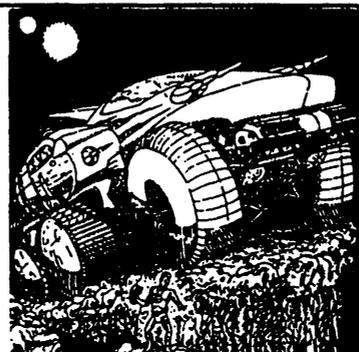
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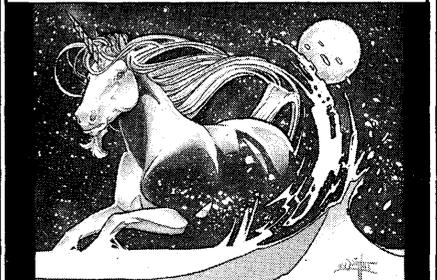
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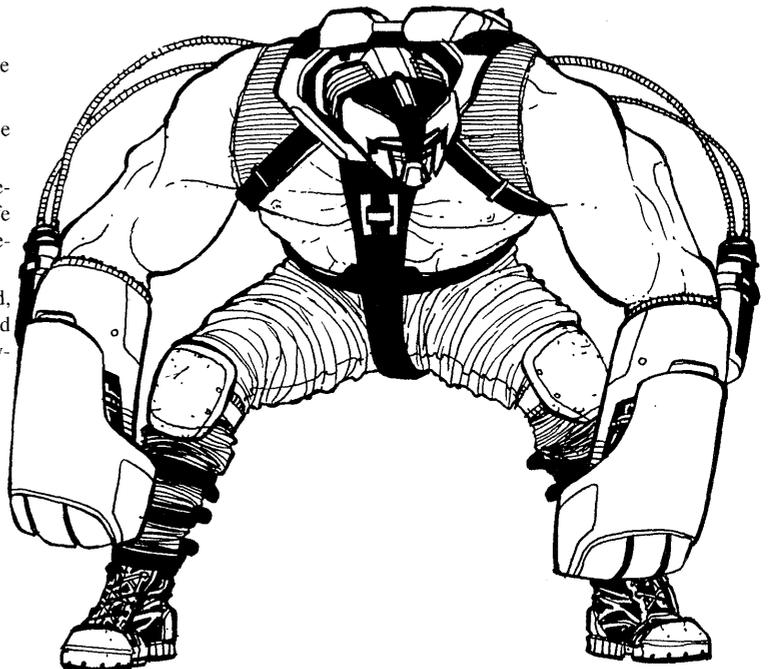
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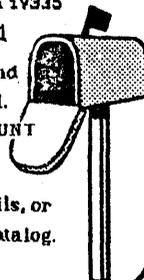
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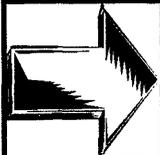
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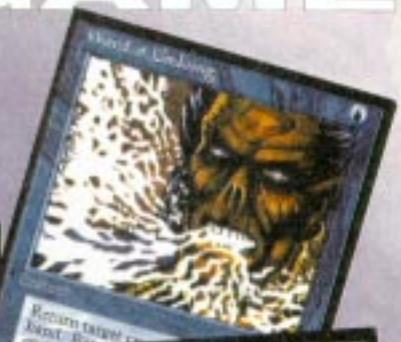
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# Beasts of the Imagination

©1995 by Ken Carpenter

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Empty Nest  
(Thunderbolt  
Mountain)

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### #1039 Empty Nest

Vignette series

Sculptor: Tom Meier

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$11.95

Technical: 9 Artistic: 10 Value: 9

Possibly the cutest figure of all time, this piece was among the fastest moving figures premiered at last year's GEN CON Game Fair! (Though my wife was twisting my arm behind my back as I wrote the opening sentence, that doesn't make it any less true.)

There's a minute parting line along the colt's right side and a little flash between the mother's rear legs, but if you can find another technical flaw, you've got a better microscope than mine. The pieces fit very well; the only problem is where to position the pair. The photo on the back of the blister shows you where Thunderbolt put them, but you can place them nearly anywhere around the nest, with a little work.

### Explanation of Ratings

- 1 Slag, a good doorstop
- 2 Poor, for die-hards only
- 3 Well below average, needs work
- 4 Below average, but salvageable
- 5 Standard, average quality

- 6 Good, definitely worth your perusal
- 7 Great, have you seen this yet?
- 8 Excellent, you have to see this!
- 9 Incredible, where can I get one?
- 10 No mortal hands produced this!



