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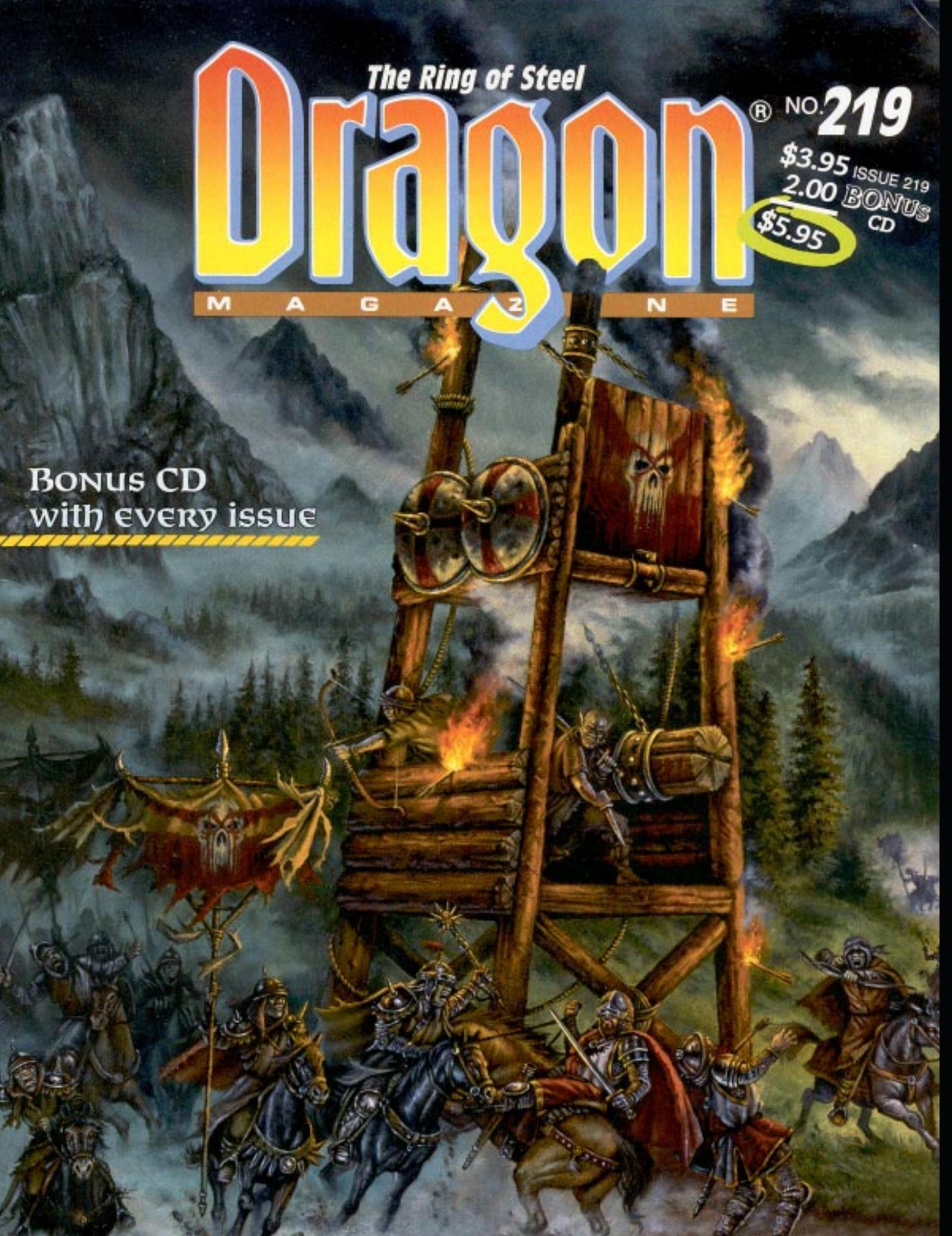
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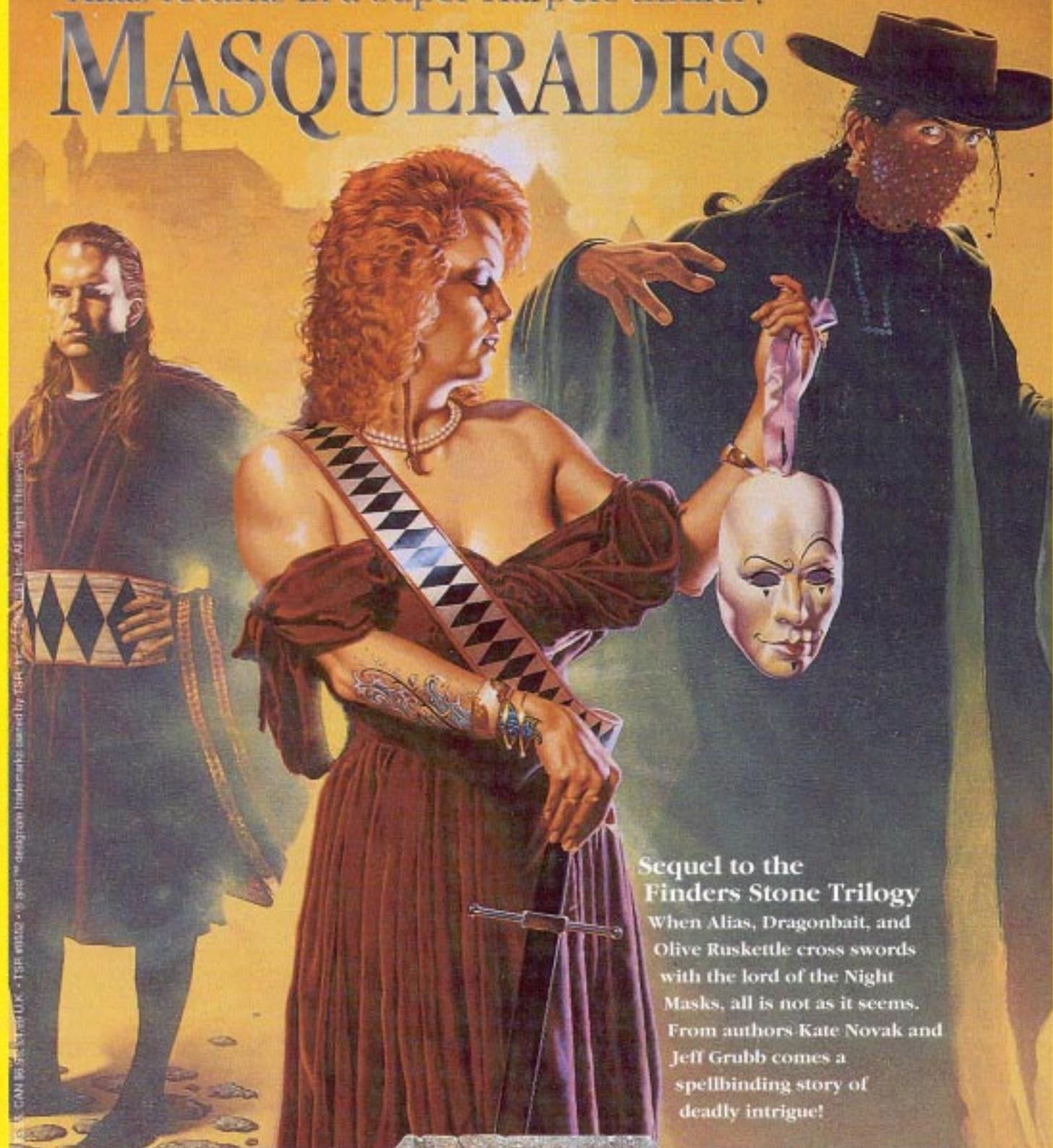
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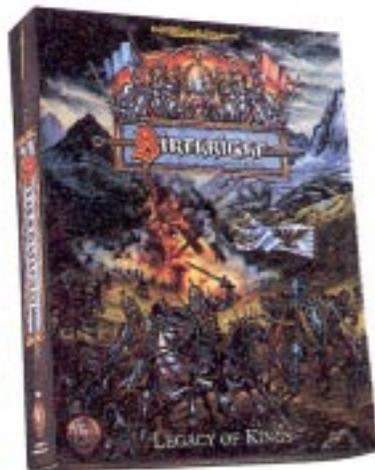
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SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

- 10** **At Sword's Point** — Christian Williams
 Sometimes it's more fun to dodge and parry than hack and slash.
- 16** **Run! A Guide to Heroic Flight** — Robert S. Mullin
 Learn how brave Sir Robin runs away.
- 20** **Out of Armor** — Gregory Detwiler
 A guide to fancy footwork and armor-free combat for DMs and players.

FICTION

- 72** **Breaking the Wall** — Lois Tilton
 Is it better to cooperate with an evil necromancer and live—or to resist and die?

REVIEWS

- 48** **Role-playing Reviews** — Allen Varney
 A look at the thousand and one adventures for the AL-QADIM® campaign.
- 57** **Eye of the Monitor** — Jay & Dee
 Get the lowdown on *Star Trail of Arkania*, *Citadel of the Dead*, *1830*, and *Warcraft*.
- 68** **The Role of Books** — John Bunnell
 The finest of fiction—and a quick peek at the *MtG* reference guide.



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112 **Through the Looking Glass** — Robert Bigelow
“Looking Glass” concludes with a lion-sized review.

FEATURES

- 8** **First Quest** — Mike Nystul
Sometimes, a blob of lead can change your life.
- 26** **Pirate Crews and Retinues** — James R. Collier
What happens when specialized fighters gain followers?
- 35** **Ecology of the Black Pudding** — Johnathan Richards
Deep below the earth, two adventurers come face-to-face with a slimy terror.
- 41** **A Colourful Weekend of Euro-gaming** — Roger E. Moore
Roger bares all about his trip to Merrie Olde England.
- 81** **Sage Advice** — Skip Williams
When optional rules create headaches, Skip provides relief.
- 90** **The Wizards Three** — Ed Greenwood
Ed, the wizards, and a few, friends get together for a weenie roast.
- 100** **The Game Wizards** — Lester Smith
A short history of the DRAGON DICE™ game.
- 102** **What's a Wizard to Do?** — Anne Brown
Is the BIRTHRIGHT™ setting nothing more than a battleground for musclebound fighters? Heck, no!
- 104** **Rumblings** — Michelle Vuckovich
Catch up on all the latest news, innuendo, and game industry gossip.

DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4 Letters | 107 Libram X |
| 6 Editorial | 110 Dragonmirth |
| 44 Convention Calendar | 112 Gamers Guide |
| 85 Forum | 124 TSR Previews |



COVER

This issue's cover painting by Tony Szczudlo shows us the swirling heart of “The Battle of Sorrow's Field,” a battle from the BIRTHRIGHT™ setting. This is only a portion of a much larger painting that will grace the cover of the BIRTHRIGHT boxed set—but you saw it here first. To see the complete painting, check out the poster insert in this issue.

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Letters

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. If you want your letter published, you must sign it. We will not publish anonymous letters. We will withhold your name if you request it.

Missing Feature 1

Dear Dragon,

I have been subscribing to your magazine for a couple of years and, after reading over issue 217 I realized that there was no fiction section. All of the magazines I have gotten so far have had this section except 217. The magazine's fiction is one of my favorite parts, because all of the stories are well-written and fun to read. Please tell me you didn't exclude the fiction permanently. Without it, DRAGON® Magazine just isn't the same.

Len Mackey
PotSDam, NY

Missing Feature 2

Dear Dragon,

WHAT??!!

So I look at the April issue. No *Libram X*. And no explanation. But I give you the benefit of the doubt. I think, "Okay, so space constraints and sloppy filing got the better of them. Happens to the best of us." And I wait for the next issue, and the next installment, which will reveal the identity of the silhouetted figure in the last panel. After waiting out four weeks in unbearable suspense, I look at the table of contents. I reread the contents six times. I check the place *Libram X* formerly occupied.

Hello? Anybody with the brilliance and impeccable filing skills of a neo-otyugh in there? Even the worst of us don't skip an entire feature twice in a row without some form of notice, some explanation, some kind of an excuse. Have you no pity on your cliffhanging readers? Must I lie on my deathbed thinking, "Who was that faceless figure?" If the artist has died, you could at least print a polite little notice saying so.

Sylvia Drake
No address given

You'll be glad to know that Bob Lessl is still very much alive and well. Both fiction and Libram X reappeared last month after short absences; we try to avoid these hitches as much as possible in the future. Our policy, however, is to print fiction only when we get a story that Barbara Young, the fiction editor, feels is strong enough. We'll always try to provide fair warning in the future when a regular strip drops a month.

Missing Warlord

Dear Dragon,

In issue #215, you gave a BLOOD WARST™ card list. Now don't get me wrong, I think it's great, and I really appreciate it, but in issue #217 someone writes about duplicate cards on the list, and you say it is complete and those are the only mistakes. I'm sorry my friends! There is one other mistake that I have found. The Warlord Thomstel Maedarson is not on that list! So where did you put that guy with a fifteen IS?

Josh Donovick
Vestal, NY

We stand by our list; Thomstel is an uncommon card and appears in the "Warlords" section.

However, several cards' names differ slightly from their appearance in the checklist; Thomstel, for instance, was originally known as Lord Thomstel the Maedarson, and he is alphabetized under that listing. Likewise, the "Elder Beholder" card is listed as just "Beholder" in the legions listing in issue #218.

The Endangered "&"

Dear Dragon,

I can't believe that TSR has scrapped the dragon-like ampersand from the AD&D® game title design. How could you? It doesn't seem to make sense. As far as I can tell, the dragon ampersand is as popular now as it was when I started playing D&D® and AD&D games 13 years ago. If you care at all about the opinions of AD&D gamers, as you often claim, you'll *bring it back!*

Also, everyone I know who reads DRAGON Magazine agrees that the cover of the American edition is much nicer than the British one. Is there any chance that you would consider making the cover over here more like the one over there, as it used to be? A lot of European readers would appreciate it.

Thank you very much for your attention to these matters.

Alexander F. Simkin
Oxford, England

Gosh, Alex, we didn't know you cared. The periodicals staff also enjoyed the dragon ampersand (call us sentimental), but the old logo has been around for quite a while. The new logo was designed to modernize the look of the game, not to annoy anyone. If enough people want the ampersand back, though . . .

The European cover is specifically aimed at newstand readers; as a result, it is much more informative about the issue's contents, something that UK readers seem to want (at least, if sales are any indication). Like the ampersand, we will update the look from time to time, but we plan to continue to differentiate between the US and the UK edition.

Yamara Anthology

Dear Dragon,

I've been an avid reader of your magazine for the past several years, and the first thing I turn to when I receive my subscription is the "Dragonmirth" section. In particular, the strip *Yamara* by Manui and Adams is my favorite part of the magazine. I might be mistaken, but I could have sworn I saw an advertisement or listing for a *Yamara* compilation somewhere, but for the life of me, I can't remember where. Since I can't seem to find it listed anywhere now, I was wondering if it might be out of print. If not, I'd really appreciate it if you could tell me where I might find it.

Gary L. Christopher
Harrogate, United Kingdom

We aim to please: the Yamara anthology is published by Steve Jackson Games. The collection is still in print, but if copies aren't available at your local shop, they can still be ordered directly from Steve Jackson Games. Just call (512) 447-7866 and ask for "Direct Mail"; the cost is \$9.95 plus S&H.



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BEYOND THE PRISM
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A Day In the Life

Dawn breaks. I get in my car and drive to the Emerald City to serve the Great and Powerful DRAGON® Magazine. If I'm lucky, I'll see two or three hawks or a heron on the drive in. No hawks today, but I think I see a roosting owl. I pull into the parking lot and take the stairs up to the French Quarter. Why do we call the editorial offices the French Quarter? Well, it has nothing to do with cheap booze and loose women (okay, almost nothing), but it does have to do with French doors, lots of plants, and skylights. It helps provide the illusion of tranquility, at least in the morning half-light.

Once inside the French Quarter, the first stop on the morning rounds is the coffee machine in the office of our Art Director, Larry Smith. If I'm lucky, Larry has already brewed some Jamaican Blue Mountain or Mexican organic. Today, the coffee machine offers me only cold, congealed sludge. Machines hate me.

That won't stop the finely-tuned Magazine Machine from rolling on, of course. It just means someone has to go to the opposite end of the building for coffee or, better yet, run down the street to Kyle's Top of the Bean for some primo java. If I'm lucky, someone else will do it. Today, it's my turn. Not my lucky day.

Most days aren't lucky, of course. Most days are Problem Days, but today's problem is the editorial. I've been suffering from writer's block for weeks; well, crank up the ole' word processor and see what happens. Dave Gross—once editor of POLYHEDRON® Newszine, now editor of DUNGEON® Adventures—is a good one at spotting and killing problems. Among his many other duties, he edits this editorial. In fact, he kills my brilliant, incisive, all-encompassing first editorial on the State of the Game Industry. I wanted to use phrases like "interactive narrative;" "third tier," and "information superhighway to the gaming future." But Dave is very mean.

Dave leaves—dropping the dead carcass of the editorial in the "Out" basket—and Janet Winters arrives in my office. Janet handles subscriptions cheerfully and efficiently, as those who know her agree. Today, Janet has a Great Idea for a special subscription deal to offer at the GEN CON® Game Fair—the lowest price of the year. It's a good thing for subscribers, a special rate for subscribing to both magazines, and it would be smart to take care of it before the convention rolls around. However, this means confronting the Publisher.

Associate Publisher Brian Thomsen is the Great and Inscrutable Oz of our Emerald City. He lives in a dark, secluded

cavern on the first floor (Seems that publishers, like dragons, prefer caverns as their natural habitat). Anyway, as associate publisher, Brian sees that DRAGON Magazine is given the attention and strategic planning any magazine needs. Like Oz, he weaves a web of illusion when necessary; he keeps the Emerald Kingdom happy, safe, and content. He talks to the realms of Marketing and the distant Foreign Editions. He wields awesome power and bears awesome responsibility. Or something like that.

Lunchtime arrives. The options are: eat in the Games Library (someone is always playtesting something, from *Barbara Cartland's Romance* game to *Pursue the Pennant* to the *Pentacle* card game to *Empires of the Middle Ages* to a hand of BLOOD WARS™ cards); eat in the French Quarter while reading a manuscript; or go work out at the Grand Geneva Spa. I'm on the Editorial Workout plan; I'm supposed to be working out, but instead I grab another cuppa joe, slam-dunk a doughnut hole, and get back to the towering stacks of manuscripts.

The afternoon chugs along at a stately pace, editing, reviewing submissions, rejecting submissions, reading email, getting art suggestions to Larry. Barbara Young shows up in midafternoon; we discuss good stories and bad ones, what to print next month and what to consign to the flames as soon as we can find some suitably long tongs. I'm always amazed that we get more fiction submissions each month than we do game articles. After all, we print many more RPG articles than we do stories each month. The competition in fiction is brutal. Fortunately, making those tough choices is Barbara's job.

Time to tackle the next problem: transferring some of my problems to Michelle Vuckovich, the editorial assistant. As a former assistant flunky myself, I realize that the job is inherently unfair. Assistants inevitably get stuck with the jobs no one else wants. To maintain this unfair tradition, I send Michelle on a Comma Hunt, proofreading galleys for the next issue. Just to be safe, I give her a deadline for the next "Rumblings" column and ask her to develop some of her big ideas for new headers for the magazine's columns. That should keep her busy for an hour or two.

Next up: hunt down an advertiser. Cindy Rick and Carolyn Wildman, the advertising gurus, are on the DRAGON Magazine staff but are rarely seen. They live far away, appearing once each month, like migratory birds, in the form of an Ad List. Larry puts the ads in the magazine, and we go

on for another month, once again oblivious to advertising. No problem for the minions of the Emerald City. Usually.

I've got a bad feeling about this one, about leaving Periodicals-Land for the dark depths of Advertising, where the shadows lie. The bad omens have been piling up all day. I briefly consider leaving early to escape whatever Impending Doom awaits. Then I grab my Nerf sword (in case I meet flying monkeys) and leave the French Quarter.

I never make it to Ad-Land. While wandering through the halls and poppy fields in a caffeine-induced frenzy, I meet the great unsung hero of the Periodicals Department, Tracey Isler, our typesetter. Today, Tracey has a problem; the typesetting machine, our Compugraphics 4000 SuperQuad Magnum Ultra Death Machine, has run amok. It rolls out great reams of type, then spits and chokes on a subjunctive phrase. It's on a rampage, destroying our paper supply, our carefully-crafted headers, our delicate editorial balance. It snarls at "Forum," it rejects the reviews, it grinds up the feature articles. If the machine keeps malfunctioning, the issue will die, and the Emerald City will fall into ruin.

Has the DeathType machine finally breathed its last? For years we've been slaves to it, cannabilizing parts for the thing. Like all things mechanical, it required constant compliments and bribes (Grade-A paper seems to help). We even made the occasional offering to it. But all things must end; someday soon it will pass on to the Great Typehouse in the Sky. Is today the day?

The DeathType machine has a hard drive problem. DRAGON Magazine will have no more type. All is lost. The July issue won't happen. We'll miss deadline for the first time in a decade. What's to be done?

We call in the scarecrow, the Good Witch Glinda, even the munchkins, but nothing can stop it—until Tracey calls the Compudoc guy, a sort of Tik-Tok gnome with a big toolbox. He tears out the SuperQuad Determinator's hard-drive heart, and plugs in a shiny new one. The Compugraphics 4000 SuperQuad Magnum Ultra Death Machine lives! Tracey has saved the day.

The work day is done. I leave the Emerald City, get into my car, and drive the yellow-brick highway home.



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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.

The Evocative Blob

by Mike Nystul

Before he left that weekend, my father told us that he was going to some kind of convention, but we had no idea what it was—nor, honestly, did we really care. A game convention, he called it. We had heard it all before. Dad was a victim of the “hobby of the week” mentality, so we assumed he was going to look at new cameras or tropical fish or something equally uninteresting. I was a nine-year-old kid more interested in horror movie magazines, model kits, and comic books.

I remember distinctly the “I have found something new” gleam in his eyes when he got back. He had a whole room full of new things that had gotten old all too fast. It was kind of an elephant’s graveyard where neglected hobbies went to die: old stereo equipment, unplayed wargames, a pipe collection, and a trunk full of magic tricks.

The Nystul residence was the first one on the block to get a VCR and a home computer. Our first VCR was one of those industrial monstrosities that used tapes the size of a cereal box and a mechanism that made more noise than a vacuum cleaner. Our first computer was the Timex Sinclair—a sporty little thing with an unresponsive bubble-button keyboard and a whopping 64k of memory. Not 64 meg, mind you—64k. The cassette tape backup drive was so unreliable that I ended up entering my programs by hand whenever I wanted to use them.

When he got back, my Dad gathered us together in the front room to tell us about his trip. My father is a great talker—he has an infectious enthusiasm that draws you in at first, but he also has a pit bull fixation on pointless details that can be something of a trial if you aren’t particularly interested in what he is talking about. Fortunately, we were still enthralled when he popped open his briefcase to share his most recent obsession with us. We weren’t sure which convention he was coming back from, but we figured it would be like the Consumer Electronics Show.

Dad had started a small company years ago to rent theatrical lighting, but when the business dried up he never bothered

to fold the corporation. When I was old enough to realize that this was a bit odd, he told me that the sole purpose of his company was to provide him with the magic business card he needed to get into the CES.

Every year my father would spend three days walking the CES convention floor collecting catalogs and flyers and some of the strangest promotional crap you have ever seen: hopping eyeballs with phone numbers printed on the back, foam-rubber cowboy hats, and cardboard guns. Strangest of all were the fuzballs with the googly eyes, wire antennae, and sticky feet that had a small ribbon hanging off them with the name of some company or other. We had dozens of these alien knickknacks in our house in various stages of decay.

My brother and I braced ourselves for another round of pretending interest in whatever it was that Dad thought we couldn’t do without but couldn’t afford. Neither of us realized that he had returned from the New World with a mysterious artifact that would change both of our lives forever.

Nestled in a small box was a wad of paper towels that he cradled protectively in his cupped hands, as if it were a newborn babe or the Holy Grail. He set the precious bundle on top of the briefcase and unwrapped it very slowly with all the deliberate reverence of a tea ceremony, building the suspense with every careful movement.

What he unwrapped, what he brought back with him from that GEN CON® Game Fair was a single Dragontooth Orc figure. This was no Ral Partha masterpiece; no, this was an ugly little bugger with a bad paint job. For those too young to remember, Dragontooth was one of the first companies to produce fantasy miniatures. Their figures had a charming awkwardness that perfectly matched the charming awkwardness of the game systems we were playing at the time.

I was awestruck. I realize that is not a wholly healthy reaction for a sane person to have to a homely blob of lead, but bear in mind that I was only a boy at the time.

In truth, it was more than a blob of lead to us; it was an Uruk Hai commander, and that held special meaning for my brother and me.

When we were growing up we went to a school right across the street from our house. While most of the other kids gathered in the auditorium to nibble halfheartedly on their bag lunches, we could go home for an hour every day. Mom would make us soup and a sandwich, and she would read to us.

Having your mother read to you seems natural when you are small, but as you get older, you start to pull away. Sometimes I couldn’t wait to hear more of whatever book she was reading, but as the years wore on and my attention span was stunted by television, I started to dread the daily lunchtime battle.

Despite our reticence, she read us *The Hobbit* and all three books of *The Lord of the Rings* at least three times. We also sat through the *Chronicles of Narnia* at least twice. The adventures of Bilbo and Frodo Baggins were as much a part of my childhood as those of Batman and Superman.

When Dad pulled back that last bit of towel and revealed the Orc it was like seeing a dream take shape. We looked at it like primitive tribesmen presented with a calculator. It was wonderful, but we had no idea where it came from, what it was for, or how it would be used. It was obviously not a toy—it was much too delicate—but it was nothing like the sterile counters in the wargames our dad used to play.

Dad explained to us that he had seen thousands of miniatures just like the Orc. They were used as playing pieces in games based on stories like the *Lord of the Rings*. For a couple of hours my father became a skald, telling us stories of great battles against the forces of darkness, the heroes who fought them, and those who died. Instead of shifting our weight uncomfortably while we waited to be excused, we listened with rapt attention, scarcely believing what he was telling us.