As you can see, this vignette depicts a mother Pegasus pushing her young child out of the nest for its first flight. Being no fool, the colt is resisting. Think of the vertigo you'd get from the view from a pegasi's nest! Detail is incredible, from nest to wings. The proportions of the pegasi are near perfect, with slim limbs and the head of an Arabian horse.

Again, "cute" is the key word here. Have a wife or girlfriend? Even many of us gamers have mothers! Any of them would treasure this piece, as will most collectors and painters. If you haven't picked this one up, you may be jeopardizing your relationship with the women in your life! (Ouch! Yes dear, you can have it when I'm finished painting!).

## Grenadier Models, Inc.

P.O. Box 305

Springfield, PA 19064

Voice: (800) 843-2015 Fax: (610) 623-5780

Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$3.00

### #3146 Pegacorn

FANTASY LEGENDS\* line

Sculptor: Sandra L. Garrity

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$4.00

Technical: 8 Artistic: 8 Value: 9

A wonderful combination of two mythological creatures, the pegacorn (uniusus?) displays a lot of life and action, making it fairly leap off the stand.

Cast in three pieces, slight traces of the old lines remain along the legs. Assembly is quick and easy, though a small amount of putty is recommended. You might also want to adjust the positioning of the wings, to emphasize the figure's motion.

The greatest detail is in the wings, which have incredibly well-rendered feathers. The mane and tail of the legendary mount are also full and flowing. Proportions are very good, and the figure's muscle definition gives great painting results. The base is blank, allowing you to add your own embellishments or remove the animal from the base for addition to a diorama.

## Lance & Laser Models, Inc.

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### #P-010 Griffin

### #5-002 Gnashings

PENDRAGON/FIFTH CYCLE\* lines

Sculptors: S. Lortz/S.L. Garrity

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$7.50/\$5.50

Technical: 8 Artistic: 8 Value: 7

Part of L&L's licensed PENDRAGON\* line, the griffin is a masterpiece. Though simpler, the gnashings from the FIFTH CYCLE\* role-playing game are also wonderfully done.

With hardly a parting line to note, both blisters are very well cast. Bare traces can be found on the gnashings and even less on the griffin. Attaching the wings to the griffin requires putty, and you might want to play with the position of the wings a bit, but the fit is pretty good.

Crisp detail and excellent proportions are the griffin's eye catchers. Though there isn't much life to the pose, the sculpting is impeccable. Its wings are unbelievable, from shoulder to wing tip.

The gnashings, in three poses, have a lot of action in their stances. The detail is simpler than the griffin, but is well done and will contribute to a great paint job. Accents, such as belts, pouches, headbands, and additional weapons are present in profusion.

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### #F0033 Black Orc Warbeasts (2)

Grendel\* imported

Sculptor: Kev Adams

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$24.95

Technical: 7 Artistic: 8 Value: 6

As a showpiece, the centerpiece in a diorama or on the table top, the black orc warbeasts will impress and entertain. Though the warbeast lacks rules for fantasy miniatures games, creating stats and rules for such a creature can be quite entertaining in itself.



Griffin & Gnashings (Lance & Laser)

Each box contains two of these critters (one shown). Cast in resin, each warbeast comes in three pieces. A bit of excess material will need to be trimmed away from the rider. Other preparation work includes sanding and washing in warm, soapy water, but the fit is very good. Little epoxy is required, but you may want to pin the pieces for added strength.

Despite their obviously ominous mien, the best word to describe these brutes is "cute." There, I said it. The beasts look like escapees from the gone-but-not-forgotten TV show Dinosaurs ("I'm the baby, gotta love me!"). Does that disqualify it for tabletop use? No way! Most miniatures players enjoy, or even require, that their armies include pieces built for entertainment and visual impact over optical nastiness. Certainly role-players don't mind the personality built into a figure like this.

The detail is crisp and omnipresent, from the rough, craggy hide to the snarling black orc rider to the skull dangling howdah. The price is pretty reasonable for such huge, finely crafted pieces. They are even a better deal in Europe, where there aren't as many middlemen.



Pegacorn (Grenadier)

## RAFM Company, Inc.

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Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$4.00

### #2015 Elemental Dragons, Earth and Air

Sculptor: Bob Murch

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$23.50

Technical: 6 Artistic: 8 Value: 7

When you think you've seen just about every possible variation of a dragon, you need to take a look at this RAFM boxed set,

From the deepest fathoms of Bob Murch's imagination come elemental dragons.