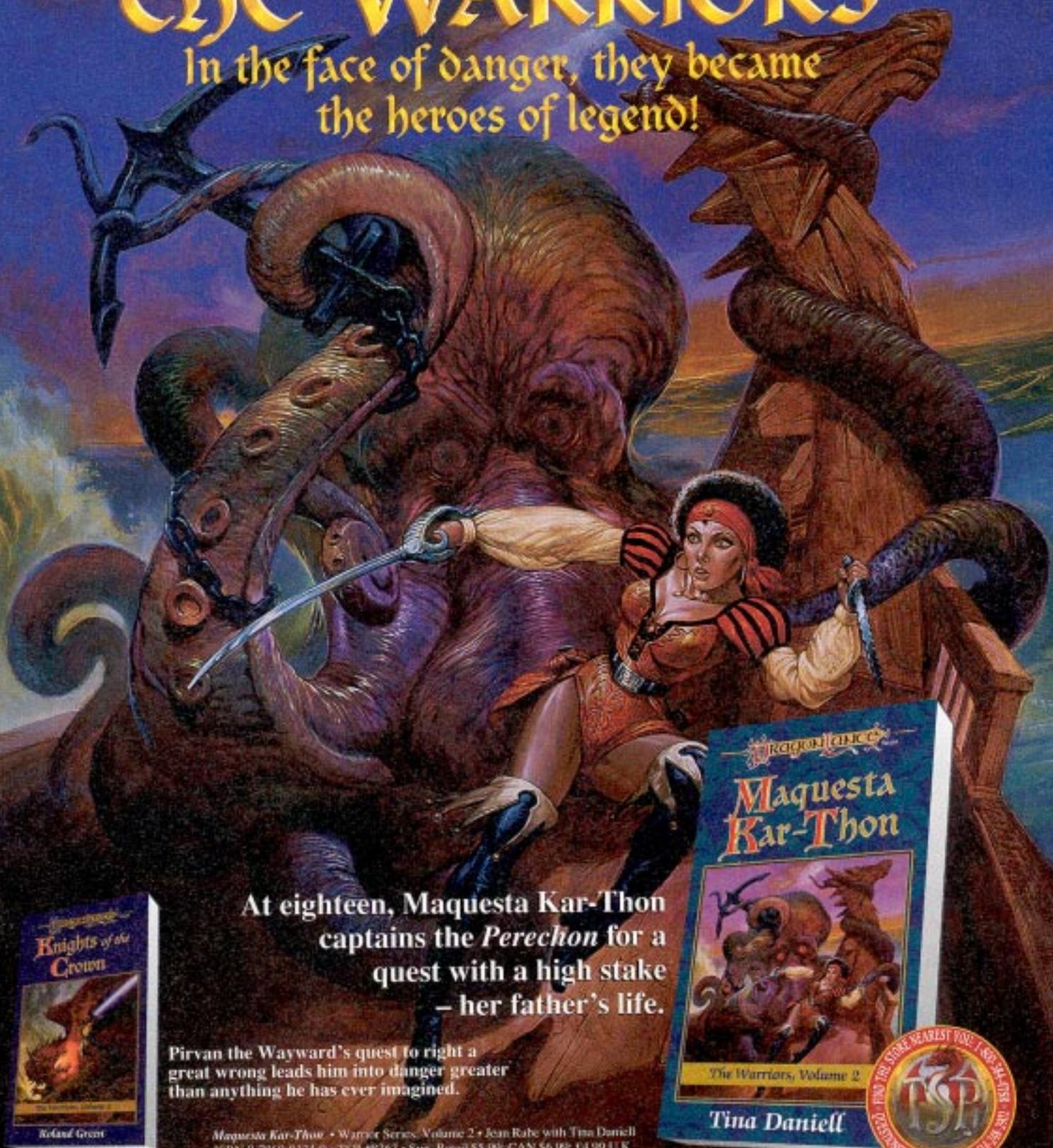
Could it be true? Was there a way to participate in the stories Mom used to

Continued on page 66

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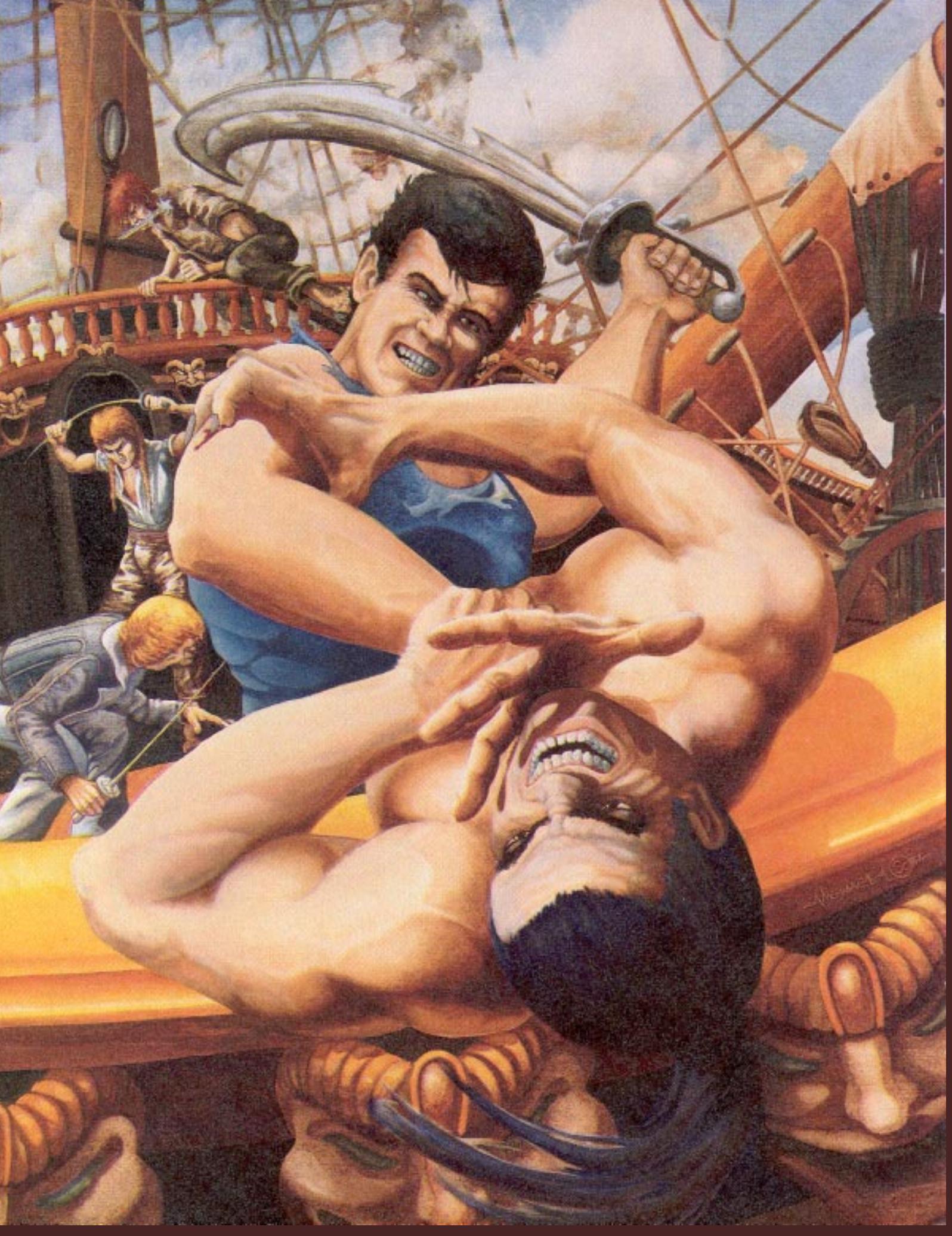
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The glories of swashbuckling

by Chris Williams

Artwork by Michael Scott



Let me tell you a story — a true story, a story of high adventure in a time when men sailed the seas in search of plunder and freedom, when all a man needed to survive was a quick wit, a quicker blade, and a little luck.

In 1666, a small band of pirates was roving the coast of Cuba in search of prey. Their captain was one Bartholomew Portugues. Lightly armed, with only four cannon and 30 men, he and his crew attacked a rich Spanish ship several times their size. After a fierce battle, Portugues and his crew captured the ship. Upon inspecting their prize, they found that it carried over 70,000 pieces of eight in addition to a fine cargo of trade goods. Several days later, however, the victorious pirates blundered into three Spanish men-of-war and were themselves captured.

Portugues and his remaining crew were taken to a nearby Spanish port, where they were to be hanged for their crimes. Fearing that Portugues might escape, as he had done on a previous occasion, the Spaniards held him prisoner on the ship that he had so recently captured. Not wishing to meet his end in the hangman's noose, Portugues devised a plan to escape. Unable to swim, he fashioned floats from two empty wine jugs and, after killing his guard, slipped overboard to float to shore. For the next two weeks he evaded search parties and ate only raw shellfish while marching through the jungles of Cuba. Using nails salvaged from wreckage on the beach, Portugues was able to make first a crude axe, then a small raft.

On this raft he sailed to a safe port and found haven with other pirates to whom he was known. After relating his tale to his new comrades, he asked for a small ship and 20 men with which he might exact his vengeance on his former captors. His new friends agreed. So, with a new ship and a crew of 20, Portugues returned to the port from which he had just escaped. By cleverly making the Spanish believe that he was bringing them supplies for their ship, he and his crew were able to approach their target. By the time the Spaniards realized their mistake, it was too late. Portugues had retaken his original prize, the ship on which he had been held prisoner awaiting execution, right out from under the Spaniards' noses! Although

the gold had been removed from the ship, most of the trade goods were still in the hold.

Here Fate turned her back on Portugues for the last time. While returning to port with his prize ship, for which he had fought so hard and suffered so much, a sudden storm came up and dashed the ship against the rocks. The fate of Portugues remains a mystery. Some say he went down with his ship, while others claim that he survived and continued his life of piracy.

So ends the story of Bartholomew Portugues. But that story, and others like it, are at the heart of what is commonly thought of as swashbuckling adventure. Throughout the ages people have been drawn to tales of such deeds, both noble and villainous, carried out for treasure, honor, duty, justice, vengeance, and love. Names such as Sir Henry Morgan, Robin Hood, D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers, Don Juan, Zorro, and Cyrano de Bergerac all evoke powerful images of dashing heroes and the ring of steel against steel. It is only natural that gamers should want to play in adventures like theirs.

Pirates and piracy are the first things that spring to mind when most people think of swashbuckling: adventure on the high seas, desperate men with daggers clenched in their teeth, swinging through their ship's rigging to board the enemy's vessel. While this certainly fits the swashbuckling mold, it is by no means the only style of adventure that can be called swashbuckling, though all swashbuckling campaigns share a certain style. This article outlines the key elements common to various types of high adventure and lists reference material relevant to running a swashbuckling campaign.

Swordplay Basics

First of all, what is a swashbuckler? The word "swashbuckler" comes from a time in Europe when dueling with rapiers was quite common. At that time, men carried a type of small shield known as a buckler. Elizabethan street toughs looking to prove their prowess with the blade would walk up and down the boulevards and bang

their rapiers against their bucklers, challenging all comers. This practice was known as "swashing the buckler," which became swash-buckler. Furthermore, the dictionary defines a swashbuckler as "a swaggering or daring soldier or adventurer." Swashbuckling adventures, therefore, are primarily men or women of action, warriors by trade.

This is important because the main underlying theme to virtually all swashbuckling stories is that, through force of arms, a small group can overcome the plans of powerful people. In Alexander Dumas' story *The Three Musketeers*, Cardinal Richlieu is seeking to gain more power in the French government by exposing the Queen's affair with the Duke of Buckingham. His plot is foiled by the four swordsmen. In *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope, Duke Michael of Stresslau's attempt to replace his brother on the throne of Ruritania is foiled by Rudolph Rassendyl and a small force of men. And, historically speaking, Bartholomew Portugues had only 20 followers with him when he sailed back and recaptured his prize ship. Action is what drives a swashbuckling story. Where politics, intrigue, and negotiations fail, martial force will carry the day.

If action is what drives the story, what motivates the main characters to it in the first place? As mentioned above, the motivations for a swashbuckler are treasure, duty, honor, justice, vengeance, and love. Bartholomew Portugues was driven by his desire for both treasure and vengeance; Zorro and Robin Hood were spurred on by a desire to see justice done; D'Artagnan and the Musketeers acted out of their sense of duty to the Queen of France; and Cyrano was driven by his feelings for the lovely Roxane. Characters in a swashbuckling campaign should be given such motivations.

While there certainly may be more than one main character involved, as in *The Three Musketeers*, the story actually revolves around only one of those characters. The other characters go along with the one for the sake of their friendship, because they feel honor bound, to repay a debt, etc. This is the idea of "All for One and One for All." For each adventure in a swashbuckling campaign, the referee

should select one of the PCs as his protagonist/patsy and tailor events to motivate that one character to action. For example, the PC's girlfriend could be kidnapped, or he could be singled out by the king to perform a special duty. Invariably the patsy needs help, and that's where the other characters come in. As the campaign progresses, the referee can either stick with the same patsy or pick a new one at the start of each adventure.

Elements of Style

To encourage the proper larger-than-life feeling that sets swashbuckling apart from other stories, the referee must carefully script his adventure. Several elements are common to most swashbuckling adventures: similar settings or backdrops, types of villains and heroes, fighting style, and circumstances.

Two broad settings are ideal for a swashbuckling adventure: on land or aboard some type of vessel. The vessel involved need not be limited to sailing ships. Steam-punk games such as *CASTLE FALKENSTEIN** and *SPACE 1889** make allowances for airships, submarines, and even subterranean mole-machines. And science fiction games such as the *STAR WARS** RPG are well suited for swashbuckling campaigns.

In either case, travel is an essential part of the setting for these stories. Captain Peter Blood (Errol Flynn in the movie *Captain Blood*) and his band of pirates sailed the length and breadth of the Caribbean Sea in search of adventure; D'Artagnan and the musketeers journeyed to England on missions for the Queen; and John Carter of Mars traveled to every land on Barsoom searching for his lost love, Dejah Thoris. Referees should take advantage of travel, as it lends a certain amount of scale to the larger-than-life aspect of the story. Robin Hood is the most notable exception to this; he and his merry men stay put in Sherwood Forest, but, as we'll see later, that's okay.

For a ship-based campaign, destinations are important only when the players have to be somewhere specific at a certain time. Ship-based games are almost always drawn toward piratical themes, with the heroes either engaged in piracy or trying to stop it. After all, the oceans are very large, and it's easy to wander for a long time and not sight another vessel.

There's no real need to play out the day-to-day routine of shipboard life. The same idea applies to air and spaceship campaigns. If the players are engaged in wandering around, don't worry too much about their precise location until it's time for something to happen.

Travel can also be used to add a sense of urgency to a story. This is best achieved by making it important to arrive at a destination on or before a certain time or date, by making the voyage a surprise, or both. For example, an adventure might start with the characters having to travel from

London to Dover to meet a traveler. However, when they arrive in Dover they discover that the traveler is the soon-to-be-coronated king, who has been kidnapped to the continent. If he doesn't appear in Canterbury Cathedral in one week's time, he will never become king. Surprise! Not only is there a real sense of urgency to the characters' mission, but they also must take a great journey, totally unprepared.

Some stories are designed for a very specific location or without the need for travel. The action in Robin Hood, as mentioned above, takes place in one area, and the idea of travel is only lightly touched upon in the story of Cyrano. Both of these stories convey the same sense of scale through the use of backdrops—events that take place apart from, and are not necessarily affected by, the characters' actions. At the beginning of his story, Robin Hood returned from fighting in the Crusades while King Richard remained behind; Cyrano was sent off to fight in the war against Spain.

War is probably the best backdrop for adding scale to a story. It lets the players feel as if they are truly part of a very large world, where nations argue and great armies clash. And, as is the case with Robin Hood, it is not necessary for the characters to become involved in the backdrop during their adventures. Other good backdrops include, but are not limited to, natural disasters such as plague or famine, political intrigue or a cold war situation, or involvement with powerful people from different countries. The DM could set up a whole adventure that requires the PCs to guard the visiting envoy from Bangladesh from possible assassination while in Paris. There's no travel involved, but the involvement with people from other countries serves to tie the story into a larger world picture.

Equally important to the story as the setting or backdrop are the characters that the referee uses to tell it. To begin with, all good swashbuckling stories have villains. These villains are always men who hold a great deal of power, either in their own right or under the authority of another. In either case, they abuse this power for their own ends. Cardinal Richelieu of the Musketeer stories is a man of great power in his own right, while Prince John, of the Robin Hood legend, rules on behalf of his brother King Richard.

Villains themselves generally have little direct contact with the heroes. Villains plot and scheme, but they have others do their dirty work. If the characters do meet the head villain, it is often in a very genial setting, usually at the request or by the design of the villain himself. D'Artagnan meets only twice with Cardinal Richelieu; both times are at the request of Richelieu, who tries to recruit him. Swashbuckling villains are best thought of as the heads of large corporations, as in cyberpunk games. The characters constantly interact with their employees, but very rarely do

they face the CEO.

Almost all of the direct confrontations are between the heroes and the villain's minions. All of the fighting in Robin Hood is between Robin and Prince John's henchmen, the Sheriff of Nottingham and Sir Guy of Guisburn. Even at the very end of the story, Prince John never draws a sword; he doesn't have to. Cardinal Richelieu has an entire army of thugs to make constant trouble for the musketeers on a day-to-day basis. But when he has a specific plan to be carried out, he turns to his henchmen, le Comte de Rochefort and Milady de Winter.

Even henchmen prefer to work through hired lackeys. The Sheriff of Nottingham usually sent Sir Guy to do his dirty work. The Comte de Rochefort may be on hand to oversee Cardinal Richelieu's plans, and the heroes may even cross swords with Rochefort once during the course of the adventure. But they won't really beat him until the bitter end. It isn't until the climax of the story that the hero fights the main henchman in the classic duel to the death, high atop the crumbling battlements.

Highly placed villains with a lot to lose often allow the heroes to win—for now. Men like Cardinal Richelieu can't afford to have their involvement in plots come to light. That's why they work through intermediaries; they're deniable. Also, if they see their plans brought to nothing by worthy opponents, they may try to recruit them. Good talent is hard to find: "If he could be turned, he would make a valuable ally." Don't be too quick to have the heroes targeted for death. Let them live, try to recruit them, or twist them to your own ends first. After all, if all the Cardinal's enemies were to die suddenly, that might raise as many uncomfortable questions as having the plots exposed. Highly placed men have to play their games very carefully.

It is not absolutely necessary to make the main villain untouchable. With just a slight alteration to the story, the Sheriff can become the main antagonist. People whose positions of power are granted by others—colonial governors, sheriffs, royally commissioned pirate hunters—all make good villains that can be confronted directly. They have just enough power to abuse at the expense of the people around them, and they can lie to their superiors back home about their true activities. Pirate hunters can prey on innocent ships and claim that the victims were in fact pirates, sheriffs can take what they want and imprison the victims; and governors can tax their subjects into starvation while the crown is thousands of miles away. These two-faced villains get their hands dirty. They are rough men who fight with the heroes at the story's end.

The last thing to remember about villains is to let them win sometimes. Not only does this keep the villain around longer to scheme and plot and generally make life hard for the players, but it also gives the players more reasons to dislike

the villain. Don't be afraid to kill the hero's kidnapped girlfriend if it's appropriate to the flow of the overall story. Sure, it may make the players mad, but they'll be that much more determined to bring the villain to justice.

Sheer Skill and Bravado

Just as every good swashbuckling story must have a villain, so too must it have heroes. That's where the PCs come in. In a world filled with swordsmen, two things set the swashbuckling hero apart from the rest: his mannerisms and his ability. As defined above, a swashbuckler is "swaggering and daring." Players can really strut their stuff in swashbuckling settings. Swashbucklers are brash, flamboyant, arrogant, boisterous men. They rush in where angels fear to tread . . . and get away with it.

The first rule to playing a swashbuckling hero is this: Put on a good show, and Fate will smile on you. When the action is heating up, never do anything small when you can do it big. Don't use the door if you can swing in through the window; don't mount your horse if you can vault into the saddle; don't run from your enemies if you can drop a chandelier on them. Impossible odds? Ha! You don't know the meaning of the word impossible.

While daring is indispensable, it's also important to use your head, too. At times you may be faced with more than you can handle. Being brash doesn't mean being suicidal. After all, a dead hero doesn't do anybody any good. Be sneaky and devious sometimes. Need to get into the castle? Try swimming the moat, scaling the walls, and then fighting off the entire palace guard. Or seduce one of the kitchen maids and convince her to open the gate for you. Don't have time for that? Perhaps there's an inventor nearby who, conveniently, has a hot-air balloon you could "borrow" for a little while. Maybe if you built a large wooden badger . . .

Nobody's perfect, of course, not even swashbucklers. Heroes are people too, so give your hero at least one flaw or quirk that will personalize him to your taste. Cyrano always speaks in rhyme during duels and is arrogant enough to make up for his looks. As for the three musketeers, Aramis is vain, Athos is a drunk, and Porthos is continually confused; D'Artagnan, while he loves his Constance dearly, sees nothing wrong with bedding every woman he can. Not only do these sorts of mannerisms help you get into your character better, but it also gives the referee some good material to work with.

But the way a hero acts isn't all that carries him through a fight. Swashbucklers are warriors by trade, so they've got to be good at what they do. In the movies, Errol Flynn can fence with six opponents at once and win. There are two possible reasons for this. First, the hero may have some tactical advantage over his adversaries: he may be on a spiral stair-

case that makes it hard to attack him, or he may be fighting in a narrow corridor where only one man at a time can come at him. This sort of advantage relies on the player to have a quick mind and spot situations that will be to his benefit.

The second reason is that the hero is just a much better swordsman than his enemies. How this is reflected in game statistics depends on what system you are playing, but the referee should bear in mind while running a swashbuckling campaign that the feel is what's important. Villains usually send a lot of thugs to ambush the heroes. But that doesn't mean

that they have to be very good thugs. Cyrano, single-handedly, fights and beats one hundred swordsmen in one fight because he's a lot better than they are. Fudge a little. If you can't make the characters stronger, make their opponents a little weaker.

But what sets Cyrano's fighting style apart from that of the typical mail-clad warrior of fantasy adventure? Most swashbuckling adventures (there are exceptions) take place in a setting resembling the 16th century or a later time period. What makes these eras' forms of combat different from previous ones is the advent of

Knockout Combat

Without armor, and with a well-placed bottle to the temple, it's a lot easier to stun your opponent or render him unconscious. Because a heavier blow has a greater chance of knocking a foe unconscious, the chance to knock an opponent out should be based on the amount of damage inflicted. Furthermore, it should be easier to stun an opponent than it is to knock him out.

As more damage is taken, determine what percentage of the remaining total has been taken in any given round and roll against that percentage. For example, if an attacker has 10 points at the beginning of a round and suffers 2 hp damage, he has a 20% chance of losing consciousness. The next round, with only 8 points remaining, two more hp damage would result in a 25% chance of unconsciousness. To determine the chance of being stunned, add 10% to the unconsciousness percentage; for example, losing 2 points from 8 would make a 35% chance of being stunned. Stunned characters may take no further actions in the round they are stunned, no actions other than defensive ones during the next round, and—if stunned again during that time—are automatically rendered unconscious.

The CASTLE FALKENSTEIN* combat system uses playing cards instead of dice, so the method for determining stuns and knock-outs is somewhat different. First of all, to have a chance of stunning a foe, a blow must be delivered to a critical area of the target's anatomy (i.e., head, abdomen or groin). The precise difficulty of hitting one of these areas should be based on the situation. It's a lot easier to hit someone from behind by surprise than to hit someone in melee. As a rule of thumb, add 2-4 points to the target's defense number in combat for an aimed blow.

Assuming that a blow lands in a key area, determine damage as appropriate for the level of success and weapon used. Then draw a card from the Fortune deck. If the card drawn is a Heart, the blow has stunned the victim. Furthermore, if the face value of the card is greater than the number of hit points the victim has remaining, the blow has rendered him unconscious. For example, a character starts a round with 10 wounds and takes 2 points of damage from a blow to the head, leaving him with 8 points left. His attacker now draws the 6 of Hearts from the fortune deck and achieves a stun. If the attacker had drawn the 9 of Hearts then our hero would have been knocked out. For purposes of stuns and knockouts, aces have a value of 1 and face cards (jacks, queens, and kings) have a value of 10.

Improvised Weapons

The following weapons are commonly used in swashbuckling brawls; nonproficiency penalties apply for characters without a brawling skill. The first set of statistics is for AD&D® games, the second for the CASTLE FALKENSTEIN* setting.

Weapon	Speed	Dmg	
Bottle	2	1d3-1/1d2-1	
Beer Stein	2	1d3/1d2	
Stool/Chair	5	1d6/1d4	
Wooden Bench	10	1d8/1d6	
Bucket/Lantern	4	1d6/1d3	
Roasting Spit	6	1d8/1d6	
	Partial	Full	High
Bottle	none	1B	1W
Beer Stein	1B	2B	1B & 1W
Stool/Chair	1W	2W	3W
Wooden Bench	none	1W	2W
Bucket/Lantern	1W	2W	3W
Roasting Spit	1W	2W	3W

small arms, beginning with matchlock rifles and pistols. These new weapons render all forms of personal armor next to useless. So fighting styles change. Instead of large hacking weapons such as broadswords and axes, people turn to longer swords, rapiers designed for thrusting, gives them a greater reach. Cyrano may not be able to pierce the armor worn by a warrior of the Middle Ages, but he can easily outrun and then shoot an enemy. Cutlasses and sabers are shorter weapons, more useful for slashing and hacking. They are primarily employed on the battlefield or for close-in fighting, such as boarding actions.

Furthermore, fencing involves a lot of fighting with a weapon in each hand. Most of the time this second weapon is a dirk, or long dagger. But there are several other options to choose from: the buckler, a second sword, your cloak (to entangle an opponent's weapon), or even a beer stein used as a club. Some schools even teach the use of a chair as a second weapon (look it up). This style of fighting involves a lot more brawling than earlier styles. The lack of armor makes thrown punches and kicks potentially effective attacks.

Much of what we recognize from this style of fighting grew out of Hollywood theatrics. But that has become the ideal of swashbuckling combat, and it is what the referee should try to simulate. Good examples are movies like *The Three Musketeers* with Michael York (1973), and *Crossed Swords* with Oliver Reed (1978). Most games don't simulate this type of combat very well. But don't feel that you have to rewrite your game's entire combat system. Just a few simple modifications will suffice.

First of all, most game systems assume that the only reason that someone would have a second weapon in their off-hand would be to gain a second attack; these systems apply a penalty to the use of the second weapon. But that's not why the two-handed fighting style was developed. The second weapon was used primarily to parry incoming attacks. To simulate this, ignore any penalties that are imposed on the use of an off-hand weapon when the weapon is used for defensive purposes. Or, as long as the second weapon is appropriate (a beer stein doesn't make a very useful parrying weapon) and is used only for defense, grant the character the same benefits as if he were using a small shield, and on any round in which he wishes to attack with it he loses the shielding benefit.

Second, several off-hand weapons could remove, break, or entangle an opponent's weapon. Sword-breakers, armored gauntlets, cloaks, and similar weapons, when used to "attack" another weapon, should make a separate attack roll. If the attack roll succeeds, then, depending on the weapons in use, have the combatants test against each other's Strengths or Dexterities to see if the weapon is entangled,

broken, or dropped—this simulates the well-known struggle between two swordsmen (and is also a good time to trade quips or insults). Obviously a cloak wouldn't be much good for breaking an opponent's weapon, but it is very good at entangling.

Coincidence? Never Heard of It

The last point to remember while running any swashbuckling campaign is the circumstance in which the events of the story present themselves. In swashbuckling, there is no such thing as coincidence; the action must be fast and furious, and every action has its consequences.

Nothing ever just happens in a swashbuckling game. There are no chance meetings, no happy coincidences. Everything that happens to the players occurs for a reason. In *Cyrano*, Christian catches a man picking his pocket. Christian lets the man go in exchange for information he has which will save his friend's life. In the movie *The Four Musketeers*, Athos drinks to forget a woman from his past. That woman turns out to be Milady de Winter, the main henchman of Cardinal Richelieu.

Such coincidences serve not only to further the story, but also to motivate the characters to action. If the hero in a story believes that his only daughter died many years ago, rest assured she did not. Rather, she was spirited away by the villain who raised her as his own, and now she is the main henchman. Only as the story approaches its climax should the truth be revealed, adding to the larger-than-life sense of drama that is so vital to this type of campaign.

The common occurrence of such coincidences also allows the referee to fudge in favor of the players if the need should arise. If the characters are facing certain death at the hands of the villain, let them be saved by a former servant, now forced into the employ of their enemy. Or if they are outnumbered in a fight, let some other swashbuckler come to their assistance; perhaps he can aid them even more with needed information or become a recurring character. Remember the example of the inventor's convenient hot-air balloon? That's taken from the third musketeer film with Michael York, *The Return of the Musketeers*. Don't hand the characters everything on a silver platter; but, if they need a little nudge now and then, feel free to give it them. Swashbuckling heroes take extraordinary risks; they deserve some breaks when things go wrong.

Keep the action of the story intense. When the time comes—and it will—for swords to be drawn and for blood to flow, don't just have a fight. There's a lot more to a swashbuckling fight than rolling for initiative and determining who hits whom. Use dialogue and specific actions to make the fight intense. The characters' oppo-

nents may taunt or threaten them while dueling away, or let the scene's tension build with dialogue for as long as possible before drawing weapons. Both the book and the movie *The Prisoner of Zenda* are good sources for examples.

Use the surroundings to add color to the scene. If a fight takes place in a bar, the braver patrons may throw bottles and chairs, overturn tables, the women scream, the men swear. If a fight takes place in a stable, have it catch on fire during the battle. In *The Four Musketeers*, a fight takes place on a frozen lake. Both sides are slipping, sliding, and falling through the ice into the lake. Keep the players on their toes and make them think, but don't give them much time to do so during the action. Events move quickly, and he who hesitates is lost.

Lastly, the heroes may win, but they never get away with anything scot free. Everything the characters do should have its consequences. Having helped the Queen successfully once, the characters had better be prepared to do it again, for little or no reward other than the privilege of serving Her Majesty. Cardinal Richelieu may let D'Artagnan and his fellows free after killing Milady de Winter, but 15 years later her daughter has grown up and is looking to settle the score. The consequences of the PCs' actions may be large or small, may come swiftly or after many years, but they will come. This theme ties in nicely with the idea of no coincidences. The story is more interesting if the daughter of an old enemy just happens to meet one of the heroes and—without realizing who he is—falls in love with him.

If all of the above has left you a little confused, go out and find some source material on your own. Apart from the movies and books mentioned previously, I recommend the following films: *Royal Flash* with Malcolm MacDowell (1975), *The Iron Mask* with Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. (1929, silent), *Nate and Hayes* with Tommy Lee Jones (1983), and—believe it or not—*Ice Pirates* with Robert Urich (1984). Also try these books: *Rupert von Hentzau* (the sequel to *The Prisoner of Zenda*) by Anthony Hope, *On Stranger Tides* by Tim Powers, *Wyvern* by A.A. Attanasio, and (if you can find it) the historical book *The Buccaneers of America* by John Esquemeling.

In summary, the most important difference between a swashbuckling campaign and any other genre is style. The roll of the seas beneath the deck of a sailing ship, desperate races to save royalty from disgrace, duels to the death fought for love alone: all of these are what make swashbuckling so attractive to dreamers the world over. I hope that you are one of these dreamers, and if not, that you'll become one soon. Ω

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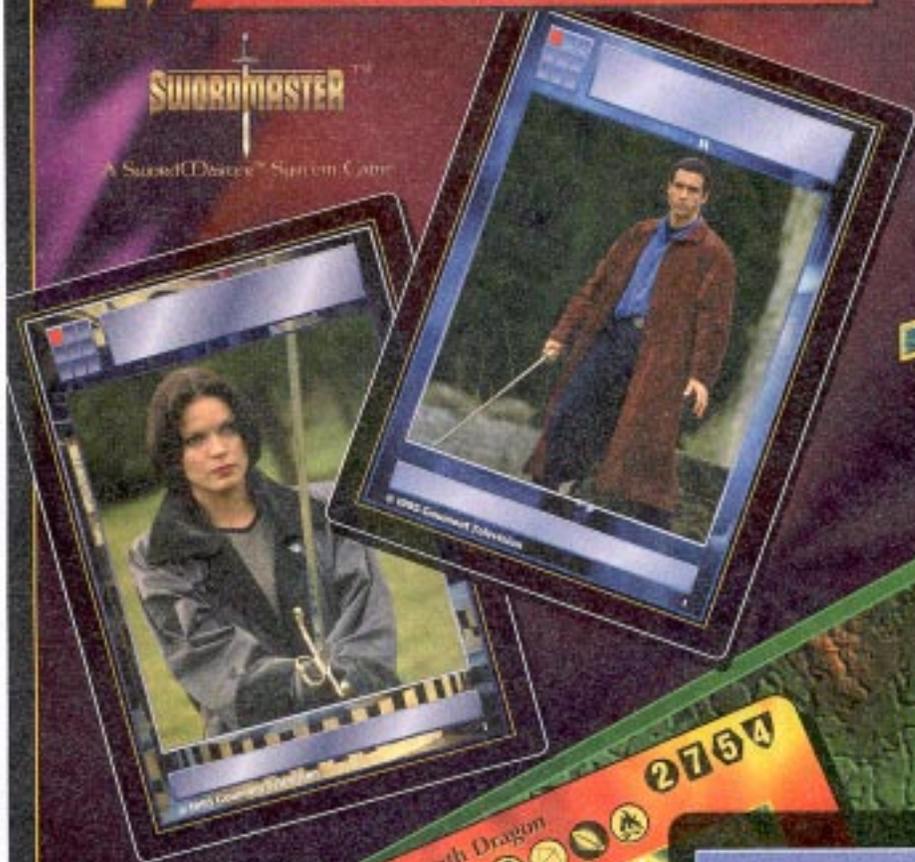
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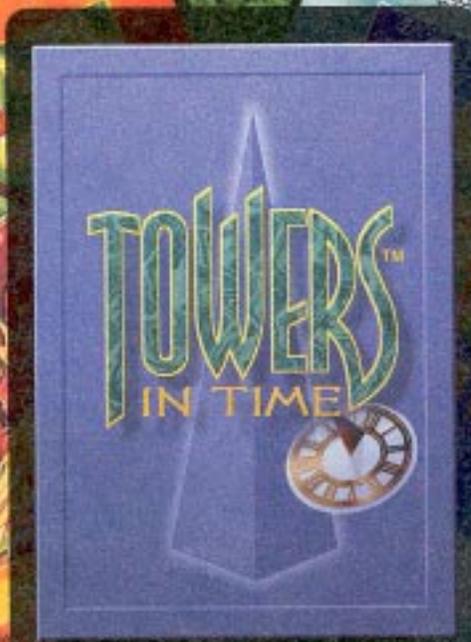
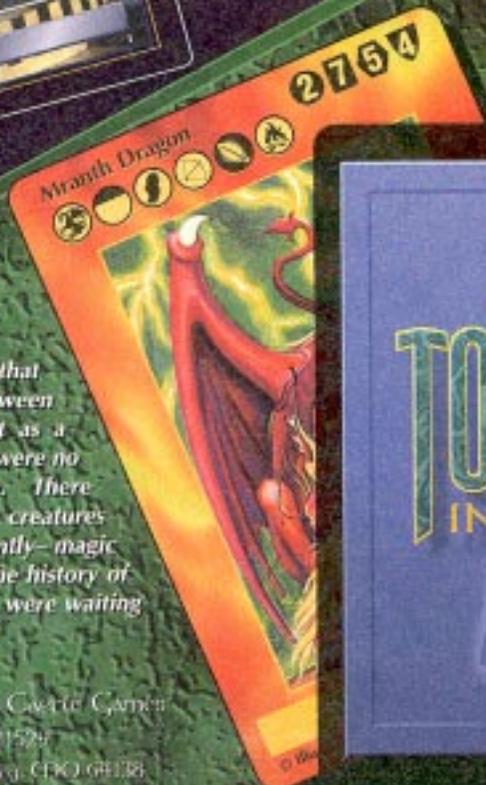
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Chase Modifiers

Race	
Human, elf, half-elf	0
Gnome, dwarf, halfling	- 6
Armor	
None	0
Leather, padded, studded leather, ring mail	- 2
Brigandine, scale mail, hide, chain mail, banded mail	- 4
Plate mail, field plate, full plate	- 6
Encumbrance	
None	0
Light	- 1
Medium	- 2
Heavy	- 3
Wounds	
Healthy	0
Wounded	- 3
Head-start	
Short	+ 2
Medium	+5
Long	+8
Actions	
Easy	+ 1
Difficult	- 4
Speed action	+3
Objects	
Slow	+ 4
Quick	0
Fast	- 6

by Daniel Mark Vyleta

Artwork by David Kooharian

It felt like Doubletongue had been running for hours. Ever since the baron awoke from his fitful sleep to find Doubletongue stealthily removing a jeweled necklace from beneath the baron's pillows, the elven thief had been in motion: down the stairs, through numerous hallways, out the main door, and into the yard. "I seem to be running out of luck now," he thought as he glimpsed the guards loosing their wardogs. The gate was just a few dozen feet away its portcullis dropping. Running had never been Doubletongue's favorite pastime, but the howling of the dogs easily convinced him to triple his enthusiasm, and he made a dash for the gate. With a roar, Doubletongue threw himself forward, rolling through the foot-wide gap between pointed death and the soft earth. At the moment when he thought he would be impaled and that his mother would never know the fate of her youngest son in a far off land, he landed on the other side. The gate crashed down, and a sheepish smile of relief crept over the thief's face.

That was before the dog, its head poking through the gap between the portcullis' iron bars, bit into Doubletongue's boot with vicious glee.

Running has always been a strong option with me. Nothing is quite as satisfying to a DM as seeing a party of full-grown machos tripping over their *two-handed swords* +5 and dropping their treasure to escape some nameless horror from the deepest pits of the abyss. Unfortunately, the AD&D® game system does not accommodate contests of speed very well. Although a creature's Movement Rate gives a clear indication of its absolute speed, it is more suited for miniature play and doesn't fully capture the excitement of a real chase. Also, all unencumbered humans move at the same speed, and the system lacks an effective way to answer questions such as: "Can I reach the door and slam it shut before the giant spider devours me?" The following rules are a quick and exciting way to resolve all game situations concerning the problem of "Who gets there first?"

The basic idea is very simple. The parties involved in the "chase" (i.e., everybody who wants to get somewhere first) declares their goal in opposite order of initiative (the slowest person declares first). Then everybody rolls 1d20 and compares the number shown to his character's Dexterity score. Whoever succeeds best-or fails least dismally-wins the contest.

For example: Dorn Fireboots (Dexterity

14) and Thran the Mighty (Dexterity 9) both enter the throne room in the Castle of Doom. They see a jeweled crown of incredible worth lying on the throne's seat and both race for it (initiative can be ignored in this instance). Dorn's player rolls an 11 and passes by 3; Thran's player rolls a 7 and passes by 2. Thus, Dorn grabs the crown and puts it on his head before Thran gets a chance to do the same. Thran is the fortunate one, of course, since jeweled crowns in doomed castles tend to be cursed . . .

The aim announced should always be a definite place or action, e.g., a door, a well, or the leap off of a cliff. Vague declarations such as "I run" should be prohibited. If the goals of the parties involved do not conflict with each other, no roll is necessary—for example, if one person tries to reach the door and the other one runs for the fireplace, it doesn't make much sense to determine who gets where first. But if extinguishing the magical fire seals the door, comparing the two speeds suddenly does become important.

In play, of course, not all participants of a chase are unencumbered, unarmored, or healed humans; nor do they all start at the same distance from their goal. The Chase Modifier Table summarizes Dexterity modifiers to accommodate all of these factors.

Race

Members of the races named are subject to the penalty listed.

Armor

Characters wearing a listed armor type are subject to the penalties shown. Other armor types must be compared by weight and encumbrance to those in the table. Magical plate mail, for example, encumbers about as much as standard chain mail.

Encumbrance

Rather than using the precise system suggested in the *Player's Handbook*, this article uses a rough estimate of a character's encumbrance. An adventurer who carries a sword, a bow, a small backpack filled with food, torches, and a short rope is lightly encumbered. If the backpack is much heavier or if the adventurer carries a particularly bulky weapon (e.g., a pole-arm or a body shield), he has medium encumbrance. Finally, if he carries large amounts of treasure, an entire tapestry, or a halfling-sized statue his encumbrance rating moves up to "heavy." Armor is considered separately from encumbrance and should be ignored here with the sole exception of shields.

Players who enjoy more precise rules may ignore the armor and encumbrance modifiers given here. Instead, determine a movement penalty due to encumbrance as described in the *Player's Handbook*, Tables 47-48 page 103. Under those rules, a human with an encumbered Movement

Rate of 9 has a movement penalty of 3 (their basic rate of 12 minus the encumbered movement rate of 9 equals a penalty of 3). Subtract the movement penalty from the character's Dexterity during chases.

Warning: Using the latter option gives unencumbered characters less of an advantage. I strongly recommend the use of the Chase Modifier table's Armor and Encumbrance adjustments.

Wounds

A character's wounds affect his Movement Rate if he has less than half his total hit points. This rule applies to this system only and should not be used for any other situation. Individual DMs sometimes dish out special wounds such as broken legs in special situations or as part of a critical hit system. These may result in additional movement penalties.

Head Start

Most of the time the runners do not start at the same place; for example, when a guard tries to catch a burglar, the latter might spot his pursuer from afar and start running. Also, runners are not always running toward the same place; for instance, the guard might try to ring the signal bell at the top of the stairs before the thief can cross the market place and leave through the city gates.

Whichever character has the shortest distance to cover has a head start and receives a bonus. The size of the bonus depends on the relative advantage of the head start.

A short head start is no more than a few steps, up to a maximum of perhaps 18'.

A medium head start means one is rather likely to get to his point of destination first. The specific distance involved depends on the total length of the race. If two adversaries race for a window just across the room, a few steps can provide a medium head start. For a chase of several hundred feet, 50' is a reasonable medium head start.

A long head start means that one of the racers is so far ahead that the DM considers not checking at all. Under normal circumstances, no one could catch the leader.

Actions

Players may decide their characters do more than simply run. An easy action would be drawing a weapon or throwing wolfsbane at a pursuer. Moving over an obstacle such as a staircase may also be considered an easy action. A difficult action would be digging a potion out of a backpack and gulping it down in mid-run, or running through waist-deep water. A speed action, finally, is an action intended to increase your speed. For example, a character may try to leave through a window before the villain's servants catch him; the player declares that the PC throws himself through the window head first instead of climbing through (easy

action) and thus may gain the speed action bonus. Similarly, sliding down a polished railing or slippery slope, leaping to tackle a runner, jumping from a balcony rather than taking the stairs, swinging down a tapestry or banner, or sliding down a rope rather than going hand-over-hand are considered speed actions. Most speed actions involve some element of risk—the bonus comes at the price of losing the chase or suffering damage.

While these modifications cover most of the standard running situations, certain questions remain unanswered. For instance, sometimes the degree of success matters; how thoroughly does one racer beat the other? A simple comparison of the Dexterity checks can answer this question. First, determine how many points the winner and the loser succeeded (or failed) by. Then, find the difference between those two numbers. For example, if the winner succeeded by 5 (with all modifications applied), and the loser by 2, the difference would be $5 - 2 = 3$. If the winner succeeded by 3 and the loser failed by 6, the difference would be $3 - (-6) = 9$. A 1-2 point difference means the winner barely beat his opponent, a 3-7 point difference describes a victory by good measure, a difference of 8 or more is a total victory. In the example of the burglar and the guard used above, a total victory by the guard means he caught the burglar after a few steps; perhaps the thief stumbled or the guard simply reacted faster. On the other hand, if the thief just barely won, he might just manage to leave the city gates but has his cloak torn off by the chasing guard. Close calls can be very suspenseful.

This system can easily be adapted for long distance chases (anything in excess of half a mile). While not many chases over such a long distance arise, a few can be imagined. For example, after spotting the baron's knights a mile back in clear terrain, Doubletongue might make a dash for the woods half a mile away. Long distance chases work exactly the same way as short distance chases, but all rolls are made against a character's Constitution instead of his Dexterity.

But racing other humans and demi-humans is only half the fun. What about racing horses, dragons, or the tarrasque? No problem. Since monsters don't have a Dexterity rating, simply use their basic movement rate minus one as the speed score for chase checks. A horse's speed score is $24 - 1 = 23$, a gold dragon's flying speed is 29. The typical human has a speed of 11; in other words, an average Dexterity score of 11. The speed score is used for both long distance and short distance races unless the DM decides that an individual creature is better at covering one instead of the other. Then he may assign two independent speed scores, using common sense as a guideline. A tireless skeleton's speed would read: speed 11 (short distance)/16 (long dis-

tance), while a cheetah is clearly a sprinter: speed 29/20.

Finally, at times characters may race against objects rather than creatures: a closing gate, a room with a collapsing ceiling, or a bridge about to be ripped apart by a flood. The character makes a Dexterity check, using all appropriate modifiers from the Chase Modifiers table, including those listed for objects. If he succeeds, fine; if he fails, the object moved faster.

Example: Let's re-examine Doubletongue's adventure from the beginning of the article. He was racing away from several angry dogs while trying to reach a closing portcullis. The DM decides to split this up into two races. First, he must determine whether Doubletongue reaches the gate before the dogs can attack him, then—if necessary—whether he reaches it in time to escape. Furthermore, the DM decides to treat the dogs as one racer, making a single check for the entire pack to simplify matters. Doubletongue's Dexterity is 15, the dogs' speed is 14 (Movement Rate 15). Doubletongue is an elf (0), wears leather armor (-2), is unencumbered (0), unwounded (0) and has a few steps for a head start (short, +2). His total chase modifier is 0.

The DM gives his dogs a speed action modification of +3, because they leap for their target once they are close enough. Doubletongue's player and the DM roll dice. The player rolls a 10 and makes his roll by $15 - 10 = 5$. The DM rolls a 15. The dogs, too, succeed, but only by $14 + 3 - 15 = 2$ points. Doubletongue is a lucky winner by 3; the race is close, but the thief can make his escape only if he beats the portcullis.

The DM decides the portcullis is a fast object, since it is already halfway down when Doubletongue starts moving. The elf's modifiers are 0 (race), -2 (armor), 0 (encumbrance), 0 (wounds), -6 (fast object). His player declares that Doubletongue throws himself under the portcullis at the risk of being impaled and earns a +3 speed action modifier. Doubletongue must pass a Dexterity check - 5 ($-2 + 3 - 6$) to make it. He rolls a 9; his modified Dexterity is $15 - 5 = 10$. Doubletongue makes it by one! The DM briefly considers ruling that the bars of the portcullis scratch his leg for minor damage, but then decides that the dog reaches through the portcullis instead—both case- rolls were barely successful and it seems like a lot more fun that way.

Final Note

If you wish, you may introduce two new proficiencies to your campaign: sprinting and cross country. Sprinting adds two points to a character's effective Dexterity score for short chases, cross country does the same for Constitution for long ones.

The legs might indeed be mightier than the sword. Just don't forget how to run.

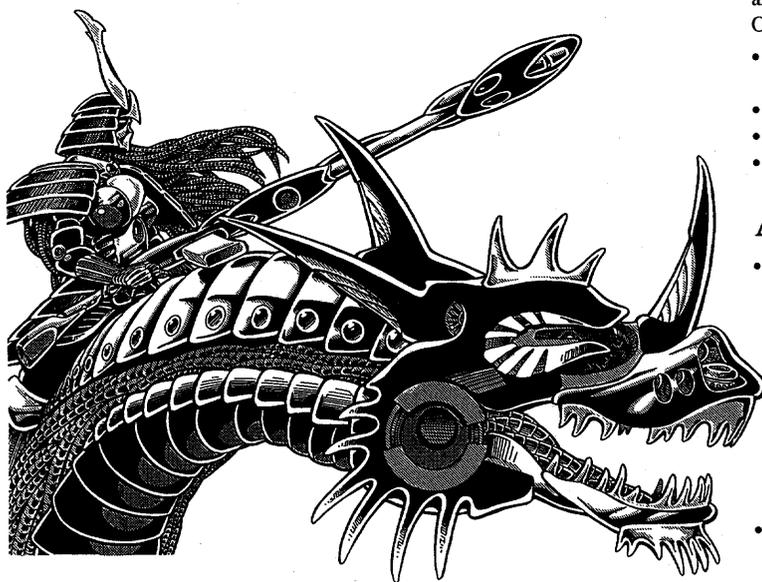
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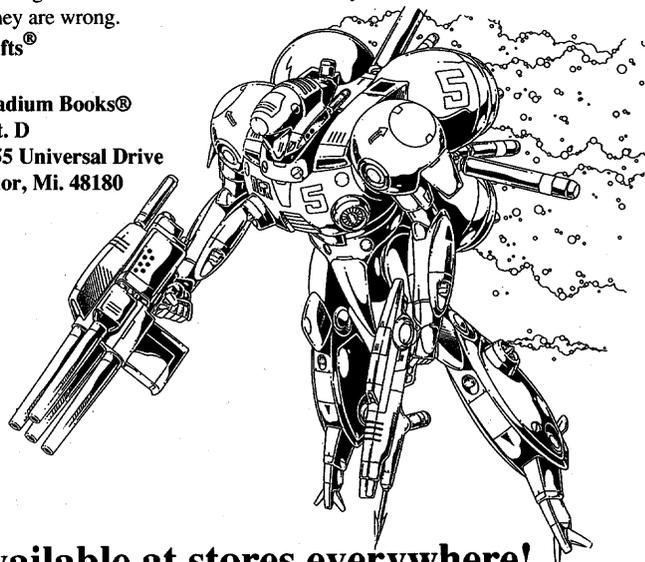
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OUT OF ARMOR

And Into Action!

by Alison Brooks

Artwork by Eric Anderson

Armor is useful stuff in a fight. It protects the body from cutting and crushing weapons wielded with lethal intent; only gunpowder made it obsolete. Despite this, many people want games to reflect the faster-moving, more agile heroism popular from films and TV, from Errol Flynn's Robin Hood, to Robin of Sherwood. It's called swashbuckling.

Many rules have attempted to cover swashbuckling alongside the more straightforward heavy-armor fighters. The problem these rules have is simple: armor *does* protect the wearer from injury, and an unarmored person fighting someone in full plate will probably lose. Some games try to get around this by introducing magical amulets that protect their wearers as well as the heaviest armor; some have special rules that give increased Dexterity bonuses for lightly-armored fighters or thieves.

Unfortunately, these rules make a false assumption about how best to help lightly-armored fighters compete with the heavy brigade. They assume that the goal is to make the lightly-armored fighter as good as a heavy fighter at standing toe-to-toe, swinging weapons until one of them falls over. This is not how swashbucklers act in the movies, and it ignores all the advantages of being lightly-armored. Most importantly, it is not swashbuckling, merely

lightly-armored fighters that act just like heavily-armored ones. True swashbuckling uses the swashbuckler's intelligence, wit, and panache to overcome armored foes, not rules fixes.

Whatever game system you use, swashbuckling can flourish, provided that the DM encourages it and applies the rules intelligently. Some rules suggest that armor is effectively weightless and neither slows wearers down nor restricts their vision. Anyone who has ever worn real metal armor knows that this is simply untrue! To use such a system, while maintaining a swashbuckling approach, apply the rules with a splash of common sense.

The easiest way to get PCs out of armor is to rule that armor does not exist, or is otherwise not available to the PCs in your campaign (it may be forbidden to commoners, for instance). However, if you don't wish to exclude armor entirely, but would still like to encourage swashbuckling PCs, then you need an indirect approach to achieve a balance between armored and unarmored warriors. The first step is to consider the problems of armor.

Comfort

Metal armor is hot and uncomfortable to wear. Historically, the Viking invaders of England in 1066 lost the battle of Stamford Bridge because of this. Many of them

decided that it would be too much bother to wear their armor on a hot day. They were caught unawares by an English army, and massacred. Even more dramatically, many European knights on the Crusades died of heat exhaustion because of their metal armor.

In gaming, the DM should remind players that their characters are uncomfortable if they insist on wearing their armor in hot, wet, or bad weather. PCs with low Constitutions might have to make saving throws against death magic to represent heat stroke and the like. If a character fails, he suffers a -1 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks for each step of armor above AC 7 (for example, a fighter in plate mail and shield would suffer a -5 penalty). The penalty is calculated using only the Armor Class that results from items that are worn, not from magical bonuses or Dexterity. The maximum penalty is -7 for PCs wearing full plate and shield.

NPC fighters might take the lead in this regard, removing their armor when it is not required, and making comments about PCs who refuse to do the same. If the PCs are reluctant to emerge from their shells, the DM should be careful not to take advantage of them. If the PCs suffer too many ambushes or emergency encounters, the PCs will go back to armor, claim-

ing (rightly) that it is too dangerous without it.

Weight

Armor is heavy, and wearisome when worn for long periods. In the battle of Stamford Bridge, mentioned above, reinforcements ran from the Viking ships to join the army fighting the English. Many of those who ran in armor dropped dead from the exertion. Later plate armor was better-balanced and easier to wear than the mail shirts of the earlier Middle Ages, but both types were heavy, and worn only when necessary.

In gaming, rules may be necessary to remind players that wearing armor all the time is tiring. Characters with low Strength might have to make saving throws against poison to avoid exhaustion. An exhausted character is too feeble to do more than move at half normal speed and defend himself in combat; he cannot cast spells, run, or attack. In games using fatigue points as well as hit points, wearing armor for long periods should inflict fatigue point losses. If the game suggests that armor is not encumbering, it needs tweaking to reflect reality.

Mobility

Armor slows you down and makes fine manipulation harder. Archers should not be able to wear armor on their arms or heavy gloves of any kind, if they want to fire their bows.

It is difficult to move quietly while wearing armor. This is only partly because of the clanking of metal; mainly, the armor's weight and bulk make the wearer cumbersome and more likely to bump into things.

In the game, use rules that penalize armored characters attempting to climb, sneak, ambush, fire bows, or perform any other action requiring good coordination. A PC in armor cannot move as quickly as one in ordinary clothes, and thieves will doubtless have learned this—a thief can outdistance a pursuer in armor, jump over a wall, and race up to the rooftops before the victim can raise the alarm. Characters without armor can give chase; which victim will thieves choose?

Perception

Helms cover the ears, making it difficult to hear opponents. Helms also restrict the wearer's field of vision and make it harder to turn the head. Add the noises made by heavy armor and the fact that wearers of armor are slower, and it is no wonder that thieves find armored types good victims. Even without thieves, the loss of perception caused by wearing a helm can be inconvenient because it eliminates peripheral vision. Anyone wearing a helm is unlikely to notice attackers coming from the side or behind, or to spot movements in the forest that may be an ambush. Ambushers and others should be more likely to surprise anyone wearing a helm because their vision is partially obstructed.

Costs

Armor is designed to block solid blows. When it does this, it gets damaged. Even without this damage, it still rusts—stainless steel is a 20th-century invention. Armor is not only expensive to buy, but it also requires constant, expensive maintenance—even if a skilled armorer is available. Horses are another hidden expense for armor—because armor is heavy, bigger and more expensive, horses are needed to carry the armor-wearer.

It would be reasonable to rule that the cost of maintaining armor is 5% of its original cost per month (100 gp/month for field plate, 200-500 gp for full plate!). This amount would be higher in wet conditions, and even more in salty conditions (by the seal, or when it takes a lot of wear and tear. Ordinary riding horses for armored fighters cost at least 10% more than the equivalents for the unarmored characters.

Social Factors

In towns, cities, camps, homesteads—anywhere where attack is not expected imminently—people do not expect the PCs to wear their armor. If the PCs insist on wearing it, people may get suspicious and wonder if the PCs intend to make trouble.

In some circumstances, armor is simply not allowed: at court, for instance. Likewise, local taverns may have dress rules. Cities or towns may find that a ban on armor is easy to enforce and keeps the peace almost as well as a ban on weaponry; PCs who insist on wearing armor may find themselves arrested on suspicion.

In a more extreme case, a society may regard certain forms of armor as appropriate only for certain people. If plate armor is restricted to the aristocracy, PCs of the lower classes had better take it off or be prepared for trouble!

Where armor is not banned, people nonetheless expect the PCs to remove their armor during harmless pursuits such as chatting up the barmaid or playing cards in the local tavern. They probably expect large weapons (anything two-handed, or even anything bigger than a knife) be left behind. If the PCs break the unwritten rules of social behavior, people will regard them as odd or even dangerous. What would you think of a member of your gaming group who always wore a diving suit and kept a harpoon gun in hand? The same reaction is likely for PCs who go around heavily armed and armored without a good reason.

Terrain

Sometimes it is very foolish to wear armor. For example, during a sea battle the ship is shifting and unsteady, the deck is slippery with sea-water, and there is the possibility of being knocked overboard. It's difficult to swim while wearing armor. Likewise, armor is cumbersome when traveling through thick forests or soft marshlands. If the DM designs scenarios

with the intention of encouraging the PCs to take off their armor, such settings are particularly useful. Bandits and other creatures in such terrain are lightly-armored and adept in getting around. If the PCs wear heavy armor, the bandits can run rings around them, popping up from behind a tree to fire an arrow, then disappearing before the PCs can reach them. The PCs who don't know what armor is appropriate may learn quickly if they are worn down by attrition.

Logistics

It takes time to put on armor. The simplest armor is the mail shirt, which consists of a padded coat with mail above. The moments it takes to pull that mail shirt on may be critical. Donning full plate armor takes 10 minutes or more, with the help of an assistant who knows which piece goes where. Obviously, no armor can actually be donned during a fight. An armor-based fighter taken unaware by enemies is at a disadvantage that a swashbuckler, accustomed to fighting without armor, is not.

Wounds

Most DMs may not want to use this penalty, but remember that in order to bind wounds, you must first reach and clean the wound. If the wound is beneath armor, the armor must be removed. A swashbuckler's shirt tears easily to allow treatment, but armor is designed to be tough. Time can be crucial if the person is bleeding to death.

Basic Swashbuckling

Assuming that the fighters can be tempted out of their armor, what next? It's time to move on to real swashbuckling.

One way to offer PCs lessons in swashbuckling is by making NPCs into positive role models. If NPC swashbucklers are successful and admired, the PCs will want to do what they do. PCs might also learn a salutary lesson if they meet an enemy who uses swashbuckling tactics successfully.

So, how do swashbucklers operate? Swashbucklers use the terrain available in a way that other fighters cannot. Swashbucklers live in a world of wall-hangings to hide behind, pull onto an enemy, or clamber up; windows to climb through or jump out of; and chandeliers to swing on. To encourage swashbuckling, give a little thought to such decorations. Scatter useful ropes, rugs, banners, and narrow stairs around, along with small tables to throw at an enemy, and large ones to fight across. Rest assured the PCs will make use of every advantage they can.

The swashbuckling style depends on speed and quick wits to outweigh the brawn of an armored opponent. Since the swashbuckler's prime defense is wits, the swashbuckler is never unarmed, unlike the heavy fighter who needs weapons and armor. Swashbucklers are quick to take advantage of improvised weaponry that heavy fighters would never notice.

The swashbuckler cannot stand in front of a tin can and swap blows. Instead, a swashbuckler stays in constant motion, and, if necessary, takes the fight onto suitably dramatic terrain—flimsy balconies, rickety bridges, thatched roofs, steep slopes, and so on.

When fighting an armored opponent, a swashbuckler may find it hard to kill the foe. On the other hand, a fight can have outcomes that are more effective than mere death. The foe might be handed over to the local authorities, along with proof of his misdeeds obtained by the swashbuckler. The foe might simply be left behind, bypassed as the swashbuckler concentrates on the real task.

When rescuing a princess from a castle, the swashbuckler can sneak up to the castle, swim across the moat, scramble up the side of the wall, overpower a couple of guards, rush up the stairs, exchange a few blows with the villain, then pull a curtain down onto him, rush to the princess, sweep her into his arms, and then leap out of the window onto a conveniently waiting horse, and ride off into the sunset. The heavy fighter, however, has to do things the hard way. The enemy is aware of his approach, and he has to fight his way in, fight his way up, and fight his way out again. The princess might not thank him for the resulting bruises if he tries to sweep her into his arms. Even a strong

horse might collapse if a fully-armored man and princess landed on its back.