The dragons, both technically superior, have negligible parting lines. Unfortunately, both of the humanoids in the set, the air dragon rider and the earth dragon summoner, have noticeable mold shifts. Both can be corrected, however, with time and patience (files wouldn't hurt, either). Assembly is required, as are pins and epoxy.

The earth dragon is a wonder of rough, rocky, spined skin. This chunky, flightless creation has long forelegs and short hind

legs, making for what would be an interesting gait. The relatively smooth belly armor, while cracked and lined, is in stark contrast to the heavy, earthen hide of the beast. The dragon's summoner is a worker of natural magic, wearing only a loin cloth, cloak, and hat. He wields a wand to supplement his magical arts.

Smooth, flowing grace is the main characteristic of the air dragon. An apparition of wind and mist, this dragon curls up from its base element and stands poised for attack. The detail is very good, and the sharply sectioned wings add something to the foreign appeal of the figure. The air dragon's rider is a thin-limbed creature with batlike ears and a polearm, and mounting him will require some work.

This fine set provides another view of one of man's favorite magical creatures. The listed price is for no-lead alloy.

### #3609 Armored Cyclops

Sculptor: Stephen Koo

Scale: 25mm Cost: \$6.50

Technical: 6 Artistic: 8 Value: 6

Standing twice as tall as a typical humanoid figure, this fantastic brute is bound to draw more than a casual glance from your friends and players.

The cyclops has slight mold lines that will clean away with some careful file work.

Strange as mythology made the cyclops, this guy is stranger still. With rugged, angular features, thick musculature, and heavy, spiked armor, Mr. Monovision isn't the fur-clad, club-wielding barbarian that we've come to expect. That's right, this guy carries a sword. Detail is very good, and he should paint up well. Price is for no-lead alloy.



Black Orc Warbeasts (Grendel)



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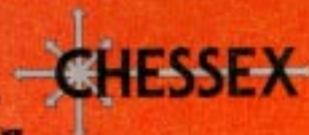
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### #1070 Wyvern

Nasteez\* line  
Sculptor: Cliff Linton  
Scale: 25mm Cost: \$5.25  
Technical: 8 Artistic: 7 Value: 6

Nearly flawless casting, Grim Reaper's specialty, has produced a figure that requires few strokes of the file. Coming in

three pieces, the wyvern requires glue and epoxy for assembly.

The wyvern has one foot perched on a rock and has spread its wings, as if issuing a challenge. With one push of its mighty leg, it could leap to the air and take wing. Head and facial detail are very good, as is the back. The inside of the wings and the belly of the beast are simple but will paint up well with some shading.

The detail of the figure is good, and it will make a great gaming or collecting piece. Price is for lead alloy, pewter will be slightly higher.

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### #DW3 Spined Wyvern

Sculptor: Staff  
Scale: 25mm Cost: \$13.99  
Technical: 5 Artistic: 8 Value: 5

Alternative Armies' version of the mythical wyvern, the sinister cousin to the dragon, will rattle the nerves of a character or two. This nasty comes in five pieces.

The parting lines along the front and back of the piece are noticeable, though not major. However, the lines do go through detail on the belly and legs. Also, some flash mars the webbed spines of his back. Be careful not to mistake the webbed spine itself for flash or you'll take a great look off the figure. None of these problems will be difficult to correct, though it will require an investment of time. Assembly will require putty to fill in a couple of small gaps.

The wings and head of this wyvern are what really caught my eye. The wings are uncharacteristically detailed and the head is so evil and insidious, it's frightening (I think I had her for 10th-grade English). The only minus on the artistic end was the ungainly stance; the rest was suitably impressive.



Armored Cyclops (RAFM)



Wyvern (Grim Reaper)



Spined Wyvern (Alternative Armies)

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**#11-494 Wemic**

**#11-495 Kirin**

AD&D® series  
 Sculptors: J. Johnson/R. Kerr  
 Scale: 25mm Cost: \$6.50/\$4.95  
 Technical: 8 Artistic: 9 Value: 7

You've used these creatures from TSR's compendiums before, now you can finally

put them on the table in metal. An incredible line to date, these figures certainly continue that tradition.

The kirin is near perfect, with only a trace of parting line between the legs. The wemic had more noticeable parting lines, and even then only between the legs and along the arms.

The wemic, a race that's been around since *Monster Manual II*, are a tribal race of lion centaur nomads. These figures do an excellent job of capturing the race: its cat-like grace, the feline proportions in the lower body, and a humanoid torso with faces mixing human and lion features.