Swashbucklers must use intelligent tactics, but have many ways to handle a foe in armor. For instance:

- Blinding the opponent by pulling a curtain down on him, or by throwing a cloak in his eyes.
- Luring him onto a cliff, a balcony, or in front of a window, and knocking him over—someone in armor is less maneuverable.
- Catching him out of armor—even opponents will not wear armor all the time.
- Pinning him down by knocking a statue or other heavy object onto him.
- Pulling off his helmet and biffing him over the head.
- Luring him onto quicksand or a rickety bridge that will give way beneath him.
- Advance planning, especially in laying ambushes that take advantage of the swashbuckler's stealth (the Robin Hood approach).

Attacks to disarm or knock down an opponent are in order. An unarmored person can recover his feet much more quickly than an armored one—in fact, knights in full plate armor used hoists or ramps to mount their horses, because they literally could not swing up into the saddle.

A note on chandeliers: Swinging on chandeliers is not only dramatic and stylish, it also has combat advantages. For

one, a hulk in armor cannot emulate the swashbuckler—it can provide a quick getaway. Swinging is quicker than running, and provides the fastest route to or from a balcony overlooking the central hall where the fight is taking place. Using a chandelier to swing into an opponent is similar to crashing a horse into them, with the advantage that it may inflict a blow to the head with both feet, doing more damage than an ordinary kick. Combatants are unlikely to be expecting the maneuver and may be taken by surprise. For these reasons, it has become the quintessential swashbuckling tactic. Since chandeliers are common lighting fixtures in taverns, great halls, and salons, player characters should have plenty of opportunities to perfect their technique.

DMs & Swashbucklers

Some plots suit the swashbuckling approach better than others. Swashbucklers are not at home in games that focus on killing monsters and stealing their treasure. Swashbucklers are happiest in towns and cities, matching wits against intelligent foes with dastardly schemes.

Swashbucklers like fast action and deriding do. They enjoy recovering the Queen's necklace before the loss is discovered, regaining the pardon of the unjustly-accused hero that the villain has hidden away, finding the deeds to the disinherited

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son's land, and so on.

The swashbucklers' big advantage from a DM's point of view is that they are easy to design scenarios for. Swashbucklers are suckers for a person in distress; books, films, and TV all contain plenty of plot and character ideas. Once the game is underway, the consequences of earlier actions should return to haunt the PCs, making the DM's job even easier. Because swashbucklers are slightly less lethal than tin cans, major villains are more likely to live to fight another day, and to have plenty of reason to seek their revenge. Heavy fighters often use up (that is, kill) their enemies, requiring the DM to invent a steady stream of new enemies with new motives. In any case, recurring villains elicit a stronger reaction from the PCs and players than new ones. For once, laziness (re-using the same villains rather than creating new ones) makes for better games.

Players of swashbucklers must use their ingenuity to run the character effectively. In most games, fighters just pile in and keep rolling dice until their foes are dead, and mages act more like artillery than wielders of mystic forces. Successful swashbucklers require tactics and forethought—couch potatoes and half-interested players will be left behind in a swashbuckling campaign. This makes things more interesting for everyone, and can lead the players to be more involved in the game as a whole.

Of course, requiring ingenuity from the players does require them to show off more than a spark of intelligence and to think quickly on their feet. This is both a good and a bad thing. Good, because anything that makes players think about what they are doing means that the game is that much richer and more enjoyable. Bad, because players who want to run swashbucklers—but don't have the verve and the panache to do so—may feel hard done by. The best thing the DM can do is point such players toward swashbuckling films in the hope that they will pick up a few ideas.

Player ingenuity can also be a mixed blessing because it means more work for the DM. If the swashbucklers are doing their job properly, the DM must describe the terrain and the surroundings in more detail than for the simple hack-slash of the heavy fighter. For a swashbuckler, it may be vitally important to know whether or not there is pepper on the table. Still, the extra detail makes the campaign richer and more vivid. Experienced players can make the DM's job easier by intelligent anticipation: "Is there salt on this table? Or pepper? Or mugs of wine? Or eating utensils?" The DM can then decide what is available.

Rules for Swashbucklers

Swashbucklers can use most rules systems without difficulty, although many systems do not cover typical swashbuckler

attacks in detail. Certain settings—the RED STEEL® campaign, for instance, or most nautical settings—encourage swashbuckling thinking by players. Not even the best swashbuckling setting can cover everything, however, and often the DM must decide the effects of an attack on the spot. The following are suggestions for AD&D® games:

- Give swashbucklers automatic initiative over heavily-armored opponents because the armor slows their opponents down; at the least, an initiative bonus of +3 for unarmored combatants is justified.

- Blinding—throwing a cloak over the enemy, salt or sand into the eyes, and so forth. Unless the opponent actively wards against the attack, the attack roll is against AC 10 for a cloak or similar; against AC 6 for the eyes only (because an attack against the eyes must hit a far smaller target than one that needs simply to drape the head). An opponent expecting the attack is entitled to any normal Dexterity bonuses. If successful, the opponent requires 1d4 rounds to clear his vision, and is blinded until he does so.

- Chemical attack, e.g., pepper into the eyes. As above, but the opponent is at -2 to attacks for the rest of the fight or until able to wash their eyes.

- Knocking over. This requires something heavy: pulling a bookcase down on the enemy, rolling barrels at them, or bashing into them on a chandelier-swing. Strong swashbucklers may try the old trick of pulling the carpet out from under opponents, but remember that this requires shifting the weights of *all* the opponents. Use the rules for Overbearing.

- Knocking off cliffs or balconies. As above, but it requires a suitable drop, and a close attention to where everyone is standing. Using miniature figures helps in sorting out positions in fights. Remember that helmeted opponents may not be able to see the drop at all, and so will not be able to avoid it.

- Keeping clear of the enemy, and attacking from a distance, with arrows, or makeshift weapons like tankards. The encumbrance rules will allow the swashbuckler to stay ahead of the enemy. (*Suggested statistics for makeshift weapons are given in "At Sword's Point" in this issue.*)

One joy of DMing for swashbucklers is that they always come up with new forms of attack. With a little experience, most DMs learn to give instant rulings on a variety of situations, from how to handle an attempted blow at the eye-slits of an enemy's helmet to the effectiveness of an improvised distraction on breaking the foe's concentration or even whether the fragile bridge is really frail enough to collapse under the weight of plate mail. Stay flexible, have fun, and remember that swashbuckling not only requires agile PCs, and agile players, but also an agile DM!

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Fleshing Out
Fighters' Followers

by James R. Collier
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PIRATE AND CREWS RETINUES



KLASNICK

D'Artagnan, after years of service to Queen and country, finally reaches 9th level and earns his reward—a troop of followers. The player rolls dice and discovers that he now commands a troop of pikemen led by a 6th-level fighter in medieval armor. He rolls a 38 on d% for his elite squad. The sophisticated, urbane D'Artagnan is now the leader of 20 berserkers!

The *Player's Handbook* lists a selection of followers attracted by a 9th-level fighter lord. While good enough for the plain vanilla fighter, the table falls flat when used to create followers for fighter kits from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*. A peasant hero commanding 10 mounted knights? A swashbuckler in action with 20 berserkers? The table's matches don't always make sense. After all, shouldn't a pirate receive a bloodthirsty crew at 9th-level? Shouldn't a noble warrior gain a noble retinue? This article presents revised tables that produce troops appropriate for fighter character kits.

In each case, the kit summons both leaders and followers, as per the original tables. Unless otherwise specified, all troops are 0-level. Each leader has a list of suggested magical items, but of course these can be altered to suit the level of magic in the campaign.

Amazon

Contrary to what you might think, an amazon does not necessarily attract an all-female force. Her years in the outside world have taught her the value of men in combat, while her reputation as a 9th-level fighter will attract men to her service, regardless of her sex and background. Nonetheless, her leader and elite troops are probably women she understands and can rely on.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level amazon in *bronze plate mail* + 1, armed with *spear* + 1 and *long bow* + 1.
- 41-75 6th-level amazon in *bronze plate mail* + 1, with helmet and medium *shield* + 1 and *long bow* + 1.
- 76-95 6th-level amazon in *bronze plate mail* + 2, with helmet and medium shield, armed with *spear* + 1 and *long bow* + 1, and 3rd-level amazon in bronze plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with *spear* and *long bow* + 2.
- 96-99 7th-level amazon in *bronze plate mail* + 2, with helmet and medium *shield* + 1, armed with *spear* + 1 and *long bow* + 2, mounted on a light war horse.
- 00 DM's option: amazon warrior priestess, bird maiden, swanmay, amazon sorceress, or amazon paladin.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 20 horse archers in ring mail, with

helmet and medium shield, armed with short bow and horseman's flail, and 100 infantry in scale mail, armed with polearm and dagger.

- 51-75 20 infantry in splint mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with morning star and hand axe, and 60 infantry in chain mail, armed with spear, hand axe and dagger.
- 76-90 40 infantry in chain mail, helmets, and body shields, armed with light crossbow and morning star, plus 20 infantry in chain mail, helmets, and small shields, armed with spear and short bow.
- 91-99 30 light cavalry in chain mail, with helmets and medium shields, armed with lance, short bow and long sword, plus 30 heavy cavalry in plate mail, with helms and medium shields, armed with lance, long sword, and mace.
- 00 DM's option.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 10 1st-level amazon riders in bronze plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with long sword and short bow.
- 11-20 10 1st-level elven fighter/mages in chain mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with long sword, long bow, and dagger.
- 21-30 15 1st-level rangers in scale mail, with medium shield, armed with long sword, spear, and short bow.
- 31-40 10 1st-level half-elven unicorn riders in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with long sword and short bow.
- 41-65 20 1st-level amazons in bronze plate mail, with medium shield, armed with long bow.
- 66-99 30 1st-level amazons in bronze plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with spear and short sword.
- 00 DM's option: swanmays, amazon centaurs, scouts, etc.

Barbarian or Berserker

These kits both roll on the same table, because most berserkers come from a barbarian background. The barbarian can expect to have berserkers in his horde (if not, replace berserker with barbarian wherever it occurs in the tables), and the berserker attracts barbarians among his forces. If berserkers do not exist in the campaign, replace all berserker entries with barbarians of the same level.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level barbarian in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with *battle axe* + 2.
- 41-75 6th-level barbarian in banded mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with a *bastard sword* + 1

and *battle axe* + 1.

- 76-95 6th-level barbarian in banded mail, helmet, and medium shield, armed with a *bastard sword* + 1 and a *battle axe* + 1, and a 3rd-level barbarian in chain mail, with medium shield, armed with an *axe of hurling* + 1.
- 96-99 7th-level barbarian in plate mail, with helmet and medium *shield* + 1, armed with a *battle axe* + 2 and a *long bow* + 1, with *boots of the north*.
- 00 DM's option: half-ogre, half-orc, shaman, barbarian lycanthrope.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 20 mounted barbarians in ring mail, with helmet and medium shield (horned helmet optional), armed with battle axe and spear, plus 100 barbarians in hide armor, helmet, and large shield, armed with bastard sword and battle axe.
- 51-75 20 barbarians in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with battle axe, plus 60 berserkers in leather armor, armed with bastard sword and spear.
- 76-95 40 barbarians in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with battle axe, 20 mounted barbarians in banded mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with bastard sword, and 30 mounted barbarians in leather armor, with helmet and medium shield, armed with short composite bow and bastard sword.
- 96-99 10 mounted barbarians in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with bastard sword, and 30 mounted barbarians in leather armor, with helmet and medium shield, armed with short composite bow and bastard sword.
- 00 DM's option: sea faring barbarians, barbarian horse archers, etc.

Die

Roll Elite Units,

- 01-10 10 1st-level barbarians in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with short composite bow, bastard sword; and war dog; mounted on medium warhorse.
- 11-20 10 1st-level barbarian priests in chain mail, armed with long bow and long sword.
- 21-30 15 1st-level rangers in chain mail, with medium shield, armed with battle axe, broad sword, and dagger.
- 31-40 20 2nd-level berserkers in leather armor, with battle axe, broad sword, and dagger.
- 41-65 20 1st-level barbarians in leather armor, with body shield, armed with long bow, battle axe, and dagger.
- 66-99 30 1st-level barbarians in splint

helm, and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and mace; one mounted 1st-level half-elven fighter/cleric in plate mail, helm, and medium shield, armed with mace and flail; and one forester (1st-level ranger) in scale mail, with small shield, armed with long sword, spear, long bow, two war dogs, and a trained falcon.

31-40 A retinue of 10 mounted 2nd-level cavaliers in field plate, helm, and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and mace; one mounted 1st-level half-elven fighter/cleric in plate mail, with helm and medium shield, armed with mace and flail; a standard bearer (1st-level gallant³, same equipment as the cavaliers); a mounted 1st-level herald³; and a mounted 1st-level half-elven fighter/mage in chain mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with long sword and long bow.

41-65 A retinue of 16 crossbowmen (1st-level fighters) in studded leather, with large shields, armed with heavy crossbow and dagger, and two mounted squires (1st-level Cavaliers) in plate mail, with helm and medium shield, armed with long sword, mace, and dagger.

66-99 A retinue of 25 sergeants (1st-level fighters) in plate mail, with helmets and small shields, armed with awl pike and mace, and two squires (1st-level Cavaliers) in field plate, armed with lance and long sword, mounted on heavy warhorses.

00 DM's option: gallants, minor nobles, noble demihumans, pegasi cavalry, etc.

Gladiator

The gladiator is something of a special case. He is an urban adventurer, used to fighting in the coliseum on his own. He is not much of a general and—with all due respect to Spartacus—his followers are students and teachers, not a personal army. On the plus side, however, his students come from all walks of life, from captured barbarians to bored noble youths; he can count on attracting a wide variety of kits and classes. In addition, these followers have unusually good armor and weapons, due to the resources of the urban center.

Die

Roll Leader

01-40 5th-level gladiator in samnite armor, with scutum, armed with *drusus*¹ +2.

41-75 6th-level gladiator in samnite armor, with *scutum* + 1, armed with *drusus* + 1 and trident.

76-95 6th-level gladiator in *samnite armor* + 1, and scutum, armed with *drusus* + 1 and trident, and 3rd-

level myrmidon in plate mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with a *crossbow of distance*.

96-99 7th-level gladiator in plate mail, with helmet and small *shield* + 1, armed with a *net of entrapment* and *trident* + 1.

00 DM's option.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

01-50 20 cavalry in ring mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with three javelins, long sword, and hand axe; 100 barbarians in chain mail, with body shield, armed with battle axe and spear.

51-75 20 barbarians in splint mail, armed with battle axe; 60 savage warriors, with large shield, armed with spear and hand axe.

76-90 40 infantry in chain mail, armed with heavy crossbow and short sword; 20 savage warriors, with large shield, armed with sling and spear.

91-99 10 beast riders in hide armor, with medium shield, armed with lance and hand axe; 20 amazon cavalry in bronze plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and composite short bow; and 30 cavalry in studded leather armor, with medium shield, armed with lance and long sword.

00 DM's option.

Die

Roll Elite Units

01-10 10 1st-level beast riders in plate mail, with helm and medium shield, armed with lance, bastard sword, and dagger, mounted on a beast in chain barding.

11-20 10 1st-level elven fighter/mages in chain mail, with medium shield, armed with long bow and long sword.

21-30 15 1st-level gladiators in gallic armor, with scutum, armed with trident and net.

31-40 20 2nd-level berserkers in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with battle axe and dagger.

41-65 20 1st-level savage warriors, with scutum, armed with darts and *atlatl*¹.

66-99 30 1st-level gladiators in samnite armor, with scutum, armed with *drusus*.

00 DM's option (virtually anything—the more exotic, the better!)

Myrmidon

At first glance, the myrmidon seems to get the best deal going. He's the regular army guy, used to working with large forces. Look again. He gets greater numbers, but less variety. When the myrmidon advances in levels, he comes up through

the ranks, gaining larger and larger commands. By 9th-level, he is the equivalent of a colonel, in command of a single section of an army—cavalry, infantry, or engineers. He doesn't get the variety that others get.

Die

Roll Leader

01-40 5th-level myrmidon in plate mail, with helmet and body shield, armed with *short sword* +2.

41-75 6th-level myrmidon in plate mail, with helmet and body *shield* + 1, armed with *spear* + 1 and *dagger* +1.

76-95 6th-level myrmidon in *plate mail* + 1, with helmet and body shield, armed with *spear* + 1 and *dagger* + 1, and a 3rd-level myrmidon lieutenant in plate mail, with helmet and body shield, armed with a *crossbow of distance*.

96-99 7th-level myrmidon in *plate mail* + 1, with helmet and body *shield* + 1, armed with *short sword* +2, with heavy warhorse equipped with *horseshoes of speed*.

00 DM's option: master seige engineer, captain of horse, paladin of war god, or dwarven infantry captain.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

01-50 100 infantry in banded mail, with helmet and body shield, armed with pike and short sword.

51-75 80 infantry in chain mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with polearm and short sword.

76-90 60 infantry in chain mail, with helmet and body shield, armed with heavy crossbow and short sword.

91-99 40 cavalry in plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with lance and long sword.

00 DM's option.

Die

Roll Elite Units

01-10 12 1st-level fighters in plate mail, with helm and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and light crossbow, mounted on heavy warhorses.

11-20 10 1st-level elven fighter/mages in chain mail, armed with long sword, long bow, and dagger.

21-30 15 1st-level scouts² in leather armor, armed with short bow and spear.

31-40 20 2nd-level myrmidons in banded mail, with helmet and body shield, armed with 3 javelins and short sword.

41-65 10 1st-level fighters in studded leather, with long bow and knife, and 10 1st-level shield-bearers in padded armor, with pavices and spears.

66-99 25 engineers, sappers and miners

mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with spear and bastard sword.

- 00 DM's option: anagakoks, savage wizards, trained bears, beast riders, etc.

Beast Rider

The beast rider differs sufficiently from the barbarian to merit his own table. Most differences are in the replacements for mounted troops and cavalry—a beast rider knows the value of his own kind.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level beast rider in *hide* + 1, with medium shield, armed with a composite *short bow* + 1, mounted on a beast of largest size (+2 per hit die).
- 41-75 6th-level beast rider in *hide* + 2 and medium shield, armed with a *composite short bow* + 1, *hand axe* + 1, and lance, mounted on a beast of largest size and maximum hit points.
- 76-95 6th-level beast rider in *hide* + 2, with medium shield, armed with a *composite short bow* + 1, *hand axe* + 2, and *lance* + 1, mounted on a beast of largest size and maximum hit points, and 3rd-level beast rider in *hide* + 2, with medium shield, armed with a *sling of seeking* + 2
- 96-99 7th-level beast rider in chain *mail* + 1, with medium *shield* + 1, armed with *composite short bow* + 3, *hand axe* + 2, and *lance* + 1, mounted on a beast of largest size and maximum hit points, which has learned three tricks of the DM's choice (as per a horse—see Table 26, DMG)
- 00 DM's option

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 20 barbarians in chain mail, with large shields, armed with battle axe and spear, and 100 savage warriors in hide armor, with large shields, armed with spear, long sword, and hand axe.
- 51-75 20 barbarians in hide armor, with medium shields, armed with bastard sword and hand axe, and 60 savage warriors in leather armor, with large shields, armed with bow, spear, and club.
- 76-90 40 barbarians in hide armor, with medium shields, armed with short bow and battle axe, and 20 savage warriors in hide armor, with large shields, armed with long bow and spear.
- 91-99 10 beast riders in banded armor, with medium shields, armed with lance, bastard sword, and mace; 20 beast riders in hide armor, with medium shields, armed with lance, long sword, and mace; 30 beast

riders in leather armor, with medium shield, armed with lance and long sword.

- 00 DM's option.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 10 1st-level beast-riders in chain mail, armed with spear, long sword, and composite short bow, on mounts of maximum hit points and size.
- 11-20 10 1st-level barbarian priests in hide armor, armed with mace and spear.
- 21-30 15 1st-level rangers in chain mail, with medium shield, armed with short bow and long sword.
- 31-40 20 2nd-level berserkers in ring mail, armed with battle axe and morning star.
- 41-65 20 1st-level savage warriors in leather armor, with large shield, armed with sling and spear.
- 66-99 30 1st-level barbarians in chain mail, armed with bastard sword, spear, and long bow.
- 00 DM's option: barbarian priests, savage priests, anagakoks, amazons, scouts, flying beast-riders, etc.

Cavalier or Noble Warrior

Although not at all the same type of fighter, the cavalier and the noble warrior share the same tastes in followers, and so share the same tables. The major changes in the tables appear among the 0-level followers. Both these kits shun the lowly footman, preferring smaller numbers of better-equipped troops to larger numbers of leather-clad fighters. In addition, while they prefer mounted followers, that does not mean that they allow any but their own class the honor of fighting from horseback. Mounted warriors are an elite, and therefore must be nobles, or cavaliers at least!

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level cavalier (noble warrior) in field plate, with helm and medium shield, armed with lance, *long sword* + 1, horseman's flail, and dagger, mounted on a heavy warhorse.
- 41-75 6th-level cavalier (noble warrior) in full plate, with helm and medium shield, armed with *lance* + 1, long sword, horseman's flail and dagger, mounted on a heavy warhorse in chain mail barding.
- 76-95 6th-level cavalier (noble warrior) in full plate, with helm and medium shield, armed with *lance* + 1, long sword, horseman's flail and dagger, mounted on a heavy warhorse in chain mail barding, and a 3rd-level cavalier in plate mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with lance and *long sword* + 1, mounted on a

light warhorse.

- 96-99 7th-level cavalier (noble warrior) in *full plate* + 1, with helm and medium shield, armed with *lance* + 2, *long sword* + 2, *horseman's flail* + 1 and dagger, mounted on a heavy warhorse with chain mail barding. The warhorse knows two tricks of the DM's choice.
- 00 DM's choice: cavalier (noble warrior) on griffon or pegasus, elven cavalier, etc.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 10 hussars (mounted infantry) in plate mail, helm, and medium shield, armed with spear and long sword, plus 80 infantry in scale mail, helmet, and body shield, armed with polearm and mace.
- 51-75 20 infantry in splint mail, helm, and small shield, armed with morning star and hand axe, plus 30 hussars in banded mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with spear and short sword.
- 76-90 40 infantry in chain mail, with body shield, armed with heavy crossbow and short sword, and 20 infantry in chain mail, with body shield, armed with light crossbow and military fork.
- 91-99 10 hussars in banded mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with spear, bastard sword, and mace; 2 hussars in scale mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with javelins, long sword, and mace; 20 hussars in chain mail, with helmet and small shield, armed with javelins and long sword.
- 00 DM's option: dragoons, grenadiers, elite halberdiers, janisseries, king's men.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 A retinue eight mounted knights (1st-level cavaliers) in field plate, helm, and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and mace, accompanied by a mounted chaplain (1st-level half-elven fighter/cleric) in plate mail, helm, and medium shield, armed with mace and flail.
- 11-20 A retinue of six mounted knights (1st-level cavaliers) in field plate, helm, and medium shield, armed with lance, long sword, and mace; one mounted 1st-level half-elven fighter/cleric in plate mail, with helm and medium shield, armed with mace and flail; and one mounted 1st-level half-elven fighter/mage in chain mail, helmet, and small shield, armed with long sword and long bow.
- 21-30 A retinue of six mounted knights (1st-level cavaliers) in field plate,

(1st-level fighters) in leather armor, armed with footman's pick and hand axe, with any one siege engine.

- 00 DM's option. Assume the Myrmidon is used to a single troop type, then add specialty elements—militant wizards, demihumans, war elephants, etc.

Outlaws and Peasant Heroes

Another case of two entirely different characters who get entirely similar troops. This is because both draw their followers from the same class of people—the poor peasants. Unfortunately, it also means that most of their followers are poorly armed and equipped. The greater numbers they receive compensate somewhat for their poor armor class. Again, substitute outlaw for peasant hero where necessary.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level peasant fighter in plate mail, armed with *quarterstaff* +2.
41-75 6th-level peasant fighter in plate mail, armed with *quarterstaff* + 1 and *dagger* + 1.
76-95 6th-level peasant fighter in *plate mail* + 1, and 3rd-level peasant fighter in studded leather, armed with a *crossbow of distance*.
96-99 7th-level peasant fighter in *plate mail* + 1, armed with a *rod of flailing*
00 DM's option: ranger, bandit chieftain, wild man of the woods.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 30 archers in leather armor, armed with short bow and dagger, and 100 infantry in leather armor, armed with spear and club.
51-75 25 infantry in leather armor, armed with quarterstaff and hand axe, and 70 infantry in leather armor, armed with short bow and bill-guisarme.
91-99 15 infantry in studded leather armor, armed with long bow and short sword, with war dogs, 25 infantry in leather armor, armed with long bow and quarterstaff, with war dogs, 30 infantry in leather armor, armed with long bow and long sword, with war dogs.
00 DM's option: bandit gang, escaped serfs, runaway apprentices, band of dispossessed freeholders (with women and children), smugglers.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 10 1st-level myrmidons (retired or deserted) in plate mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with long sword, spear, and mace.
11-20 10 1st-level elven fighter/mages in

chain mail, armed with long sword, long bow, and dagger.

- 21-30 15 1st-level rangers in scale mail, with helmet and medium shield, armed with long sword, spear, and long bow.
31-40 25 2nd-level bandits² in leather armor, armed with club and short sword.
41-65 20 1st-level peasant fighters in studded leather armor, armed with long bow.
66-99 40 1st-level fighters in studded leather armor, armed with long sword, long bow, and dagger.
00 DM's option: druids, gypsy-bards, gnome illusionists, or other woodland types.

Pirate

More than any other kit, the pirate's troop types are dictated by his profession. The pirate lord is a captain, and thus must have a ship. However, the ship is not necessarily a warship, nor is it his; the ship is the common property of the pirate band. Note that pirates of the medieval period often did not attack ships—such attacks were limited to boarding parties, and were very dangerous. Shore raids were more common.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level pirate in leather armor, with *ring of protection* +2, armed with *cutlass* +2.
41-75 6th-level pirate in leather armor, with *ring of protection* + 2, armed with *trident* + 1 and *gaff* + 1.¹
76-95 6th-level pirate in leather armor, with *ring of protection* + 3, armed with *trident* + 1 and *dagger* + 1, and 3rd-level buccaneer in leather armor, with *trident of submission*.
96-99 7th-level pirate in leather armor, with *ring of protection* + 3 and *ring of water walking*, armed with *cutlass* +2.
00 DM's option: merman, sea elf, half-sahuagin, priest of sea god.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 100 oarsmen pirates in leather armor, armed with cutlass and dagger, manning a galley of minimum size.
51-75 50 pirates in leather armor, armed with cutlass and belaying pin, manning a coaster of minimum size.
76-90 70 pirates in leather armor, armed with cutlass and dagger, manning a cog of average size.
91-99 70 pirates in leather armor, armed with cutlass and dagger, manning a longship of average size.
00 DM's option: sea elf pirate raft, viking longship, smugglers' ship, rogue warship with crew of mutineers on the run from navy.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 A shore unit, consisting of a fence², two smugglers² with longboats to ferry goods ashore, and two spies² able to inform the pirates of cargoes and potential targets.
11-20 10 1st-level aquatic elf fighters, armed with trident and three throwing knives.
21-30 15 ballista gunners (1st-level pirates) manning either two ballistas or a light catapult.
31-40 20 2nd-level pirates in leather armor, armed with light crossbow, cutlass, and dagger.
41-65 20 expert archers, 1st-level pirates in leather armor, armed with longbow and cutlass.
66-99 30 boarding specialists: 1st-level buccaneers² in leather armor, armed with cutlass and three throwing knives.
00 DM's option. Some suggestions include seawolves, skalds, selkies, and other seagoing troops.

Savage

If these tables look as though they might be better suited to a ranger, you're almost right. A savage warrior is very nature oriented, but less civilized than a ranger. His tribe was probably small, and if he has kept his kit, he is unlikely to want castle guards or heavy cavalry. On the other hand, trained animals, rangers, or even The Ape Man⁵ could be found guarding the village of a great 9th-level chief.

Die

Roll Leader

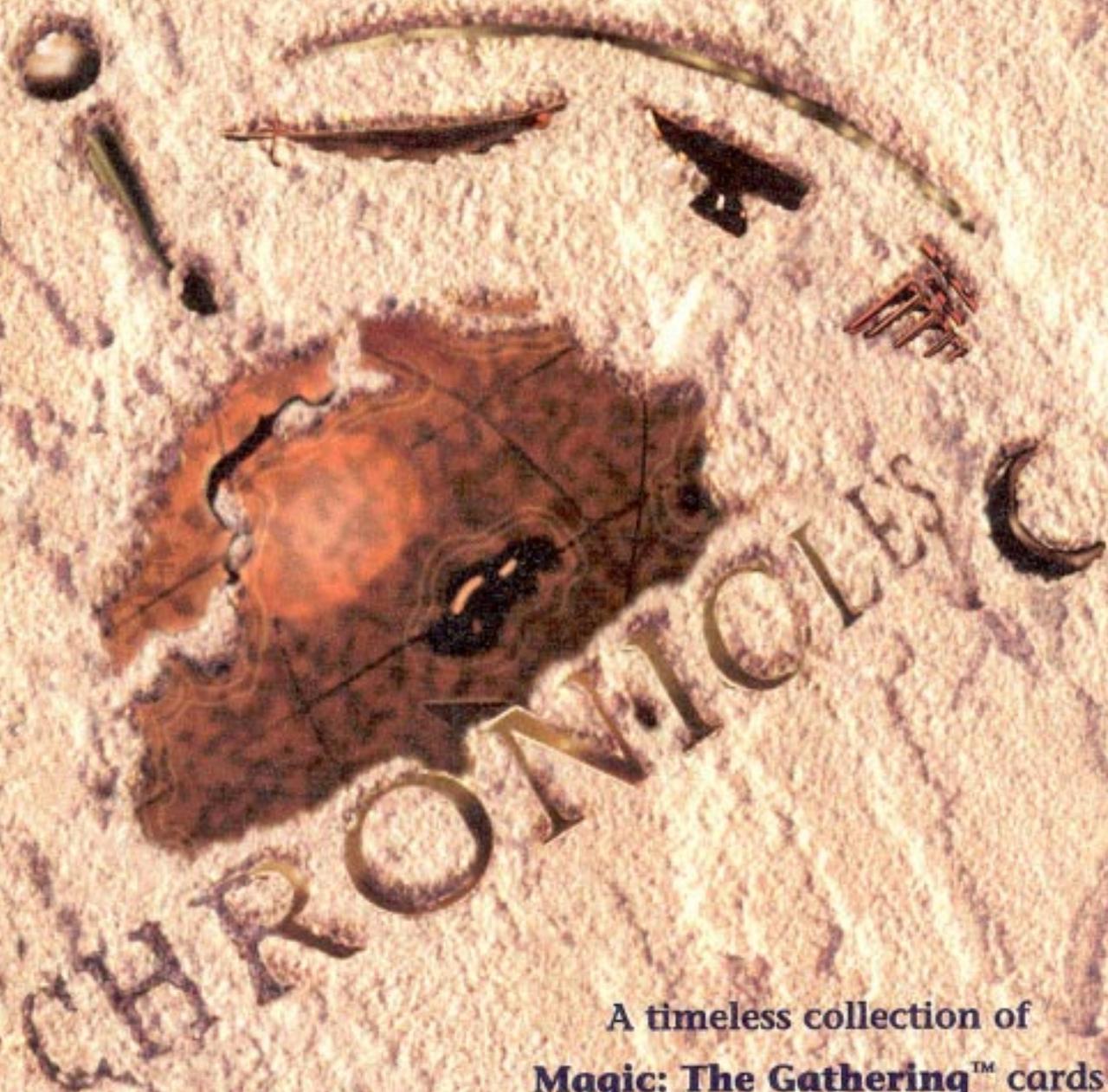
- 01-40 5th-level savage fighter with body shield, armed with *spear* + 1 and club.
41-75 6th-level savage fighter with *body shield* + 1, armed with *spear* + 1 and club.
76-95 6th-level savage fighter with *body shield* + 1 and club, and 3rd-level savage fighter with body shield, armed with *short bow* + 1.
96-99 7th-level savage fighter with *body shield* +2, armed with *spear* +2 and *boots of speed*.
00 DM's option: lizard man, weretiger, barbarian, shaman, dakon, jungle giant.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 20 savage fighters with body shields, armed with blowguns and spears, plus 100 savage fighters with body shields, armed with spear and club.
51-75 20 savage fighters with body shields, armed with hand axe and club, and 60 savage fighters with body shields, armed with spear and hand axe.
76-90 40 savage fighters with body

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shields, armed with sling and hand axe, and 20 savage fighters with body shields, armed with short bow and spear.

- 91-99 10 savage fighters with body shields, armed with blowgun and club; 20 savage fighters with body shields, armed with short bow and club; 30 savage fighters with body shields, armed with three javelins, atl-atl, and hand axe, and three trained 4-HD monsters of animal intelligence.
- 00 DM's option: an "adopted" tribe of lizard men, mongrelmen, pygmies, spirit folk, wemics, or savage centaurs.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 10 1st-level beast riders in hide armor with large shield, armed with javelins and club, mounted on beasts of maximum size and at least 4 Hit Dice.
- 11-20 10 1st-level savage wizards, armed with bolas.
- 21-30 15 1st-level rangers with body shield, armed with spear and sling.
- 31-40 20 1st-level berserkers with body shields, armed with clubs and daggers.
- 41-65 20 1st-level scouts² in leather armor, armed with blowguns and knives.
- 66-99 30 1st-level savage fighters with body shield, armed with spears and bolas.
- 00 DM's option: elephants, savage priests, panthers, and so on.

Swashbuckler

The swashbuckler is very much a one-man band; followers aren't much of a priority for him. Showy and sophisticated, he prefers a small, elite force to a large mass of armored men, and a urbane, sophisticated force to a bunch of medieval barbarians. He would feel as out of sorts commanding Conan as Conan would feel being ordered around by a fop.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level swashbuckler with *bracers of defense* AC 3, armed with a *rapier* + 1.
- 41-75 6th-level swashbuckler with *bracers of defense* AC 3, armed with a *rapier* + 1 and *main gauche* + 1
- 76-95 6th-level swashbuckler with *bracers of defense* AC 2, armed with a *rapier* + 2, and *main gauche* + 1, and a 3rd-level thief swashbuckler with brigantine, armed with a rapier and a *hand crossbow of distance*.
- 96-99 7th-level swashbuckler with *bracers of defense* AC 1, armed with two *rapiers* + 2 and a *rod of splendor*.
- 00 DM's option: diplomat, king's champion, fencing master, professional duelist, or other urbane warrior.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 40 infantry in plate mail, armed with halberds.
- 51-75 30 infantry in studded leather armor, armed with awl pike and rapier
- 76-90 30 infantry in brigantine armor, armed with heavy crossbows.
- 91-99 20 cavalry in brigantine armor, armed with rapier and main gauche, with horses and tack.
- 00 DM's option: musketeers, younger sons of nobles, dashing mercenary company.

Die

Roll Elite Units

- 01-10 10 1st-level spies³, armed with club and dagger
- 11-20 10 1st-level elven fighter/mages, armed with long sword, long bow, and dagger.
- 21-30 15 1st-level thief swashbucklers³, armed with rapier and dagger.
- 31-40 20 2nd-level fighters in brigantine armor, armed with halberds and daggers.
- 41-65 20 1st-level musketeers, armed with arquebus⁴ and rapier.
- 66-99 30 1st-level swashbucklers in brigantine armor, armed with rapier.
- 00 DM's option (but make it stylish!)

Wilderness Warrior or Samurai

These two types are combined because they share the same special case—they gain followers from another reference work unless a DM-designed group is more appropriate.

Unless the samurai is part of an Oriental campaign, he will acquire regular troop types upon reaching 9th level. DMs wanting to use Oriental troops should check the *Oriental Adventures* book, if available. Similarly, a wilderness warrior receives the standard troop types from the *Player's Handbook*, unless the DM decides that the culture this kit comes from does not have regular cavalry or infantry.

For the inventive DM, therefore, these last tables consist of formulae, from which the DM may calculate the troops and leaders appropriate to these or any new kits. A little juggling is allowed, trading armor class and numbers for other benefits, but any changes should reflect the role of the kit in adventuring.

Die

Roll Leader

- 01-40 5th-level fighter at AC 3, with helmet and shield, armed with a +2 magical melee weapon.
- 41-75 6th-level fighter at AC 3, with helmet and *shield* + 1, armed with a *polearm* + 1 and *dagger* + 1
- 76-95 6th-level fighter at AC 2, with helmet and shield, armed with *polearm* + 1 and *dagger* + 1 as well as a 3rd-level fighter at AC 4, with helmet and shield, armed

with a magical missile weapon.

- 96-99 7th-level fighter at AC 2, with helmet and shield + 1, armed with a melee weapon +2 and miscellaneous magic pertaining to ground travel.
- 00 DM's option. If the PC really deserves a truly exceptional follower, a 5th-level fighter with a powerful magical item like a *horn of Valhalla* could be considered, or a 5th-level NPC with an exotic kit, say, a *thespian*, could be in order, but under most circumstances the four basic choices should do. Remember, this leader's function is military second-in-command—don't choose a character who can't fight.

Die

Roll Troops/Followers

- 01-50 20 cavalry, all AC 7 with helmet and shield, armed with two melee weapons and a missile weapon, and 100 infantry at AC 6, armed with polearm and club.
- 51-75 20 infantry at AC 4, armed with two melee weapons, and 60 infantry AC 8, armed with polearm and melee weapon.
- 76-90 40 infantry at AC 5, armed with missile weapon and melee weapon, and 20 infantry at AC 5, armed with missile weapon and polearm.
- 91-99 10 cavalry at AC 4, with helmet and shield, armed with lance and two melee weapons, and 30 cavalry at AC 7, with helmet and shield, armed with lance and melee weapon.
- 00 DM's option. Again, it depends on the kit. Samurai would lead bushi, nomads are restricted to mounted troops only, while Romans would have almost 100% infantry.

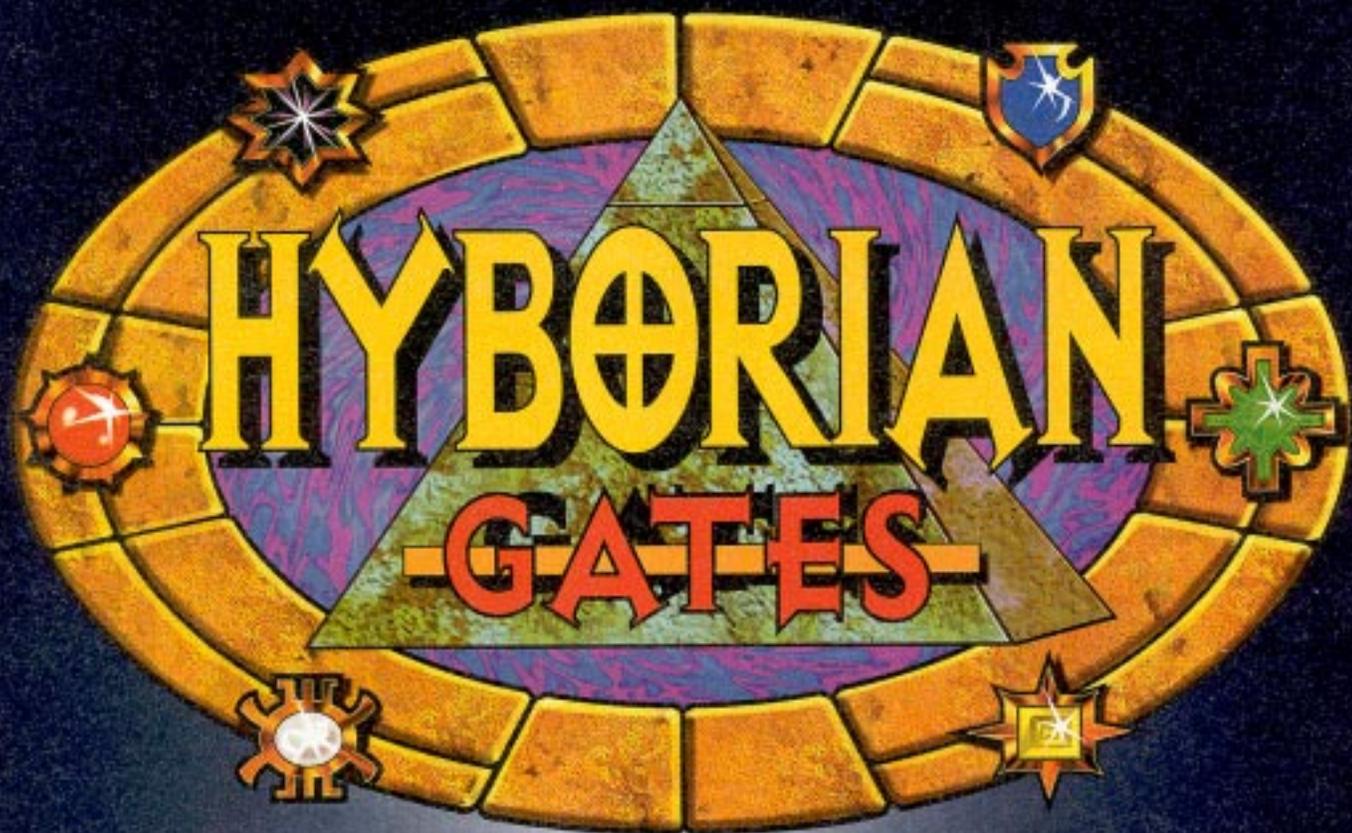
The AC and weapon statistics can vary, as long as the troops are approximately equal in power.

A fighter's reputation determines how many followers and what kind of followers he gains. A pirate who has stalked the Western Seas attracts the attention of other pirates of the Western Seas. A beast-rider who spends years defending the elven forests from human invasion will impress not only his own people, but also the elves and a few renegades among the human invaders. Keep these things in mind as you assign followers to the fighter lord. Give him helpers appropriate to the adventures he will experience, and they will enrich his game—and yours.

Ω

Notes:

- 1) As per the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.
- 2) As per the *Complete Thief's Handbook*.
- 3) As per the *Complete Bard's Handbook*.
- 4) If the DM does not permit this weapon, replace with heavy crossbows.
- 5) **The Ape Man:** 17th-level savage warrior; MV 12; hp 150; #AT 2/1; Dmg by weapon or 1d2 +6; S 18/00, D 18, C 18, I 12, W 9, Ch 17; SA animal friendship; AL CG; THACO 4; XP 40,000 (Hey, he's a legend!).



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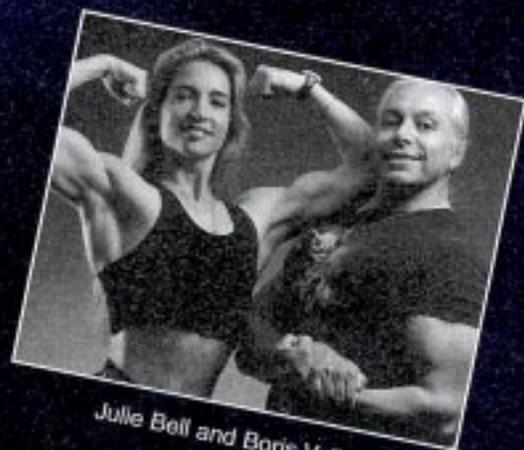
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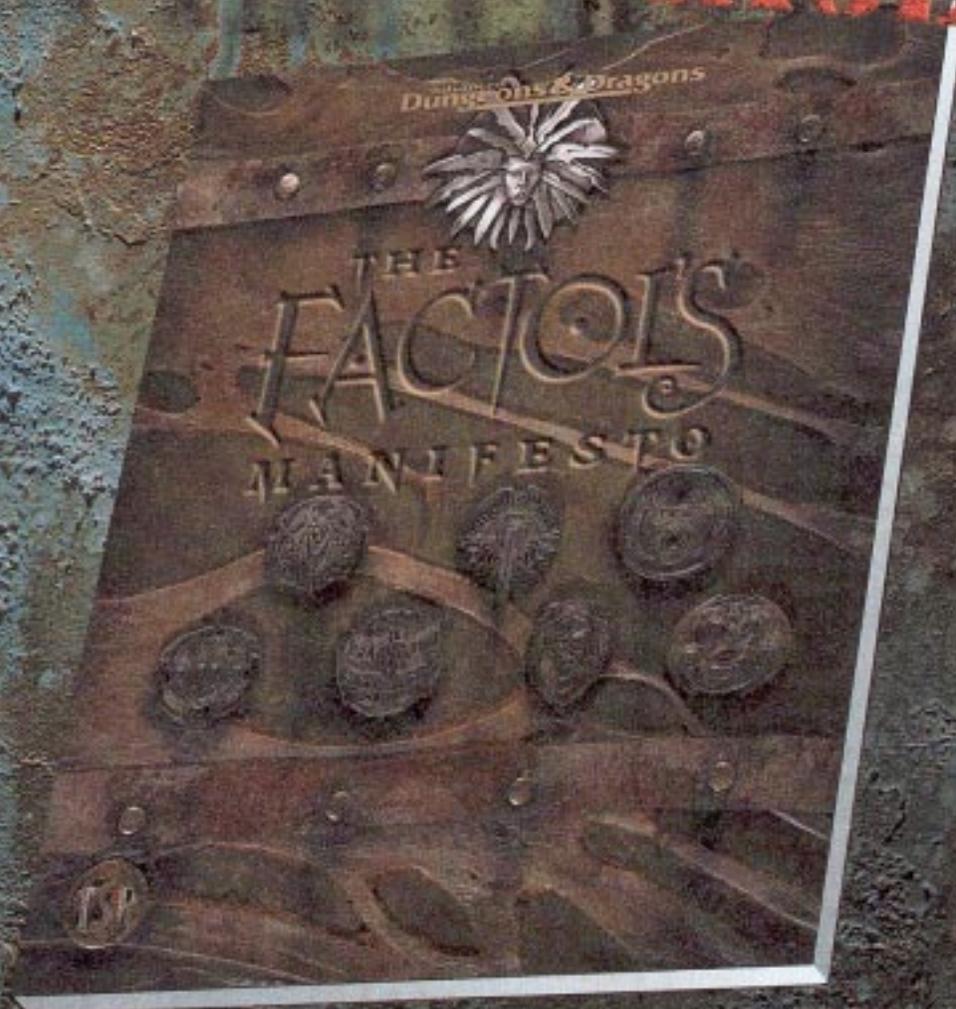
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T H E E C O L O G Y O F

Slimy, Yet Deadly

By Johnathan Richards

Artwork by Terry Dysktra

The creature spasmed and quivered in the ebony darkness of the cavern interior. Readjusting to its new form, it pulled itself together into a central mass. Had it any eyes, it would perhaps be able to see an identical creature a mere two feet away, undergoing a similar process. Each was a glistening mass of black protoplasm, roughly three feet in diameter.

Blind as it was, it could nonetheless sense the heat of its nearby companion, but disregarded it as not-food, and began oozing and slithering its way across the cavern, away from its twin. Gradually, the other creature faded out of range of its heat sense. It crawled onward, ever onward, in search of food.

Ahead, the steady dripping of water alerted passersby of the presence of an underground pool. The creature headed toward it, but not because of the telltale dripping sound—in fact, the creature was stone deaf, and the concept of sound was foreign to it. No, instead, its eerie ability to sense heat and analyze patterns identified the pool as that type of not-food that often has food inside of it. Without hesitation, the creature flowed into the water, seeking prey.

The pool was not deep, only two feet or so, but that was deep enough to hold a dozen tiny cave fish, white and blind and darting back and forth in the cold, clear water. The creature instinctively altered its shape, spreading itself out in two directions, forming a wall that closed around the fish like a net. As they came in contact with the jet-black creature, the fish immediately began to dissolve, as tiny mouths all over the creature's body ate them away. When all the fish were devoured, the creature moved on, leaving the shallow, lifeless pool and continuing on its random journey.

Several minutes later, the creature's travels brought it into a cavernous chamber, hundreds of feet in diameter, with stalactites reaching down from the ceiling and merging into the stalagmites growing up from the floor. The chamber was home to hundreds of bats, hanging upside-down from perches on the ceiling. To the flowing creature's heat senses, it seemed as if it had just entered the open fields of the



surface world at night, with countless points of fire burning overhead. However, the stars were forever out of reach; the bats were not.

Without slowing for an instant, the creature flowed up a huge pillar formed by the meeting of stalactite and stalagmite. It spiraled its way up the pillar, and, upon reaching the top, flowed just as effortlessly along the ceiling, winding its way around jagged protuberances, straight toward the nearest sleeping bat. The bats had no warning, for the creature made no noise as it flowed up and over them, engulfing the small mammals with its syrupy body.

How long the creature spent on the ceiling gobbling up bats it neither knew nor cared, for it was simply going about its normal routine: finding food, eating food, finding more food. This was the sum of its existence, its reason for being. Eventually, the bats flew off, though whether

they were somehow alerted to its presence or their sleep was over and it was time to hunt, it mattered not to the creature. The food was simply gone; more food would have to be found.

It didn't take long. Dimly, at the edge of its perception, the creature sensed a tiny movement in the heat-patterns of the cavern below. A spider, barely an inch across, was making its erratic way across the cave floor. Size didn't matter to the ebony creature above; food was food, and this was the nearest. It dropped to the floor below and flowed over the spider, dissolving it instantly.

Its latest meal finished, the creature flowed in a random direction, looking for more.



"Do you really think we should go much further?" Shandrilla asked. She swung her lantern around, casting eerie shadows along the cavern walls, and shivered involuntarily. "I'd hate to get lost in here."

"Just a little further", insisted Javorik, her gnome companion. "I want to see what's ahead." He hummed softly to himself, happily and not quite in key. The dangers of the Underdark held no terror for him; after all, was he not Javorik the Bold, Illusionist Extraordinaire, Wielder of the Wand of Lightning, Slayer of Lizards, Tamer of Rats? So far, this underground exploration stuff was a cakewalk.

"Okay," Shandrilla replied, with a frown. "But not too much further, huh?" She didn't like it this far underground. She kept seeing movement at the edge of her vision, and even though her mind knew it was just a trick of the light, her gut kept telling her otherwise. She kept a firm grip on the lantern with her left hand, and an even firmer grip on the short sword in her right.

"Ooh, ooh, hey!" squealed Javorik in delight, as he ran ahead. "Look at this!" Shandrilla hurried to catch up, and found the gnome kneeling next to a clump of orange fungus, shoveling the mushrooms into a sack with his little dagger. "I was right, I was right, see? I was right! Squimmerall! I knew we could find some down here!"

"You were right, all right. Can we go now?"

"Just a little further. There might be more!" And he toddled off further into the depths of the Underdark. Shandrilla hurried to keep up.

The creature oozed over a rock formation, and found the corpse of a kobold, an arrow stuck in its back. The little humanoid was long dead; the coal-black creature sensed no heat from the body. However, heat or no heat, its senses could tell that its find was composed of once-living tissue, and it oozed toward the kobold without delay

The kobold wore a chain mail vest over ragged leather garments. Neither had been protection enough from the arrow that extinguished its life; neither provided much protection now from the creature devouring its body. The night-black ooze flowed over the kobold, eating its way through armor, clothing, flesh and bone alike.

"C'mon, Javorik, enough's enough already. Let's go back."

"What, frightened? A big, strong human like you? Nonsense! What's to be afraid of, down here? Some bats? A patch of squimmerall? That's all we've seen so far. Nothing to be afraid of."

"Yeah, well, I've heard stories . . ."

"Stories? Stories of what?"

"You know. Drow. Snirf goblins."

"Snirf goblins?" He scratched his head. "Svirfnebli, you mean? Pah. Don't exist. Fairy stories. Evil gnomes, indeed. Come on, let's go down this way."

Shandrilla let out a sigh of exasperation and followed her diminutive companion.

The creature made short work of the kobold, and moved on. It was noticeably larger than it had been when it first split off from its twin, however long ago that was. Since that time, it had consumed its own weight in fish, bats, spider, and decaying kobold. Other than taking the time to feed, it had been on the move constantly. Now was no exception; it had finished its meal, and it was time to find another one.

Javorik let out another squeak of delight as they rounded a corner and found another patch of the orange fungus. "See, didn't I say? Didn't I?" he asked, as he squatted and untied the sack attached to his belt. "This stuff is great. You can use it in all types of potions. Good substitute component for a few spells, too, I think. And it tastes good in tea, eh? Ever have squimmerall tea, Shanny?"

"Huh? No." Shandrilla was looking in all directions at once again, her eyes interpreting the flickering shadows as the movements of malevolent creatures, just out of sight. "Can we go now, Javorik? Please?"

"Hey, hold that light steady, will you? I'm almost done here." He continued picking the odd-looking fungus growths and stuffing them into his sack, which was beginning to tug comically on his belt.

Shandrilla was suddenly aware of the devastatingly huge volume of rock all around her, and shivered again. She didn't like being so far underground—it was like being buried already. Still, Javorik didn't seem to mind, but then he was a gnome, wasn't he? Sure, he was raised in a gnomish village on the surface, and he spent most of his time in dusty libraries, but all the same. Spelunking was normal for gnomes, even if this was his first time in the Underdark, as it was hers. She'd just be glad to see the light of the sun again, and soon.

"Almost done," said the little gnome, fidgeting with the tie-string on the sack. It couldn't possibly hang from his belt now, not if he wanted to keep his pants up. Over the shoulder was probably the way to go. Better hurry, too, before that silly human girl worried herself to death over flickering shadows. "There," he said at last. "All set. Let's go."

Which he followed almost immediately with a "Hello, what's this?"

As the creature followed the underground passage, it came to a dead end, where the ceiling collapsed some time ago. The way was impassible to most, but not to the amorphous, raven-black creature that now flowed up the pile of rocks, then oozed through the narrowest of cracks and crevices, winding above some stones and under others, tracing a path that the most nimble of mice would have a hard time following. After 30 feet of this, the creature found itself in an open passage-way again and continued on its journey

The passageway twisted back and forth, and the creature followed its path, deviating only to crawl up to the ceiling to engulf a lizard it sensed scampering up the wall. It continued its winding journey on the ceiling for a while, before dropping onto an unsuspecting beetle it noticed with its heat sense. Then it turned another corner, and immediately sensed two more sources of food. Homing in on them, it flowed silently across the floor toward the two.

"What is it?" asked the human, nervously.

"I've no idea," replied Javorik. "Looks kind of like oil, doesn't it?"

"It's heading our way. Let's get out of here."

"Wait a minute, I think it's alive. Go poke it with your sword, see what it does."

"Go poke it yourself, gnome."

"Pah, I'll do better than that. Am I not Javorik the Illusionist, Wielder of the Wand of Lightning? Stand back, foul glop, or face the wrath of Mighty Javorik." The gnome set down his sack and fumbled at his belt, pulling out a slender wand, and aimed it at the approaching blob of darkness.

"Javorik . . ."

"Take that!" A sizzling flash of lightning bolted across the room, neatly slicing the creature in half. The gnome saw the two small blobs where once there had been but one, and smiled to himself. Cut the thing in two, he thought. Have to add Slayer of Oozing Menaces to my title.

Then the two blobs started to move, and his smile collapsed to a frown.

Each of the two creatures seemed to have picked a different target. While one oozed over to the gnome, the other was making its way toward Shandrilla. "Your ring!" yelled Javorik, and started a spell. This creature lives in total darkness, he thought. Let's see what a continual light spell does to it.

"Ring, right," said the human, mentally invoking the power of the ring her gnome friend had given her for added protection. As the illusionist finished his spell and the cavern lit up with the power of the light he had summoned, Shandrilla faded from view.

Neither ploy worked. While one creature seemed unaffected by the fact that it was now casting the light of a sunny day into the chamber, the other followed Shandrilla's invisible figure wherever she went.

So much for sneaking up behind it, thought the thief. Although, really, who's to say I'd even know when I was behind it? Kind of hard to tell when your opponent's a blob of goo. She raised her sword arm, preparing for a downward swing into the thing with her full weight behind it. Just as her sword started its downward arc, Shandrilla's invisible form popped back into view and her companion cried out.

"No! Don't hit it!"

Shandrilla twisted, yanking her sword to the side, missing the creature by a hair's breadth. The awkward movement sent

her spinning, and she fell forward. Instinctively, she threw her right foot in front of her to keep her balance—it landed on, and sank into, the creature's pliant body. Immediately, a sensation of heat pervaded her foot.

"A pudding! We're fighting a pudding!" yelled the gnome from across the chamber. "Federico told me about these things once; if you hit them, they split in two."

"Great, so we can't hit them," said Shandrilla, tugging her foot out of the evil-looking blob of darkness. The thing had been flowing up her leg, and her leather boot was already half-dissolved from the brief contact it had with the creature. "What can we do? How did Federico kill his?"

"Uh, he didn't, not that I recall," muttered the gnome. "Think he ran away from it after he split it into about six pieces." Javorik was getting winded, running back and forth away from the glowing blob, while simultaneously trying to remember his cousin's description of his battle with the pudding years ago, racking his brain for a good spell to use against these ones, and fumbling through his pockets for a weapon that might do some good.

"Sounds good to me," said the thief. "Let's go!"

Unfortunately, the two creatures blocked the way back to the surface, though whether they did so by accident or design it was hard to tell. One oozed its way to the gnome's sack of orange fungus and began absorbing it.

"Stand back, let me try something," the little gnome said, reaching into a pocket for the right material components and starting the words to a spell. At the spell's completion, a gaping hole appeared in front of the two adventurers, a jagged gash in the cavern floor that wasn't there a second ago, stretching across the chamber from one wall to the other. From the looks of it, it was at least 50 feet deep. "That should hold them a bit," he said.

It didn't. Without a moment's hesitation, both creatures oozed over the edge of the crevasse and continued across, seemingly floating over the pit until they reached the other side.

"Hmph," snorted Javorik. "So much for illusions."

As the two ink-black creatures flowed over the illusory pit, Javorik and Shandrilla had nowhere to go but deeper into the Underdark, the way the original creature had come. The cavern narrowed to a width of about six or seven feet, too narrow to risk a dash past the amorphous beings. So deeper they went, Shandrilla leading the way, her human legs taking her further with each hurried stride than Javorik's, who struggled to keep up and kept glancing nervously over his shoulder at their unrelenting pursuers. The passageway twisted back and forth, and Shandrilla kept praying for a forking path where they might lose the dark blobs so intent on making the two

adventurers their next meal.