Detail is very good, and there is a lot of life in their pose.

Kirin, goody-goods that they are, are a happy and powerful lot. This figure is as capricious as they come. Romping happily, the Kirin bears a huge grin. Detail is phenomenal, including its scaled sides, furred head, and flowing mane and tail. The detail makes this a painter's trial by fire, so get out your golds, whites, and grays, and let's see what you can do.

As always, you can write with your comments and suggestions to: From the Forge, P.O. Box 9, Murrieta, CA 92562.

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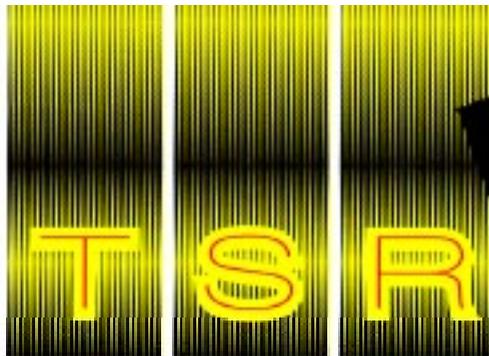


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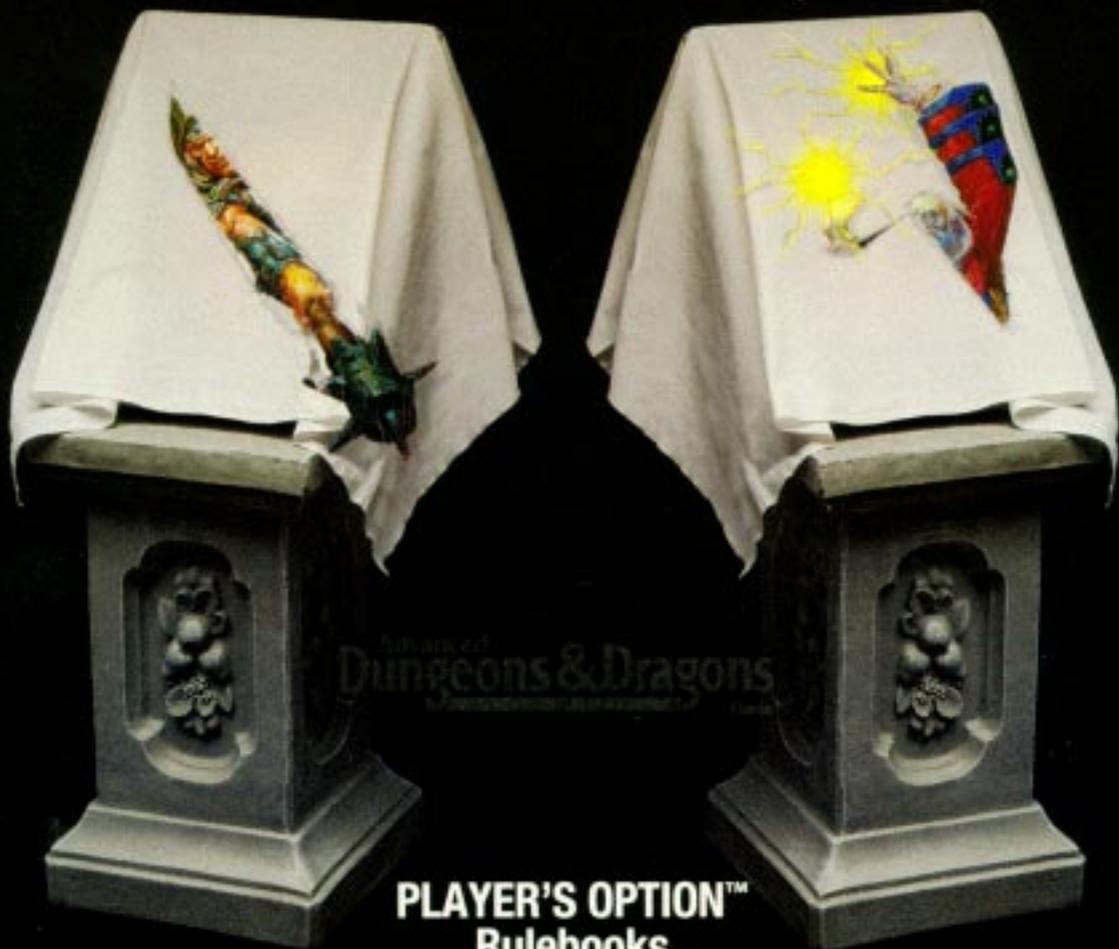
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