Then they turned a corner and found the way blocked by a pile of rocks, caused by a cave-in some time ago. Javorik summed up their situation in two short syllables.

"Uh-oh."

Onward the two creatures flowed, onward toward the fleeing food. Each entity was aware of the other, but discounted it as irrelevant nonfood. All that mattered was that food was nearby, food that must be pursued and devoured. While the taller of the two foods was faster than the creatures, it kept slowing down and waiting for the smaller food to catch up. Better yet, the smaller food was starting to slow down. Soon, very soon, the creatures would overcome the small food and devour it.

The two adventurers scrambled up the pile of rocks, hoping in vain to find some way over the top. They frantically explored each edge of the rock barrier, to no avail. Shandrilla felt panic closing in; never before had she been more aware of the enormous quantity of solid stone all around her. Bad enough to be buried alive under tons of rock, but to be devoured by some slimy horror from the bowels of the earth . . .

"Close your lantern," suggested Javorik. "Maybe they can track our light."

"I doubt that."

"So do I, but do you have any better ideas? Maybe they'll go away if they can't see us."

Reluctantly, Shandrilla closed the lid on her lantern, plunging the passageway into total darkness. The two waited in silence, and before long, Shandrilla's eyes picked up the faintest glimmerings of light from around the bend. It was the creature lit by Javorik's light spell, she knew. The light grew brighter, and then from around the bend flowed the glowing creature. Without hesitation, it headed straight for the pile of rocks and began oozing its way up, toward the two adventurers.

"No, no, no!" screamed the thief, and started flinging rocks at the approaching monster. She kicked with her feet, simultaneously trying to get as far away from it as possible and knock loose stones down on the vile thing. Several rocks hit the creature, but none struck with enough force to split it in two. However, perhaps sensing an easier approach, the pudding began to ooze between the rocks in the pile, gradually slipping further in until it was no longer visible. As it submerged into the pile, the spell's radiance vanished with it.

"The other one! Where's the other one?" cried Javorik. "Quick, the lantern!"

Shandrilla fumbled with the lantern's lid and finally got it open. She swung its beam across the pile of rocks, down on the floor below, back and forth. Nothing.

Then a burst of light erupted beneath them, and they saw a dark form oozing up through the very rocks on which they were perched. Both adventurers screamed

and rolled to the side, the gnome to the left, the human to the right. It was an instinctive response, and one that saved their lives, for at the same moment the other creature dropped from the ceiling onto the spot they had occupied a mere second before.

Shandrilla felt her footing give way, and arms flailing, fell backward off the pile of stones. She lost both sword and lantern on the way down and landed in a heap on the floor at the foot of the pile. She struck her head hard, and the world spun dizzily around her.

Then she felt hands gripping her arm, tugging her up. It was Javorik, face flushed and grimy in the flickering light. He was saying something, but it wasn't registering.

"Shanny? Come on, get up, we gotta go. Shanny, come on, we gotta get going."

Flickering light? Shandrilla sat up, got to her knees, thought about standing up, decided to wait. Anyway, at this height, she could look her companion in the eyes, and make intelligent conversation.

"Huh?"

"You did it, Shanny! The lantern hit that bugger square on! Thing went up like kindling. I don't know about the other one, though, so, if you're ready to go . . ."

Shandrilla staggered to her feet and looked up at the pile of rocks. A small fire was burning at the top. Almost as if on cue, shafts of light began streaming out of the rocks near the bottom of the pile. The glowing creature was oozing out between the cracks.

"Let's get out of here," said the thief.

"Let's," agreed the illusionist. Together, they staggered down the corridor. As they rounded the bend, Shandrilla realized that their only source of light was gone, burning on the rocks. Javorik sensed her unease. "I can guide us, Shanny. Infravision. No problem. And I promise, no stopping for squimmerall."

For the first time in what seemed like a long while, the beginnings of a smile appeared on the young thief's lips. "Deal."

The creature flowed out of the rock pile, still glowing from the effects of the gnome's spell. At the very edge of its awareness, it felt the two foods moving away. Reorganizing its mass, it sped along the twisting corridor, in pursuit.

"Almost halfway there. I think next time, we'll bring torches."

"Next time? There is no next time, gnome."

"No next time? That's no way to talk, human. Especially not now that you're Shandrilla, Slayer of Pudding."

"Sometimes I think you're Javorik, Brain of Pudding."

"You wound me."

"Seriously, gnome. Do you think that other one'll follow us to the surface?"

"Hard to say. I doubt it. I never heard of one above ground. I'll have to ask Federico."

"So once we make it back topside, we should be home free."

"Should be. We'll let this bugger skulk around down here to his little heart's content. And good luck trying to sneak up on anybody when he's glowing like a bright summer day."

"Who knows, Javorik? You might have created a new species. 'Javorik's Glowing Pudding.'"

"Sounds more like a recipe."

"Maybe you're right."

Silently, the glowing creature stalked the two adventurers. It sensed the presence of food, and so it would follow the food until it overcame it and fed. Nothing would stop it from repeating its endless cycle.

And then it became aware of a different food on the ceiling above it. A lizard was trying to scamper out of range of the light. The glowing creature changed direction, heading for the nearest wall and flowing up onto the ceiling. The lizard scurried off, but it was slower than the swiftly-flowing abomination. Before long, the little reptile had been dissolved.

Its meal finished, the glowing creature cast its senses forth in all directions. There was no food within range. Moving off in a random direction, it set out to find some.

Ω

Notes:

1. The black pudding can live underwater, as it can extract oxygen from water as easily as it can from air. However, water dampens its senses and its movement rate, halving them both. Thus, it can sense heat variations up to 45' away, and move at a rate of 3 while underwater. The pudding cannot swim or float but must flow along the bottom of the body of water.

Obviously, while underwater, the pudding is immune to fire, and one might think that it would adopt this environment for that very reason. However, water also dilutes its acid attack, reducing its damage per attack to 1d6 instead of 3d6. Once out of water, it takes two rounds to restore each die of damage: thus, after two rounds, it does 2d6 hp damage with each attack, and only after four rounds is it back to full damage.

2. The black pudding moves silently at all times, in a steady flowing motion, over any solid surface. The black pudding's movement can perhaps best be likened to that of a rolling ball of clay, if the clay were softened to an almost-liquid state, so that it hugged the floor as it rolled. The pudding can alter its shape and can also move snakelike in a long, thin mass; its soft, pliable body is equally silent when it moves in this manner. In fact, a black pudding can flow over a stone floor strewn with autumn leaves without making a single leaf crunch (it dissolves the leaves as it engulfs them).

3. A blow from a weapon divides a black pudding into two smaller puddings, each with half of the original pudding's hit points, but each able to attack as the original. This is because the blow strikes the pudding's soft body and sends it flowing away from the weapon in all directions, which invariably splits the pudding into two or more sections. Once this separation occurs, each piece of the pudding is a separate being, unable to merge into one being.

However, the stress from a weapon strike is largely due to its being unanticipated. When the blow lands, it takes the pudding by surprise; it cannot prepare for or prevent its separation into two or more entities. By contrast, the black pudding can drop from above and land on the floor without splitting. There are two reasons for this. First of all, it knows exactly what's coming, and what to expect, as it's doing it itself. Second, it's being "struck" by the floor, along its entire length, and this flattens the creature out but does not send it flying in two different directions.

4. A black pudding's senses extend a full 90' in all directions from its body. Within this area, it can distinguish the structural composition of its surroundings. While this sense is not fine-tuned enough to distinguish between different types of creatures, the pudding is aware of any animal or

vegetable tissue in its range of awareness.

Furthermore, it can tell whether the organic material is living or dead (not that this makes any difference whatsoever to the pudding's eating habits). Once a black pudding is aware of a living creature, it will immediately approach this food and attempt to eat it, stopping at nothing to do so (puddings never check morale, and they always fight to the death).

5. Black puddings destroy chain mail in one round, and plate mail in two. This is because the links of chain mail allow the creature to flow through the armor and devour it from all sides simultaneously, whereas plate mail presents a continuous solid surface, and the pudding must dissolve it from one side only. Dissolving weapons works the same way: a sword poked into a pudding can be dissolved from all sides, so it takes the pudding one round, whereas a sword left flat on the ground takes a pudding two rounds to dissolve. Each magical plus of the weapon or armor adds one round to the time required to dissolve it.

6. Puddings range in size from 3' to 8' in diameter. As they eat, they gradually get bigger. Of course, the rate of growth depends on the availability of food, but, regardless of how quickly it reaches reproductive size, the pudding will reproduce by fission at some time after reaching 6' in diameter, and before reaching 9'. Puddings splitting voluntarily (as opposed to as a result of being struck by a weapon or lightning) always form two equally-sized smaller puddings, each with half of the hit points of the parent pudding.

7. Black puddings do not need to sleep, a fact which gives them a distinct advantage over their prey, which usually does.

8. Black puddings are immune to damage from all forms of electricity, including lightning. However, although a lightning bolt causes no damage to the black pudding's body, it does cause an involuntary convulsive reaction that splits the pudding in two, regardless of the pudding's size. Lesser forms of electrical attack, such as a shocking grasp spell, cause a weaker convulsive spasm in the pudding, but this is not strong enough to split it.

9. Because black puddings have no sense of sight, they cannot be affected by sight-based spells. They cannot be blinded by *light* or *continual light* spells, and *invisibility* cannot mask a creature's presence from the pudding's heat sense; its heat sense is not a form of vision.

10. Since puddings neither see nor hear, they are completely immune to all illusions with visual or auditory effects. In addition, their blindness makes them immune to such sight-based attacks as a medusa's gaze, and their deafness makes them immune to such sound-based attacks as the roar of an androsphinx.

Puddings are also immune to all forms of acid. Their acid dissolves webs (both natural and magical) without slowing their movement rate. Finally, their odd metabolism allows them to ignore the effects of poison and cold. The latter ability is especially true of the white pudding, which thrives in arctic lands.

11. Since black puddings are immune to all forms of acid, including their own, one pudding cannot eat another. Furthermore, they are asexual, and do not need to interact with another in order to reproduce. Therefore, puddings generally ignore the existence of others of their kind. If no food is within range, two puddings in the same location will generally go separate ways instinctively; if there is food in the vicinity, each immediately heads toward it.

12. Black puddings tend to remain underground and out of sunlight for a good reason: their dark coloration absorbs heat a bit too well, and dries them out after about one day's exposure. This is true only of the black pudding; the white, dun, and brown varieties of pudding have all adapted to life on the surface. Note that black puddings take no damage from being briefly exposed to sunlight, nor do spells such as *sunray* harm them.

13. Puddings are nonintelligent, and so always head for the nearest food (animal or vegetable) available. Adventurers not willing (or able) to battle a pudding can usually escape a pudding by throwing some food its way and hightailing it in the opposite direction.

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A Colourful Weekend of Euro-gaming

by Roger E. Moore

My supervisors informed me that I was going to the 1995 European GEN CON® game fair exactly one month before the convention was held, while I was in the middle of a scheduling crisis in my product group to boot, so naturally I assumed it was one of those management-type jokes of which TSR's management is so fond. Ha, ha! In no time at all, I found myself aboard a British Air jumbo jet, my hastily packed bags flung willy-nilly into the cargo hold and my hands stained with complimentary peanut residue, heading for London and, shortly thereafter, the Pontins Holiday Centre at Camber Sands, England, where the convention would be held over the April 27–30 weekend.

I knew nothing at all about Camber Sands except that it was near the English Channel, the weather was usually awful there, and fellow TSR co-workers who had been there described the convention grounds as similar to a prison camp, which indeed they had been during World War II. Thus informed, I felt I was fully prepared to partake in the wild festivities. After all, I had been in the U.S. Army for five years and had survived that.

I was accompanied on the trip by the internationally famous artist Jeff Easley, who forgot to sleep on the flight over and got a terrible case of jet lag. The internationally famous editor, designer, and creative director Steve Winter had gone on ahead with his internationally famous author-wife, Mary, to take a more leisurely look at southern England, bathing in the local ambiance, shopping for quaint knick-knacks, rooting for truffles, etc. Jeff and I landed at Heathrow on the 26th and took an extensive tour of London's most exciting and cosmopolitan morning traffic jams then were given the rest of the day off to take in the 97,420,348,498 marvelous sights and sounds of London before we were rocketed out to Camber Sands by a pleasant gentleman who had obviously learned to drive by carefully watching the chase scene in "The French Connection."

The Pontins Holiday Centre at Camber Sands proved to be quite nice, aside from having little teeny apartment rooms built for midget gnomes and aside from the

chilly rainy windy cloudy weather, which could not be blamed on Pontins. (It was just like being in Wisconsin again.) Jeff Easley and I found Steve in no time, Mary having for some reason decided to continue shopping and touring the rest of England, and we were then discovered by the TSR Limited staff, who wore official TSR shirts of a brilliant yellow color (or "colour," as they pronounce it) that could be easily detected by all aircraft pilots within 100 miles.

The TSR Ltd. staff turned out to be the most amazingly friendly and helpful people, just perfectly wonderful and brilliant folks. In fact, *all* of the gamers at the European GEN CON game fair were incredibly polite and helpful. Most gamers there seemed to be older teenagers and adults who dressed in studded black leather jackets, old Army boots, and nose or ear rings (or both), but they always said "Ex-

cuse me!" if they bumped into you and would hold doors open for you and everything, just as if they really liked you.

These gamers also took their gaming very seriously. They laughed and joked and had fun, but they were quite mature and sophisticated about gaming matters. They tended to ask probing, intelligent questions and bore a healthy skepticism toward anything that any game company told them. The gamers came from all over Europe (including the eastern side) with their bags and suitcases stuffed with collectable card games and role-playing rulebooks, and they played and played and played and played and played. They also drank gallons of beer and smoked cigarettes until my sinuses shut down, but that was fine since it was *their* country, after all, and they did have the best Scottish jokes, none of which I can repeat here.

Regarding the four-day convention itself, it was *GREAT*. The European game fair was very relaxed and casual, smaller than the American game fair has been lately but much freer in tone. (I'm sure the beer helped.) Jeff was tucked away in an upstairs room where his legion of fans could pay £10 each to have him draw wholesome pictures of undead skeletal thingers crawling out of graves in their new copies of the *Player's Handbook* until Jeff's fingers fell off, just like those of the undead skeletal thingers. Steve and I were *far* luckier, as the TSR Ltd. staff allowed us outdoors at times to walk over to the (the following part is not a joke) Pontins nursery to give seminars.

The nursery was next to the laundromat, so each seminar was conducted in a room with cheerful pictures of fuzzy bears and dancing alphabet letters on the walls with a refreshing aroma of detergent filling the cold windy air. The chairs were luckily adult-size, and the seminars went off without a hitch on those days when we remembered to sign out the room keys in time. Steve and I took part in group discussions on TSR's soon-to-be-released BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign, the possibility of seeing the 3rd edition of the AD&D® game before the year 2005 (no chance, forget it, no way, we ain't gonna do it, next topic *please*), the new



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RED STEEL™ campaign coming out in 1996, high-level AD&D games, and how to create a fantasy or science-fiction campaign. Other gaming companies ran huge *Magic: the Gathering** card-game and *VAMPIRE** role-playing tournaments, miniatures battles, giant *SPELLFIRE™* card-card and AD&D role-playing tournaments, live-action role-playing events (called "freeforms"), vast *STAR TREK** card-game and *STAR WARS** role-playing tournaments, and a murder-mystery toga party.

The high point of the entire convention, of course, was the Charity Games Auction on Friday night. Steve Winter and Colin Cornwall (of TSR Ltd.) were the auctioneers, and Michelle Dodkin and I were their faithful helpers. A total of £3,700 (over \$6,300!) was raised for the Cerebral Palsy Charity in the most amazing ways, such as passing a bucket around through the entire convention building to collect money to bid on having the Wesley Crusher card from the *STAR TREK* card game burned alive on stage. (We collected £210 for this alone, and Wesley, despite a valiant attempt on the part of a crazed gamer to rescue him, was put to the lighter to the wildly appreciative screams and roaring applause of the audience.)

I, too, had a part in raising money for the charity, but the audience was sworn to secrecy about this and I don't dare say more for fear of arrest. At least I didn't do what Jim Ward did a year or two before at the same auction, though of course I'm sure he really didn't do what everyone said he did despite the numerous eye-witnesses and photographs taken of the event. You will have to contact the TSR Ltd. staff to figure out what I'm talking about, but they are sworn to secrecy, too, and so can't tell you, either.

I flew back to the States Monday morning, exhausted but full of happy British memories and some of the most fattening fried food I've ever eaten in my life. Thank God no one gave me any M&Ms, or I would have had to travel home by military cargo plane. Jeff, Steve, and Mary went on to explore southern England for a few more days, but I had to get home to find out if anything had gotten done on all my crisis projects while I was away. Nothing had. Silly me.

If you, Dear Reader, get the chance to pass by the 1996 European GEN CON game fair (wherever it is held), you could nothing more fun than to stop in and play with the rest of the international crowd. And give the wonderful TSR Ltd. staff a warm smile and big hug for me. You'll have no trouble picking them out by their eye-blinding T-shirt "colours."

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Palladium Books® Booths 316, 318, and 338



Gen Con® Highlights

Meet the Palladium Staff

Many of the creative people responsible for the books you enjoy will be available to sign autographs, chat and talk about upcoming projects.

- **Kevin Siembieda** — Publisher, designer, writer and artist. Creator of *Rifts*, *Heroes Unlimited* and many other titles.
- **Maryann Siembieda** — Vice President, submission's editor, and writer of the *Compendium of Contemporary Weapons*™.
- **C.J. Carella** — Writer of *Nightspawn*™, *Phase World*™, and many *Rifts*® titles.
- **Kevin Long** — Artist of *Rifts*®, *Triax*™, *Robotech*®, and countless others, plus co-author of *Villains Unlimited*™.
- **Vince Martin** — Artist of *Mystic China*™, *Rifts*®, *Rifts Japan*, and many other titles.
- **Steve Sheiring** — Contributing writer, marketing executive, and public relations. Plus other staff members, guests and surprises.
- **Booths 316, 318, and 338.**

Free Rifts T-Shirts

Free with any purchase of \$30.00 or more any one of our black *Rifts*® T-Shirts, plus these and other T-Shirts, baseball caps, prints, posters, miniatures and artwork will be for sale.

Rifts® Miniature Only \$4.00

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- The "regular" hardbound edition will be available in stores every where, in August. It will have a different cover, printed in silver on a quality leatherette material and has no limit to the number of copies that may be pressed. \$32.95 cover price. Please note that the *paperback* edition (\$24.95) will remain in print.

Rifts® South America 2 — New!

Hot off the presses! *Rifts*® *World Book Nine: South America Two!* Author, C.J. Carella, explores more of South America, reveals the secrets of the Nazca Lines, and presents nearly 20 new character classes, new magic, new weapons and equipment, plus tons of adventure ideas and world information.

Rifts® Japan — New!

Only released in July this hot new *Rifts*® world book and all the others will be available at our booth for purchase and autographs. Written by *Kevin Siembieda* and *Patrick Nowak*. Cover by *Zelevnik*. Art by *Vince Martín* and others.

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C onvention 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, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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

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

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You 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.

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 for registration information.

MANAFEST '95, June 30-July 3 CA

This collector-card-game-only convention will be held at the Cathedral Hill Hotel in San Francisco, Cal. Special events include sanctioned tournaments for the BLOOD WARS™, Magic: The Gathering*, Ultimate Combat*, Galactic Empires*, and Highlander* card games. Guests include Lester Smith, Anson Maddox, and Jonathan Tweet. Registration: \$15 per day, \$30 for the weekend. Write to: MANAFEST, P.O. Box 170436, San Francisco CA 94117.

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. Other events include an auction and tournaments. Registration: \$18. 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, Col. 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.

DRAGON CON '95, July 13-16 GA

This convention will be held at the Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel, Atlanta Civic Center, Atlanta, Ga. Over 200 special guests include 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, Ga. 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* 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.

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

ARCEECON '95, July 22**IL**

This convention will be held at Leisure Hours Raceway in Joliet, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, a Japanimation festival, and a silent auction. Registration: \$5. Write to: Leisure House Hobbies, 2712 Planfield Rd, Joliet IL 60435; or e-mail Compu-serve: 73074,3220.

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

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**MO**

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: \$30 before May 28, \$35 until June 28, \$40 thereafter. Gaming only registration available. Write to: CONTINUUM IV, 1617 Lyndhurst, Cape Girardeau MO 63701.

SKIRMISHES '95, July 28-30**MO**

This convention will be held at the Civic Center Hotel in Kansas City, Mo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures painting contest and dealers. Registration: \$19 preregistered before July 10, \$25 on site. Write to: SKIRMISHES, c/o 812 N.E. 100 Terr., Kansas City MO 64155.

CANGAMES, August 4-6***TX**

This convention will be held at the Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, a painting contest, and auction, and dealers. Write to: CANGAMES, 6930 Sunset Blvd., Greely, Ontario, Canada, K4P 1C5.

ICON III, July 29-30**South Africa**

This convention will be held in Edenvale, Gauteng, South Africa. Events include roleplaying, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniature painting, an art and costume contest, and dealers. Write to: SAGA, P.O. Box 965, Kengray, 2100, South Africa.

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 a dealers room, Japanimation, 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 Ramada Hotel Market Center in Dallas, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and animation. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$15 on site, or \$7 per day. Write to: Dallas Game Expo, P.O. Box 824662, Dallas TX 75382.

DALLASCON '95, August 4-6**TX**

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

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.

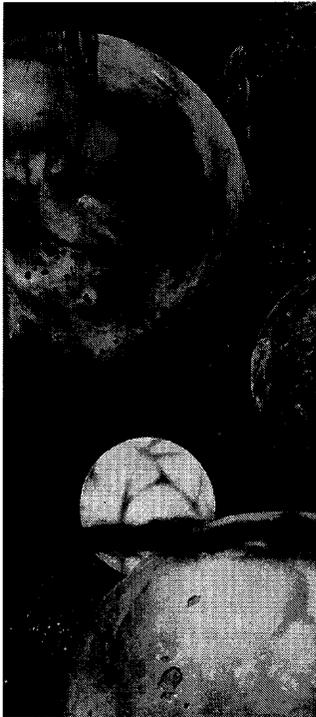
GAMEFEST XVI, August 9-13**CA**

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.

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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.

STARQUEST '95, August 18-20 CA

This convention will be held at the Red Lion Inn in San Jose, Calif. Guests include Michael O'Hare, Walter Koenig, and Kevin Anderson. Events include role-playing games. Other activities include autograph sessions and anime events. Write to: STARQUEST '95, P.O. Box 56412, Hayward CA 94545 or e-mail: starquest@shakala.com.

RAILCON '95, August 25-27 CO

This convention will be held at the Sheraton 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.

FOX CON '95, August 28-Sept. 3 IL

This convention will be held at the Arlington Park Hilton in Arlington Heights, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$10 per day, \$15 for the weekend. Write to: Randy Giesey, 1775 Ashford Circle, Wheeling IL 60090.

DEMI CON 6, September 1-3 MD

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Conference Hotel in Towson, Md. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, an auction, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$25 on site. Write to: Harford Adventure Society, c/o The Statagic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Road, Bel Air MD 21014.

CATCON 1, September 2-3 #

This convention will be held on the FH Ulm campus, Prittwitzstr. 36 (Catcafe), Ulm, Germany. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Write to: Imp's Shop, Zinglerstr. 51, 89077 Ulm, Germany.

**FOX CON '95
EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY CON XIV,
September 1-3** IL

This convention will be held at the Arlington Park Hilton in Arlington Heights, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$13 per day, \$18 for the weekend. Write to: Randy Giesey, 1775 Ashford Circle, Wheeling IL 60090.

STRATEGICON, September 1-4 CA

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

KINETICON II, September 8-10 CT

This convention will be held at the Comfort Inn in Darien, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, Write to: KINETICON II, Connecticut Game Club, P.O. Box 403, Fairfield CT 06430.

REGIMENT, September 16 IN

This convention will be held at the Century Center in Southbend, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and dealers. Write to: Mark Schumaker, 1621 Frances Ave., Elkhart IN 46516.

TACTICON '95, September 15-17 CO

This convention will be held at Sheraton Hotel in Lakewood, Col. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, an art show, painting contest, and dealers. Registration: \$15. Write to: Denver Gamers Association, P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

FIELDS OF HONOR IV, Sept. 22-24 IA

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's Hotel in Des Moines, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and a painting contest. Registration: \$10 for the weekend, \$5 per day. Write to: FIELDS OF HONOR, 6501 Douglas Ave., Urbandale IA 50322.

ANDCON '95, September 28-Oct. 1 OH

This convention will be held at Seagaate Convention Center in the Radison Hotel in Toledo, Ohio. Guests include Scott Douglas, Frank Mentzer, and Robin Wood. Events include role-playing, board, card, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, computer gaming, and interactive events. Registration: \$24.95 for the weekend. Write to: ANDCON '95, P.O. Box 1740, Renton WA 98057 or e-mail: andon@aol.com.

SILVERCON 4, September 29-Oct. 1 NV

This convention will be held at the Best Western Mardi Gras Inn, Las Vegas, Nev. Guests include Roger Zelazny and Bob Tucker. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, dealers, films, and a banquet. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: SILVERCON 4, c/o Aileen Forman, P.O. Box 95941, Las Vegas NV 89193.

What's your opinion?

What is the future direction of role-playing games? What problems do you have with your role-playing campaign? Turn to this issue's "Forum" and see what others think—then tell us what you think!

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ROLE-PLAYING reviews

A Thousand and One Adventures

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I have heard (but Allah alone knows the truth) that in ancient times the central Asian Ring Shahriyar believed all women faithless. He guarded himself from betrayal by taking a new wife each night, then killing her in the morning. After three years his kingdom ran out of suitable brides, so his vizier betrothed to the king the vizier's own daughter, Shahrazad. To avoid execution Shahrazad conceived a plan.

On her wedding night she commenced a tale but left it unfinished. Curious to know its outcome, the king delayed her execution until the next night. On that night Shahrazad finished the tale and began another—and so on. For three years she staved off death with hundreds of folktales, eventually winning the king's love and convincing him to abandon his cruel policy. The huge collection of stories comes down to us as *The Thousand and One Nights*, better known as *The Arabian Nights*.

In Arab literature the *Nights* occupies a minor niche at best, but in the West its popularity surpasses even that of the Qu'ran, the holy book of Islam. Its hundreds of flavorful and exuberant tales, festooned with kings, viziers, rogues, eunuchs, tradesmen, fisherfolk, perfervid lovers, mermaids, djinn, rocs, and the Caliph of Baghdad, have entered pop culture. Adaptations vastly change the source, stripping out its Islamic setting, ornate language, pragmatic fatalism, and bawdy vulgarity. Filmgoers can look through the *Nights* in vain for a tale resembling *Aladdin*, *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, or other Hollywood hodgepodes.

In the *Nights* you find hodgepodes of a different kind. Centuries ago storytellers in the Arab lands would carry on their stories much as Shahrazad did, building to a climax and then waiting for the rapt listener to throw them another coin. To stretch their income, they would bring in a character to tell his own history, which included a character telling *his* story, and so on, in recursive stories nested three or four deep. Oddball stories hung on the slenderest premise, a gallery of wonders thrown together without much internal consistency, a long narrative that wanders the world—say, this all begins to sound familiar, doesn't it? Like a role-playing campaign?

The original *Nights* and its transfigured popular versions both seem natural for role-playing adventures. Over the past few years, after an inexplicable years-long delay, several game publishers have adapted both versions. But which works better in a game? Do you want the authentic Persian-Islamic worldview, at once familiar and alien, teeming with improbable incident and lustrous rhetoric? Or how about the glittering Hollywood hookah-and-harem equivalent, at once familiar and gaudy, a scenic backdrop for traditional RPG adventures?

As I looked into these Arabian supplements, I had not decided. In the end, both sides won me over.



Photography by Charles Kohl



Arabian Adventures

TSR, Inc. \$18
160-page softcover AD&D® campaign rulebook

Design: Jeff Grubb with Andria Hayday

Cover: Jeff Easley

Illustrations: Karl Waller

Last year TSR cancelled—more accurately, completed—the AL-QADIM® campaign world. From the start, the design team projected a three-year life for the product line. In three years they meant to finish all the supplements they wanted to do, and then they would stop. What a rare and refreshing idea: You can finish a game when it's done, instead of milking it for supplements beyond all reason until the audience tires of it. As it turned out, TSR did keep the AL-QADIM line going for a fourth year, but this did not exhaust the vigor of an interesting and well-rounded line. All told, it includes the original rulebook, two boxed sets, eight “sourceboxes,” a monster appendix, and a character class handbook.

Reviews seldom get to cover an entire game line in one shot. Although most DRAGON® Magazine readers have probably already bought the AL-QADIM campaign or decided not to, this review starts with the source rulebook and moves straight through the line.

You know from the first sentence of the original 160-page softcover rulebook that the AL-QADIM campaign setting emphasizes pop cinematic Arabia over scholarly accuracy. “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” “Aladdin and His Magic Lamp”—these and other classics fill the pages of the *Arabian Nights*. No, they don't. European translators introduced both Ali Baba and Aladdin as spurious additions to the *Nights*, back in the 1800s. But what of that? Would you want an Arabian role-playing campaign that didn't include them? In the AL-QADIM rulebook, Jeff Grubb offers character kits for barber-thieves, beggar-thieves, and other rogues in the cinematic Ali-Baba mold, as well as other characteristically Arabian roles such as merchants, moralistic priests, hakimas (wise women), mystics, mamluks, corsairs, and elemental wizards. Each kit includes imaginative benefits, hindrances, and—most important—discussion of the kit's societal role in the fantastic Arabesque desert of Zakhara, the Land of Fate.

The player character kits (over 40 pages of them!) make up the outstanding section of the rules, still unsurpassed to this day by other AD&D® campaign worlds. The most creative of these, the signature class of the AL-QADIM world, remains the sha'ir, the wizard who gets his magic by sending a genie or elemental familiar to fetch spells. Original and ingeniously balanced, the sha'ir class gains its greatest appeal from the role-playing opportunities inherent in negotiating with a genie or a dimwitted familiar. Other highlights of this fine rulebook include rules for calling

upon Fate (the Zakharan equivalent of Islam's Allah), the Evil Eye, and discussions of honor, piety, the salt bond, and other characteristics of Arabian society.

At least one review that marked this books release in 1992 called it the best rulebook ever done. With hindsight we can identify it more accurately as an important step in TSR's transition to its current graphic design philosophy, a precursor of the PLANESCAPE™ line and other beautiful products. The AL-QADIM rulebook's gold page borders, elegant endpapers, and six full color plates made a striking impression. Just as important, the AL-QADIM line marked the first time TSR used one artist for interior illustration throughout a whole line: the remarkable Karl Waller, whose atmospheric work conveys exactly the textures, exoticism, muscular genies, and empty desert expanses appropriate to the game line. (Artist Stephen Fabian had previously achieved almost the same level of saturation in the RAVENLOFT® campaign line.) Waller and Fabian are thus the forerunners of Tony DiTerlizzi, whose incredible art is a big plus to the PLANESCAPE setting.

Still, even in its time the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook fell short of perfection. Though pretty, it lacks a distinctive writing style and sense of atmosphere. The rulebook offers a comprehensive list of desert equipment, lists of spells with a desert motif (*move sand, sand quiet, sand slumber, pillar of sand, hissing sand, sand sword, whispering sand*—you get the idea), Arab character names, and proficiencies like Hagglng and Display Weapon Prowess. But does it simulate the flavor of the *Arabian Nights* tales? Only in part.

The character kits have flavor to spare, and Waller's art inspires many adventure ideas. Yet for all their beauty, these pages only rarely describe the elements of Arabian adventures—the causes that assassins die for, the bargains that genies make, ambitions and aspirations of PCs, and the conventions of Arabian folktales. There is no attempt at all to describe what you actually *do* in an AL-QADIM campaign: explore the southern seas, wage holy war, stage palace intrigues, and so on. (This lack was remedied, in part, only in early 1994, in Gregory W. Detwiler's excellent article “Campaign Journal: Arabian Adventures Galore” in DRAGON® Magazine #202.)

The rulebook's lack of Arabian flavor may derive partly from the uneasy relationship between the *Arabian Nights* adventures and standard AD&D® rules. It's hard enough justifying elves and dwarves in this setting, and there's a worse lack. The AL-QADIM campaign accepts slavery and polygamy as facts of life, and dispassionately discusses the ways of holy slayers, but it never dares hint at that ultimate taboo of all AD&D campaign worlds, monotheism. We must presume that developing a fantasy equivalent of Allah would offend Muslims, whereas compromising Islamic culture with a poly-

theistic hodgepodge is just fine. No doubt TSR also wished to avoid unpleasant links to the modern Islamic world in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War.

Evaluation: The AL-QADIM rulebook impeccably presents a good set of tools for building an Arabian AD&D campaign, although it leaves the actual construction work to you—or to the host of supplements that followed. Given the fine quality of most of those supplements, this core product becomes essential for Arabian AD&D adventure.

Land of Fate

TSR, Inc. \$20

128-page locations guide, 64-page campaign guide, 8 loose MC sheets, 12 card-stock mapsheets, 2 large color maps, plastic hex scale, boxed

Design: Jeff Grubb with Andria Hayday

Cover: Fred Fields

Illustrations: Karl Waller

It makes sense, unfortunately, that the *Land of Fate* box quickly followed the AL-QADIM rulebook as its first supplement. The rulebook briefly introduced the setting of Zakhara, but this set described it at length. A campaign needs this basic data: maps, geography, routines of daily life, fashion, customs, organizations, class status, the legal system, magical items, languages, calendars, and *the like*. The *Land of Fate* set describes it all, *plus* 12 different desert tribes. *Plus* 17 deities or deity types. *Plus* 27, yes, 27 city writeups in the “Adventurer's Guide to Zakhara,” along with DM-only secrets for each city in the “Fortunes and Fates” book. It's all very large.

The AL-QADIM line continued a trend in the role-playing hobby that has only increased, and I would say worsened, in the years since its debut: the steepening of the learning curve. Buy any campaign set nowadays, and you get a long series of notes, jottings, about a hundred different places and organizations. Then you have to buy the inevitable supplements to get sufficient detail on each jotting. It resembles the Arabian storyteller's technique of interpolating hints of a dozen other stories amid the one he's telling, in order to coax more coins from his curious audience.

In principle the jottings of a campaign set can be satisfying in themselves. In the *Land of Fate* set, they make for dry reading. We get a useful chapter on all aspects of daily life, and a couple of wonderful sidebar articles on the Zakharan coffee ceremony (“the measure of a good host”) and pearl diving, the stuff of memorable scenes in an adventure. The rest is a sandstorm of little details, one-paragraph character outlines, societal tidbits (we're told twice that worshippers in Zakhara “prostate” themselves), and jottings. With work you could assemble any dozen jottings into a free-wheeling adventure like the loose-jointed *Arabian Nights* tales, where one thing follows another without much logic. But not much of *Land of Fate* matches the

screwy imagination of the best *Nights* tales. At times the designer's creativity clearly flags, such as in this candid beginning to an entry describing the secrets of Hilm: "The City of Kindness is boring." And, as with the rulebook, there is no hint in all these pages of how to develop these jottings into a memorable, characteristically Arabian campaign.

Evaluation: Parts of the *Land of Fate* boxed set enhance any AL-QADIM campaign, but its length is excessive and its inspiration uneven. Unless you plan to construct a long, ambitious campaign, you can probably get along without this box. The next one, on the other hand . . .

City of Delights

TSR, Inc. \$20

96-page locations guide, 96-page campaign guide, 8 loose MC sheets, 8 cardstock mapsheets, 2 large color maps, boxed

Design: Tim Beach, Tom Prusa, Steve Kurtz

Cover: Robh Ruppel

Illustrations: Karl Waller

Zakhara's principal jewel is the Golden City of Huzuz, the AL-QADIM equivalent of Hollywood Baghdad. In this excellent 1993 set, three gifted designers summoned Huzuz in all its majesty, creating a true *City of Delights*. It's regrettable that it appeared over a year after the rulebook, for the Golden City offers an ideal starting point and base for any AQ campaign. (We saw the same misstep more recently in the PLANESCAPE line, where a year of non-starters like *Planes of Law* preceded the description of the base city of Sigil.)

Huge, filled with every imaginable item and service, saturated with intrigue and mystery (why can't the Grand Caliph father an heir?), Huzuz also succeeds where *Land of Fate* failed in conjuring an appropriate atmosphere. Each of the 800,000 citizens has a story, we're told, and we get many of them: how the merchant Khwaja al-Danaf gained his fortune; how the Talking Bird and Singing Tree came to the garden in the Palace of the Enlightened Throne; and how the Caliphs elven concubine Halima gained a winged cat. (Robh Ruppel's superb cover painting shows Halima gazing placidly from a palace window on the minarets and golden domes of Huzuz, the cat by her side. This quiet piece embodies the exotic AL-QADIM campaign better than any fight scene with genies and corsairs.)

City of Delights excels in its clear view of what player characters (PCs) want to do in Huzuz. Any ethoist priest worth his turban wants to preach in the great Golden Mosque, so the Mosque entry tells who to talk to. A sha'ir wants to study with Adnan al-Raqi, Master of the Invisible, the Whisper that Thunders; here's his tower and how to become his apprentice. Because any party includes a rogue or two, we get details on sneaking into the Caliphs harem. And the DM struggling to digest all

this will appreciate the clear, useful campaign advice, unique in the AL-QADIM line.

Evaluation: Whether the PCs visit the Caliphs splendid palace (based on Topkapi palace in Istanbul), Mad Aja in the Grand Bazaar, the sewer lair of the evil yak-men, Gorar the singing barber, or the hidden temple of the Flamedeath Fellowship, *City of Delights* meets the DM's needs for an exotic Baghdadian campaign base. Though it has the same demanding learning curve as the *Land of Fate* set above, and it really needs an index, this imaginative box should prove more immediately and easily useful.

AL-QADIM Sourceboxes

I like almost all of TSR's thin \$18 boxes of Zakharan adventures. Each gives a well-rounded assortment: 32 pages of source material and 64 pages of adventures (all illustrated by Karl Waller), four loose *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*® sheets, and a big color map. The first, *Golden Voyages*, also includes a DM's screen, whereas the others give six cardstock sheets of maps and play materials. In terms of components I find these sourceboxes pricey, especially in comparison to the large boxes above, but in content they deliver good value. Besides, nowadays I find nearly every gaming product pricey, an effect of age and indigence.

None of these sets discuss campaign issues in detail. In general, the structure of their adventures calls for a loose, picaresque campaign with little continuity. The PCs walk into one adventure, get through it, and next week they're off somewhere else doing something new—a contrast with the *City of Delights* campaign above. An ambitious DM could alternate Huzuz city adventures with the wide-ranging journeys of these sourceboxes.

Note: Almost all these boxes rely on the AL-QADIM *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* appendix (MC13) by Wolfgang Baur and Steve Kurtz, so be prepared.

Golden Voyages by David "Zeb" Cook: The designer calls this "Sinbad in a box." The linking story, impressive in its transparency, sends the PCs on a rambling ocean voyage to seek a Great Treasure in an archipelago thick with wonders. The DM chooses one of ten Treasures suited to the inclinations of his group (power gamers, warlords, role-players, storytellers, or puzzle solvers), then plants clues that lure the PCs through seven mini-adventures in any order the DM likes.

Zeb Cook doesn't sink the PCs as often as the tales sank Sinbad; that happened at least once per voyage, if memory serves. Nonetheless, he captures perfectly the atmosphere and morality of the setting. Island fish! Lodestones that pull metal from hundreds of yards away! Black pearls that cause maelstroms, an Isle of Sadness where melancholy

inhabitants seek the True Sorrow, a notorious thief who by an *amazing* coincidence looks exactly like a PC! The adventures here practically glow with the spirit of *the Arabian Nights*. We also get plenty of information on dhows, baghlas, booms, and other vessels; details on hiring crews and running journeys, and stories, stories, stories. Though its profusion of little booklets and sheets challenges the DM's tracking ability—can you find the adventure's finale?—*Golden Voyages* still makes an excellent introduction to AL-QADIM adventuring.

Assassin Mountain by Wolfgang Baur: In his years of grinding toil before he achieved ultimate magnificence as DRAGON Magazine's editor, Wolf Baur got involved in many AL-QADIM supplements, including this inventive 1993 sourcebox about the dreaded holy slayers (assassins) of Zakhara. These fanatics show up in force on almost every page of the three adventures (for levels 5-9): first in a simple robbery; then when the PCs assault the slayers' impregnable mountain fortress, Sarahin (and wind up in its nightmarish Pit of a Thousand Voices); and in a sequel nine-day murder mystery set in Sarahin, where the PCs must discover who killed the slayers' leader, the Old Man of the Mountain.

The approach in *Assassin Mountain* is unique in the AL-QADIM line. Eschewing a barrage of colorful magic, Baur develops a claustrophobic atmosphere of paranoia and intrigue. Character interactions drive the plot, and the occasional fire elementals and gibbering moulder are tools to develop the narrative. These morally ambiguous adventures, modern takes on classic Arabian settings, require and reward good role-playing. Several scenes here will put role-players through the wringer, and they'll love it. But the plots also assume highly pragmatic PCs. If you or your group wouldn't feel comfortable allying with assassins, steer clear. I have trouble with this idea myself, and though *Assassin Mountain* is an accomplished work, it's not what I think of as the stuff of Arabian adventure. (For a much more characteristic sourcebox from Baur, see *Secrets of the Lamp* below.)

A Dozen and One Adventures by Steve Kurtz: Now this is the stuff of Arabian adventure: weird bathhouses, deceptive ghouls, amorous succubi, passionate genies, raucous merriment with desert riders, the sacred salt bond between host and guest, a boasting contest, a mummified talking head in the Hall of Lost Kings, Greek fire, a deranged fire mage, the Brotherhood of True Flame—well, actually a lot of fire burns through the last half of these thirteen short adventures, despite one late episode in an inundated sand castle.

Starting with beginning characters, the *Dozen and One Adventures* develop a more-or-less continuous narrative up

through the finale, for levels 9-12. Here the PCs become pawns, and occasionally onlookers, in a deadly struggle among the fire mage, the Soft Whisper assassins, a Leper King, and other high-power factions. Still, Kurtz (who has read *all* the *Arabian Nights* tales—"including the supplements!" he says, as if incredulous at his masochism) has summoned the flavor of the genre with impressive skill.

Ruined Kingdoms by Steve Kurtz: In these adventures in long-lost Nog and Kadar, the PCs meet the gibbering beggar-prophet Adil, find a cursed ceramic disk, meet a pleasant mason wasp, fight yak men, and run afoul of an ancient Arch-Geomancer, just for starters. Traveling to the jungles of eastern Zakhara to solve the mystery of the disk, the PCs model for three giant sisters who sculpt topiary shrubs, fight serpent cultists, visit the Isle of the Elephant, and learn that by an *amazing* coincidence, one PC is the long-lost heir of a rich merchant family. This kind of thing happens all the time in the AL-QADIM line—and Arabian tales.

Like *A Dozen and One Adventures*, the structure of *Ruined Kingdoms* presents some problems. The framing adventure, about the disk, starts the PCs at levels 4-6, but leads to a climactic fight against extremely tough villains where 9th-12th level heroes should expect a high body count. To

strengthen the party for this, the enterprising DM must fill out the scenarios *between* with additional adventures. *Cities of Bone*, reviewed below, offers possibilities.

Corsairs of the Great Sea by Nicky Rea: Lightest in content and least cohesive of the sourceboxes, this 1994 collection offers five routine adventures (plus a sixth filler encounter) that sort of feature corsairs, or take place in corsair cities, or, well, appear in a sourcebox with "corsairs" in the title. One sends the PCs after an evil ghul cult that's sacrificing children, a couple of others depend crucially on traitors betraying the PCs, and in one the PCs are spies; all these notions seem badly out of place in an Arabian campaign.

This box makes more references than usual to the Forgotten Realms, where Zakhara is nominally placed. I'm uncomfortable with this, because the Realms already have three desert cultures (including one, Anauroch, with the same cultural roots as the AL-QADIM setting), and because Zakhara is more than a different place, it's a different genre of adventure. But *Corsairs* even brings in a spelljamming ship from Kara-Tur, which is about as nonArabian as you get. The good news is, this is the only weak entry in an exceptionally strong line.

Caravans by Rick Swan: Although caravan journeys have long made for romantic adventures, soap operas of the desert, this box actually deals little with caravans in themselves. Rather, its caravan serves as an excuse to move the characters (levels 5-9) across the High Desert in western Zakhara. In missing this chance, the sourcebox reads like some old SPELLJAMMER™ adventures where PCs travel through space to another world, then go on an ordinary dungeon adventure.

That said, I still like this set. Sure, the scenario is linear, and NPCs get some of the best lines, but just guess what's on the full-color 21" X 30" poster map. Terrain maps, ship plans, a palace, a mosque? No, a *rug!* It's a beautiful Persian-style rug with a name, Ala'i the Hungry. If the PCs feed it ancient poetry during the adventure, Ala'i gives them clues by blacking in parts of its weave; the cardstock handouts show Ala'i in the act of giving various clues keyed to the scenario. I could talk about the rest of the neat stuff in this box—the talking tent, weird lightning on a high rock spire, broom-wielding copper automatons, giant roc skeletons, bug-eating centaurs, an efreeti palace beneath the Pit of Ghuls—but admit it, the rug has already convinced you, right?

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Cities of Bone by Steve Kurtz: The indefatigable Kurtz returns with another mixed lot of adventures in ruined cities. The AL-QADIM line had been held over a year beyond its original plan by the time of this 1994 sourcebox, and this may explain the set's flagging inspiration. We get six dungeon crawls, mostly portable anywhere in Zakhara and mostly routine, half for beginning characters and the rest for mid-to high levels. The text offers good advice for creating a spooky atmosphere, and the historical reasons behind the construction of each dungeon make interesting reading, but these are basically numbered rooms with traps and monsters. These are endlessly popular in other AD&D worlds, but in Zakhara they fit awkwardly, for (as the text remarks) "robbing the tombs of enlightened creatures is considered a base and dishonorable profession."

Half the text makes up the set's best adventure, "Court of the Necromancers." In the undead city of Ysawis, the PCs get involved in the intrigues of a couple of repugnant wizards and a senile lich. There's an interesting plot and one well-staged, creepy dinner scene with the two necromancers, but the storyline works only with players who behave with cautious restraint—yet the same adventure's dungeon crawl, like all the others here, belongs to the kill-everything-that-moves school of adventure design. It's an unfortunate mix.

Secrets of the Lamp by Wolfgang Baur: Zakhara's multitudes of djinn, jann, dao, efreeti, and the rest are yours to command in this entertaining 1993 sourcebox. Its centerpiece is a detailed description of the famous genie City of Brass. This enchanting city, which floats on an endless lake of burning oil, is featured in a nice poster map and on the usual story cards and monster sheets.

A lengthy scenario in the 32-page adventure booklet sends the PCs (levels 4-7) rushing all over the City of Brass. See, this efreeti physician falls instantly in love with one of the heroes (this kind of thing happens all the time in the AL-QADIM line). The physician imprisons the party, and soon they have trouble with his two current wives, his albino nightmare, patrolling salamanders, and the Sultan of the Efreet. It's all rambunctious excitement and daring exploits, enhanced by fanatic efreet warriors, sparktail scorpions, and the bumbling djinni Hazim the Fool. However, the DM should take care to keep things on track, because if the PCs fail, they end up slaves for seven years.

The 64-page "Genie Lore" book describes the Sevenfold Mazework of the Great Dismal Delve, the Court of Ice and Steel, the Great Padishah of the Marid, genie sorcerers, lots of new magic, and the details of genie wishes. Here Baur hints at many colorful story possibilities. ("Sardior, the ruby king and ruler of the gem drag

ons, brings his flying castle to the Court to pay a visit from time to time. Toasting and gifting the dragon lord might impoverish even the richest of Prime Material creatures, but it could also be the subject of great poetry and storytelling.") We don't get much more than imaginative hints, but in these quantities that might be all you need. Instead of developing one situation, try blitzing the players with a bunch of them. It worked fine for the *Arabian Nights* storytellers, and the modern role-playing gamemaster works very much in their tradition.

Evaluation: If you haven't long since tried a Zakhara campaign, get one going while you can still find its products. Practically speaking, you need the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook, the MC13 appendix, the *City of Delights* box, and one of the sourceboxes—I'd pick *Golden Voyages*. And if you favor history over Hollywood, also look for. . .

GURPS * Arabian Nights

128-page softcover GURPS* supplement
Steve Jackson Games \$16.95

Design: Phil Masters

Cover: Rowena Morrill

Illustrations: Sam Inabinet, Laura Eisenhour

To my mind the GURPS "universal" RPG believes in encoding all of existence as rules, as opposed to creating fun campaigns. Some of its worldbooks show that with sufficient effort, a realistic viewpoint can make any adventure genre dull. For instance, *GURPS Atomic Horror* describes 1950s alien-invasion movie adventures, but it points out that nothing can live on Mars, and all the Martians died eons ago. Thanks for setting that straight.

The 1993 *GURPS Arabian Nights* continued this conscientious education with, among other things, its flying carpets that won't bank sharply or fast, for instance on page 88: "Magic carpet 'dogfights' (fun for high-magic campaigns, silly otherwise) mostly reduce to either cautious, long range archery duels, or scrappy close-quarters fencing matches." Boy, that was close; players might have accidentally tried something fun. You won't find giddy Hollywood/Harryhausen antics in *GURPS Arabian Nights* (if you can find it at all—it's out of print, so check the back shelves of your game store). Even so, the supplement is worth the search, because it provides fun in a different style.

Drawing extensively from Arab history, English author Phil Masters (who wrote the excellent *Kingdom of Champions* for Hero Games, reviewed in issue #172) turns *GURPS Arabian Nights* into a fascinating sourcebook of real-world Islamic history, with digressions into legendary fantasy. After a useful 24-page overview of the culture as portrayed in the *Nights*, Masters outlines historical high points beginning with Muhammad's flight to Medina and ending with the Crusades. Then comes a



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superior description of character types, a delicately upbeat discussion of female roles in Islamic society, and advantages and disadvantages like Claim to Hospitality, Code of Honor, Compulsive Vowing, and Hunchback. A realistic campaign can use the extensive discussion of money, jobs, and expenses; no doubt we'll eventually see a GURPS supplement with a simulated income tax form.

The discussion of Arabian attitudes toward magic is fascinating. There follows a long list of shapeshifts and other new spells, new magic items like the Seal of Solomon and djinn bottles, and a dozen gray pages of monsters; forgive me, but I've never stayed awake through any GURPS spell or creature list. I woke up for the excellent, too-brief campaigning chapter, which crams more creative suggestions into six pages than you'll find in the entire AL-QADIM line. The book ends with the useful glossary, bibliography, and index that are characteristic strengths of the GURPS supplement line.

The 12-page sample adventure, "The Tale of the Poet, the Slave, and What Was Not Theirs," makes a realistic contrast to the magic-rich AL-QADIM adventures. Yes, there's a djinni here, and the oasis city of Dhulhiban is fictitious, but the citizens and Bedouins and coffeehouses and farms seem real; events take place on a small, believable scale that somehow gives them

an exotic power. It's the difference between seeing an impressive castle in a Hollywood movie, created by special effects, and entering a smaller but genuine castle a thousand years old. Hollywood and history: powers of different orders.

Evaluation: If you like genuine Islamic culture or want to know more about it, *GURPS Arabian Nights* is worth searching for on your game store's back shelves. Though it's a bit small to support a campaign, its source material can easily correct the AL-QADIM campaign's more obvious deviations from history. Change Zakhara to Arabia, Huzuz to Baghdad, the pantheon of fake gods to Allah, elves and dwarves to people, and there you have the *Arabian Nights*, ripe for "authentic" adventure. But remember: Allah alone knows the truth.

Hail! Hail! Finished is my tale!

Short and Sweet

The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook by Sam Witt (TSR, \$18). This 128-page softcover covers not only sha'irs but also the elemental mages of Zakhara. In the familiar "Complete Handbook" format it gives role-playing and campaign advice (apprentices, dueling practices), new wizard kits (astrologer, numerologist, clockwork mage, and others), almost a dozen secret magical societies, and ten pages of new spells and proficiencies.

The kits work well, especially the Mechanician, who crafts clockwork automata to cast his spells. But the societies come out of nowhere, adding a needless layer of campaign complexity ungrounded in Arabian folktales or the Zakharan campaign. If you want a secret society of desert mages, play in the DARK SUN® world. Flatly written and wordy, *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook* offers some useful advice on topics like genie prisons and caring for familiars, but its new spells look unusually powerful, as does the wizard assassin called the Spellslayer. Look before buying.

PSYCHOSIS* by Charles Ryan (Chameleon Eclectic, \$15). I haven't played this small, attractive, one-shot adventure game, and here's why. The gamemaster runs five or six PCs through an adventure staged as a flowchart of scenes. Follow me closely here: Each PC is completely nuts. Using a minimalist rules system based on Tarot cards, the gamemaster runs each PC along a different path through the real "spine" story, interpreting reality to fit the PCs own unique hallucination—Arthurian fantasy, cartoon craziness, hanging out at the megamall, or one of dozens of others. The story takes several game sessions to run; no player can write notes for use in later sessions; a PC's imagined world can change without warning. This scenario's exciting plot and many creative ideas should reward skilled gamemasters in search of a challenge. Good for them! It sounds like terrific fun. Me, I wouldn't try running it for fifty bucks. (*Stalwart reviewer Lester Smith has dared to play this game—and lived! His complete review will appear next issue.—WB*)

Creatures of Barsaive by Fraser Cain (FASA, \$18). "Ho-hum," you say, "another monster book." But this one is for the EARTHDAWN* RPG, and like many of the game's other supplements, it takes a creative approach to its well-worn subject. The narrator is Vasdenjas, a great dragon (!) with wide knowledge and monumental vanity. Dictating his reminiscences about 50 creatures to a dwarven scribe, the dragon incidentally reveals much about draconic psychology, and his dialogues with the scribe make the text a delight to read. The monsters? Some are original and conjure neat story ideas (the relan, a spine burrower, animates dead bodies); some are dumb (killer rabbits, killer calfs) or boring (four-lobed trilobites); most are new takes on long-established monsters (be sure to read about the breeding habits of chimeras). Did you expect anything else?

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Steel, Sorcery, and Stocks

The good news is that just about all computer game companies these days are recognizing the value of art and graphics in selling a product—and they're hiring artists accordingly. The bad news is, they don't all seem to have gotten the same message about the value of gameplay. This month's feature reviews include *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* from Blizzard Entertainment, *1830 Railroads & Robber Barons*, developed by SimTex and published by The Avalon Hill Game Company, *Citadel of the Dead*, created by R.J. Best, Inc. and published by Affiliate Venture Publishing, and *Realms of Arkania: Star Trail* from Sir-Tech Software. All of these games have pretty good art and sound support, but only a couple have really excellent gameplay.

Warcraft: Orcs & Humans

For IBM/DOS

Published by Blizzard Entertainment

Requires: 20 MHz 386 or faster, VGA

graphics, 4 MB RAM, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, DOS 5.0 or higher, mouse

Dee: So your gaming group's not meeting this week, and you're in the mood to hack into something besides hot dogs. *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* might be just the game to while away a few hours, if you're pining for a head-to-head challenge.

Warcraft is a simple strategy game in the *Dune II* mold (isometric viewpoint, real-time action, guns-vs-butter type decisions). The gimmick is that you can play either noble humans or evil orcs. Each scenario gives you an assignment and a skeleton start-up team, and lets you go at it.

Jay: The gimmick of playing either side is kind of cheesy, because humans and orcs are pretty much identical. Sure, the briefing sequences use different pictures, and the phrasing each general uses to describe your mission is flavored to show off the species' divergent attitudes. But both sides offer equivalent units, dwellings, and skills, as far as I can tell. Differences are merely in vocabulary. Try clicking on an orcish unit over and over: eventually, it will complain "Stop poking me!" The human says "Why do you keep touching me?" instead.

Reviews

Jay & Dee's ratings at a glance

Game	Jay	Dee
<i>Warcraft</i>	3	3
<i>1830</i>	3½	4
<i>Citadel of the Dead</i>	0	0
<i>Star Trail</i>	2½	3



EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1995 by Jay & Dee



Warcraft: Orcs & Humans (Blizzard)

Dee: Still, I did find the game somewhat absorbing—in most scenarios, you train your team, they're not just handed to you. You have to build up resources by setting up a little village economy that includes mining for gold and chopping down trees, all the while trying to avoid enemy raiders. It's important to balance the number of workers you train with the number of fighters you outfit, and you'll have to decide between training warm bodies and building infrastructure. The general course of play is familiar to most strategy game players: you start with a small amount of manufacturing capability (you

are "manufacturing" people, actually) and must supply raw materials. To do this, you send your peasants out to find and exploit mines and forests. The gold and lumber they bring back is turned into new peasants or warriors by the Town Hall and Barracks structures, respectively.

Jay: Your peasants can also build new structures, like the Lumber Mill that allows the creation of archer units (in the Barracks), or the Church that creates Clerics and also teaches them Healing and other spells. So the general tension of the game is, "Do I spend all my time on building up workers and structures, or do I

make new warriors?" You'll need the new warriors, because the enemy is not shy about launching attacks. Once they've chewed up your few starting troops, they can easily wipe out undefended peons.

This may not sound particularly new, as far as game concepts go. It's not. But the real-time aspect makes it compelling as you click back and forth, worrying that while you give orders to your war party, things might be going to hell in a hand-basket back home. Fortunately, once you give an order, your units are reasonably good about following it. Another thing that makes *Warcraft* fun is the scenario structure, which leavens each episode with new units to train and new buildings to construct. You keep playing to see what's coming next.

Dee: What didn't I like? The interface is okay, but I wish the designers had taken advantage of the right mouse button and made movement a default order. In fact, there is no default—I wonder how many other players click on the unit they wish to activate, then click someplace on the map and expect the unit to just go there. Instead, you first have to go to the menu box and click "movement," then return to the map to tell the unit where to go. Since movement is the most common order, it would have been nice to cut out this step.

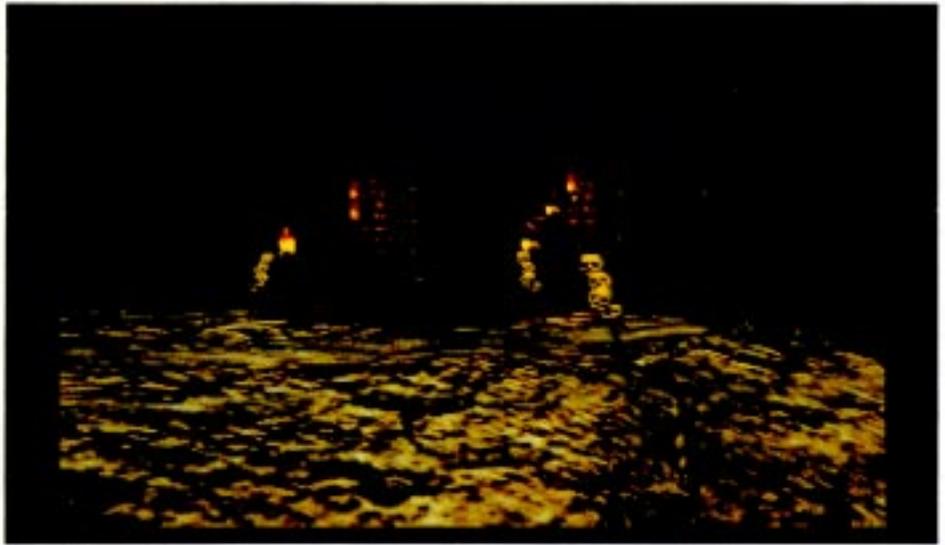
As Jay said, real-time is a cool feature: it's a nice way to eliminate the wait most games have while the enemy moves his units. The variable speeds, are good; you can tone down the tedium of mere chopping and mining by cranking the game speed up to "Fastest" level until raiders show up. Unfortunately, sometimes even Fastest isn't fast enough.

Jay: True, but once those orcs—or humans—do show up, you'll be glad the speed is variable. Use the "slowest" speed early on, to get your bearings and find the reflexes that you'll need for later scenarios.

I was perfectly content, peacenik that I am, to build farms and a lumber mill and research spells. In fact, I won my first orcish scenario without ever encountering a human, perhaps by minimizing the amount of exploration my units did.

However, I'd prefer it if the documentation included written statistics for building costs and unit strengths. As it is, you have to tell a peasant to build a structure before you can find out whether you've got enough lumber and gold to accomplish the task. And though the paragraph on archers in the manual warns their armor is "lighter," no statistics measure how much lighter. I didn't expect my archer to die after taking two blows!

Dee: Actually, I like the mystery of not knowing how things work or what's coming up, but I think *Warcraft's* designers overdid it. The box says the game includes two dozen campaign scenarios and 20 more customizable assignments. I would like to know which scenarios hold what new challenges. More importantly, I would



Warcraft: Orcs & Humans (Blizzard)

like an index instead of the stupid upside-down book design. The front cover reads "Humans" and the first half of the book discusses them. Once you're past the centerfold, the text is printed upside-down—when you flip it over, the cover reads "Orcs." Despite the minor annoyances, however, I enjoyed the (relatively) constant feel of progress in the game, both within a scenario as new units are built, and between scenarios as new technologies and unit types are introduced. I've actually found myself wanting to play more *Warcraft*, which is high praise in these days of computer-game glut. I give it ***

Jay: I kind of liked the upside-down book approach, but Dee's right—the novelty is pointless, because the information is completely redundant. The strategy—maximizing your troop building and minimizing raider's effectiveness—and the relentless, beat-the-clock attacks are what make this game worth considering, and I also give it ***. By the way, we said at the beginning that this was a good wargame for when you're gaming group's not meeting, but you can play *Warcraft* with others as well, over network or modem. We haven't tried it personally, but a few people at work tell us that it's a breathless, mind-bending experience. When your boss starts complaining about lost productivity due to game playing on the network, you can tell him it's our fault.

1830 Railroads & Robber Barons

For IBM/DOS

Designed by SimTex

Published by Avalon Hill

Requires: 386SX or faster, VGA graphics, 4

MB RAM (at least 2700K EMS), hard drive, MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, mouse

Dee: Avalon Hill has been in the board game biz a long time. Recently, they've started updating those board games for

the computer age. In *1830: Railroads & Robber Barons*, they've taken a fun but complex game and simplified it by teaching the computer to do all the tedious calculations. Otherwise, this game is just like the board game, only faster. It's a multi-player game, complete with AI—so here's another good one for when your game group cancels. If you've never played the board game, the computer game's limited strategy notes make it frustrating to follow what's happening. And you need to follow the action to improve for the next game. Fortunately I've played the board game some, or I'd have been *completely* derailed (so to speak).

Jay: *1830* is an economics game about buying, running, selling, and manipulating railroads and their stocks. The gameplay has two main sections: the stock market and the map. When the stock market is open (less and less frequently as the game goes on), each round you can buy one share of any of the eight railroads. If you buy the first share, it's the President's Share and counts double. As long as you have the President's and at least as many shares in that railroad as anyone else, you control that company on the map. Controlling a company can be profitable (and fun to do) but isn't necessary for victory: you can conceivably win by having part ownership of everyone else's railroads. In later stock rounds, you might find yourself selling shares of a profitable railroad to finance floating a new one, or dumping shares of a bad company (often one you've run into the ground on purpose) so some other poor sap will have to control it.

Dee: On the map, you place "tiles" to create your rail net, and run your trains to collect revenue. This is where the board game version was tedious: a player might sit for several minutes figuring out all the possible routes to see which one was most profitable (often aided by kibitzing shareholders who wanted more dividends); the

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computer does these calculations in nano-seconds. Also, the computer doesn't make mistakes in addition (we hope) and takes into account all the obscure Station rules and other modifications to routes that players might forget.

Jay: Our summary just touches the surface of the gameplay. During the course of a game, you might manipulate the rolling-stock market to make opponents' trains obsolete; try to take over a rival company; trade between your own companies, sucking one dry to lever another into a better position; place stations to limit opponents' access to lucrative markets; try to force an opponent into bankruptcy by forcing the purchase of new, expensive trains; and so on. The game goes by pretty fast, but there's a lot to try. Unfortunately (for us, at least), the AI is too accomplished even at Easy level. We learned many of our tactics from watching what the AI did to smear us in the first four games. Finally, one of us placed above an AI player in our fifth game!

Dee: I have a few quibbles with the conversion (as usual): SimTex (the people who brought you *Master of Magic* and *Master of Orion*—an odd choice for this project) could have used blinking dots to show where each railroad HQ was when it was that company's turn to run. The random maps (a nice feature) are really hard to use. Partly this is due to low-res graphics that make it tough to company logos and other important information. At least with the original map, you get a paper copy to scrutinize and refer to. Despite my kvetching, I found *1830* engaging and want to play again so I can beat the computer opponents! Plus, I like railroad games.

Jay: Dee always notices game design; I always pick on manuals. In this case, I think it's pretty dreadful. The layout is cluttered with colored boxes of text, fancy box borders, and fussy page headers. Four color artwork on every page is the kind of production value every editor craves, but *1830's* manual doesn't use this richness to very good effect. And of course there's no index. The manual is so-so as a learning tool (it's hard to follow where one chunk of text ends and the next begins) and uselessly as a reference.

Another problem I have is with learning how to win the game, and with feedback during the game. One time, we thought we were doing really well—making money, manipulating stock—only to find at the very end that we had lost, without any real idea why. The point of having a computer handle all the donkey work is to avoid having to constantly monitor what everyone else is doing. But that's exactly what you have to do to figure out what's going on (and guarantee yourself a mere third place!)

Dee: The final analysis boils down to two questions: is the game itself fun (for

CORP	PRICE	PAR	REV	TREAS
NYC	82	100	480	120
ERIE	76	100	440	84
B+O	71	82	190	0
PRR	69	75	260	386



1830 Railroads & Robber Barons Avalon Hill)

those who have never played the board game)? and does this particular conversion do justice to the original (for those who have)? I'd say yes and mostly yes. The game itself is fun, if a bit involved, and with the computer helping out, goes very quickly. The conversion is, with the few exceptions noted above, very good, and includes several optional rules that are integrated easily and in some cases unavailable in the board game version. I give *1830* ****.

Jay: I'm not as familiar with the board game as Dee, so the connection between private companies and railroads, for instance, was hard to follow. In the computerized *1830*, a lot of business distinctions like this don't make sense at first glance and aren't explained very well. Maybe I should read the board game rules.

I like railroad games as a general rule, and it's fun putting together the routes and earning whopping bucks for a job well done. I wish someone would do a computer version of *Empire Builder!* Since they haven't, I'm willing to settle for *1830*.

The game is well put together; all the parts fit into an interesting whole. The manual could be better organized, and I wish the AI were easier to beat at first—it's easy to get discouraged starting out. Even so, I give *1830* ***½. There's no modem or network play, but multiplayer is supported, and there's no reason one person can't sit at the keyboard and enter the commands for everyone else. One last kudo: This is one of the few "board game on computer" games I can think of that you might prefer over the paper version, even when you have multiple players.

Citadel of the Dead

For Macintosh
Published by Affiliate Venture Publishing
Requires: Color graphics, 4MB RAM, hard drive

Dee: If your missing gamer friends are role-players, you might be thinking of turning to a computer "role-playing" game. I use the term hesitantly, because so many

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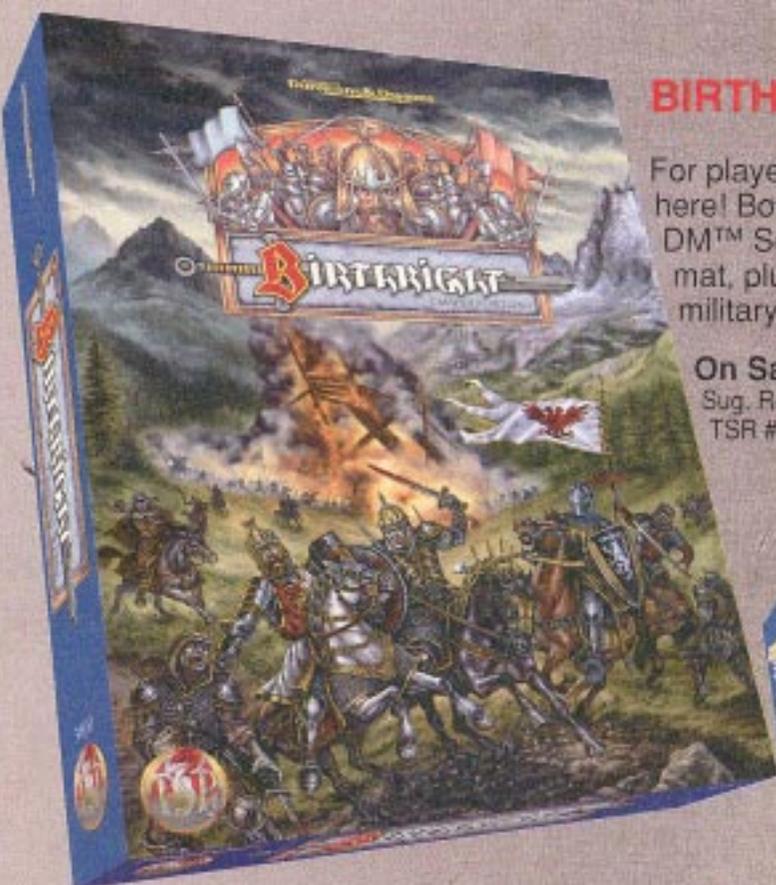
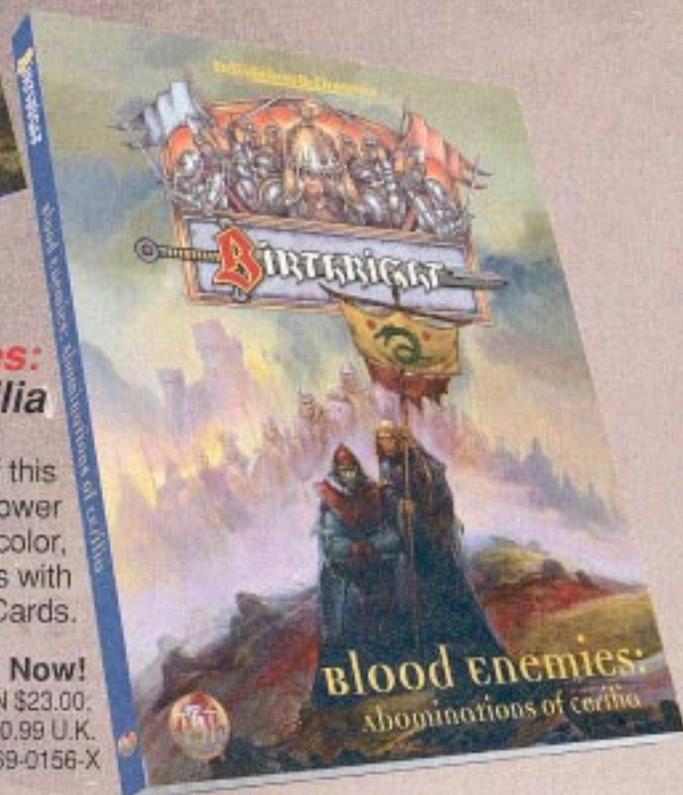
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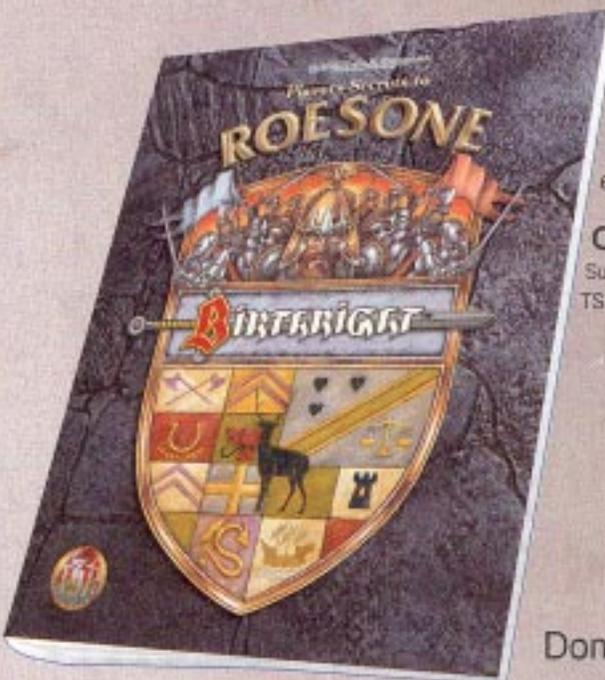






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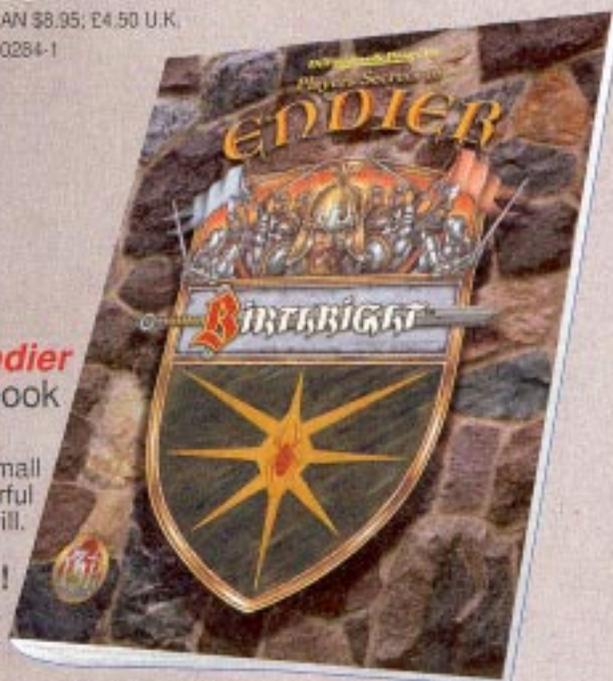


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computer games that call themselves “role-playing” confuse dice rolling and monster slashing with actual characterization and growth. We looked at two computer role-playing games that are relatively new.

Citadel of the Dead is the first.

In six words: I thought *Citadel* was a ripoff! Compared to *Citadel of the Dead*, I'd call *D!-Zone* the best computer game to hit the market in decades (See the *D!-Zone review/flame in issue #217—Wolfgang*).

Citadel is a primitive, old-style *Bard's Tale* kind of game without all the features, with fewer spells, with less interesting and intuitive character types and items—and it's slower and harder to use!

Jay: It's so trashy that we might not have bothered including it in our review, but like *D-Zone*, the box hype is very in-your-face. And it's not a bargain-basement old product: the copyright date is 1994! Apparently, RJ Best is trying to market this as a modern, super-intricate roleplaying experience (best one available for the Mac, the box crows!)

Dee: I say, buy *Might and Magic* and ignore this turkey. Some of *Citadel's* “features” include: 11 total magician spells and 10 total clerical spells, all the standard character classes (plus samurai, though the minimal back story gives no indication of mythos), standard attributes, poor documentation (you have no idea what types of weapons and armor a class can use except through experimentation); mediocre sound effects (mostly grunts and clangs); no automapping . . . I hope you get the picture. Not only is it utterly derivative, but it doesn't do the cliches particularly well. No stars.

Jay: I always mention the manuals, and this one sinks to new depths. It's a grand total of 10 pages, including installation instructions, table of contents, and back story. Just one of its many charms is that it refers you to “the roller” without ever identifying which icon on the screen this is! (Not only that, but the manual also never refers to “the roller” again.) In fact, there are no screen shots at all to help you identify the screen icons.

Other astounding facts that Dee couldn't bear to mention: Your default character name is Dufus, which gives a good indication of how seriously the designers took the fantasy genre; the combat interface resembles Electronic Arts' old *Standing Stones* for the Apple (not Macintosh)—which shows how dated it is!

Monsters attack dead bodies and dead bodies absorb hits. Samurai can't use swords. Also—no, I can't go on. This is, simply, the worst dungeon-crawl, you-do-the-mapping, oops-you're-in-a-trap-and-your-torch-went-out, mindless click-the-“attack”-button game I've seen in a decade. The black and white dungeon we played in 1984 was better than this, though *Citadel* does have nice color graphics. Just dumb. No stars.

Realms of Arkania: Star Trail

For IBM/DOS

Published by Sir-Tech Software

Requires: 20 MHz 386 or faster (33 recommended), VGA graphics, 4 MB RAM, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, DOS 5.0 or higher, mouse, 580 kB conventional memory, and at least 24 Meg of hard drive space

Jay: Whew! Going from *Citadel of the Dead* to *Realms of Arkania: Star Trail* is a bit like going from baby food to *palak paneer* (pureed spinach) at an Indian restaurant. They both look the same at first, but baby food is just green mush, and palak paneer is green mush with a sophisticated blending of spices, flavors and textures. *Star Trail* bears superficial resemblance to *Citadel* in interface and look, but it's a quantum level more sophisticated and involved. Unfortunately, it's not quite as much more fun as you'd expect.

Dee: Where *Citadel* was just plain dumb and left out everything, *Star Trail* perhaps goes a bit too far the other way; everything's in here but the kitchen sink, and I don't doubt we'll come across it later!

First, *Star Trail* is the second game in a trilogy that started with *Realms of Arkania: Blade of Destiny*. This is important because you can upload your *Blade of*

Destiny adventurers into *Star Trail* to continue their campaign. Which might explain a few things. More about this later.

The second thing you need to know is that the *Realms of Arkania* series is based on Germany's most popular role-playing game (*Das Schwarze Auge*, by Schmidt Spiele—*Teutonic Wolf*, according to the box. This also explains a few things. Apparently, German role-players are heavily into statistics (in fact, the rules say that the games' method of rolling attributes is “as true to role-playing as a game can get”).
Yow!

Jay: Each character has seven positive statistics—the usual assortment of wisdom, dexterity, strength and charisma. They distinguish between agility and dexterity. Only courage and intuition offer a little spice. But that's not all. Each character also has seven negative statistics, including avarice, curiosity, superstition, and the ever-popular necrophobia. These sound interesting but have only limited game effect—necrophobia, for instance, determines how likely a character is to run away from undead monsters. You can add to your positive stats if you're willing to boost your negative ones as well.

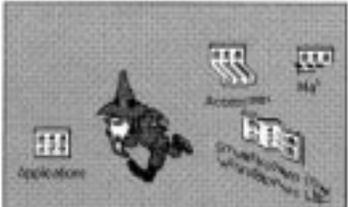
But that's still not all! Three “pages” of skills are attached to various statistics, and another three if you're a magic-using character. Admittedly, all the rolling and skill adds can be handled by the computer,

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but we played on "Advanced" level and got the full number-crunching treatment.

Dee: Once you're into the game, the interface is reasonably easy to use and provides plenty of information. *Star Trail* has auto-mapping and extensive character manipulation (you can switch goodies between characters, re-arm, examine possessions, and remind yourself of the stats and skills of all six of your party members). Interacting with your environment is also pretty easy: buttons let you talk, buy and sell, and move around inside a location (for instance, you can choose where to sit at the inn). When you're out on the trail, you can arrange watches, hunt (for food or herbs), and let characters practice their spells and healing arts on each other.

Jay: But that's *still* not all! One of the coolest features is a diary that your party carries with them. Each encounter is recorded in this diary so that you can remind yourself of what NPCs' names are, what information they've given you, and what-all has been going on during the game. Even better, you the player can make entries and notes to yourself. There's a search feature that allows you to comb through the pages to find name or object references.

Dee: So, this is a wonderful game, right? As true to role-playing as a game can get, and all the information you could possibly desire, right? Couldn't ask for anything more, right?

Jay: Right! I want less! Remember when Dee mentioned that this is the second game in a trilogy? Perhaps because of this, your starting party of "first level" characters is pretty helpless. In fact, the strategy guide (thoughtfully provided by Sir-Tech to dauntless reviewers) suggests creating extra characters, taking their default stuff and selling it, and then ditching them for new recruits. This strategy lets your starting characters begin the game with more equipment than the game normally allows. They also recommend not getting too attached to more than one initial character: during your "adventures" you're not supposed to mind losing the others as long as your chosen one gains enough experience to advance. Do this six times, and you've finally got a party ready to start the game!

Dee: So the question is, why not just scale the character creation system to provide decent characters up front and avoid all these contortions? I suppose they expect you'll bring in your beefy *Blade of Destiny* party and avoid this problem. Perhaps you're the kind of player who'll pop for the earlier game in the series because you want to play them in order. I'm not; I want to play the game I bought and be able to enjoy it.

Jay: So you're finally ready to go out adventuring. You've talked to the shifty-eyed man and the seemingly-friendly elf, and you have several possible quests (the

Salamander Stone, the Star Trail axe, and more). What do you do? Just walk up to a signpost pointing the way out of town, and you're on the wilderness travel screen. You can plan well in advance, or you can travel day by day; it doesn't seem to matter. You'll have plenty of random encounters either way, and enough of them are deadly that you'll end up rethinking your plans. As I mentioned, we have the hint book, and it gives a walk-through (to help reviewers see all the good stuff in the game?). Even with the hints (which aren't always accurate), the game is a bit tedious and random. It seems to be slanted toward chaos: for example, your own healers may give the other party members deadly diseases (the manual recommends you always treat wounds to avoid tetanus, but my elf gave characters tetanus about 20% of the time she attempted treating them), unexplained wilderness encounters (Look, says the elf maid, I'm riding a moose!), and failed skill-increase attempts. Why can't a game be challenging without being whimsically evil?

Dee: Despite these complaints, there's lots to see and do in *Star Trail*, and a fun little combat system that's too deadly but still interesting. (Don't let the computer run your characters during battles—it's apt to get them killed!) We barely scratched the surface of the story, so I'm sure there are plenty of quests to keep you busy. If you like this sort of game, *Star Trail* is a fine addition to your collection: you won't see much that's new and innovative in game design or game play, but the interface and information are well handled and easy to use. Being partial to dungeon-party games myself, I give *Star Trail* a *** rating, though I must say that trying to identify with six characters at once through all this information makes me want to load *Landstalker* back into my SEGA. And I'd like to add that true role-playing has yet to come to the computer, despite the claims of computer fantasy games.

Jay: *Star Trail* does let you print out your characters' stats, so you can have two or three pages of hard copy to fiddle with—I still read paper better than electronic screens. I found this game too frustrating really to want to play it a lot—horse-flies attacked and all my party members lost two points of Charisma for four days, due to pock-marks! It may be a true-to-life random encounter, but it's just not my idea of fun. I give it ** 1/2.

Dee: That's all for now, folks. We'll see you in two months with four new reviews. Until then, keep those cards and letters coming! Ciao.

Blob

Continued from page 8

read to us? If it was possible it seemed to us that there could be no better way to spend an afternoon. Better yet, our dad seemed to approve of the notion and told us that he would like to play too. I have heard that a lot of fathers take their sons to baseball games when they want to spend a little quality time. I have been to a couple of baseball games. Quite frankly, I don't see the attraction.

My father and I have slain dragons together,

Pretty cool if you ask me.

Over a decade has passed since that fateful day. I am married now with two kids (three kids if you count my game company).

My brother, Bryan, works for FASA. Not only is he doing the same job I did three years ago, but he seems better suited to it. I am trying real hard to be happy for him.

Gaming has become my hobby and my profession. I have had some success and have eaten a lot of rice and a lot of noodles, but it is still the best job I have ever had.

My little girl is walking and talking up a storm. My mother passed away a few years back, but I still have the books she read to me. My wife intends to start reading *The Hobbit* to my daughter as soon as my son can sit still for an hour at a time.

This year I used my business card to get into the Consumer Electronics Show and brought back a briefcase full of crap. I guess my old man had it figured out pretty good after all.

Ω

Mike Nystul is a game designer and the owner of Pariah Press, publisher of the Whispering Vault horror RPG. He is also the only person to have an AD&D® game spell named after him, rather than after his character.



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MASTERING MAGIC CARDS

George H. Baxter & Larry W. Smith, Ph.D.

Wordware Publishing 1-55622-457-5

\$15.95

I admit it; I've been lured into the *Magic: the Gathering* phenomenon. But for a variety of reasons, I've been quicker to acquire a sizable number of cards than to pick up practical playing experience. The prospect of a detailed independent field guide, devoted both to dueling strategy and to navigating the complex community of *Magic* players, seemed too good to be true.

And, in fact, it is. *Mastering Magic Cards* is well-meant, but it suffers from two serious flaws that limit its usefulness to novice gamers. The proportion of examples to explanations is badly out of balance, and authors George Baxter and Larry Smith give far too little attention to matters of trading, finding opponents, and keeping up with the nearly constant evolution of the game's rules and protocols.

In part, the latter decision is a deliberate design choice. The books subtitle is "An Introduction to the Art of Masterful Deck Construction", and the primary emphasis is on the mechanics of building playing decks. But the books introduction, and its wide distribution, make it equally clear that Baxter's and Smith's intended audience includes brand-new players, and the authors drop these novices rapidly into deep water without first sketching in a map of the ocean.

Guidance on trading and plugging into the *Magic* network isn't entirely absent. But the trading lore is unhelpfully divided; a section near the beginning lists a series of specific trades but gives little guidance on negotiation, while a short chapter near the end discusses negotiating strategy while giving few illustrations. Contributor Corey Segall glibly classes card-traders as guppies, fish, and sharks, but only provides detailed examples of a veteran shark on the prowl. Similarly, there is little help for the deck-owner looking for fellow gamers with whom to duel or trade.

Likewise, while the authors make a few specific comments differentiating tournament decks from those better suited to "friendly play", there is almost no discussion of specific tournament requirements or formats and virtually no help for the reader who's uncertain about where to find fellow gamers in his local area. In particular, the Duelists' Convocation organization is identified by name only in an appendix list-entry (but not in the "Organizations" appendix!), and none of the appendices lists major conventions or tournament organizers. Even granting that no printed book can hope to be completely up-to-date in the realm of *Magic* rules and networks, the omissions are serious and puzzling.

There are other problems and eccentricities as well. A major table purports to list the complete contents of a hypothetical starter

deck and five booster packs, but leaves out one of the booster packs entirely and omits cards from three others as well as the starter deck. The text switches unpredictably from third person to first person, often with no clue as to which collaborator is addressing the reader. The "complete list" of cards in the final appendix isn't; the special-release "Nathalni Dragon" card illustrated by Michael Whelan isn't there, nor are any of the cards offered to purchasers of the *M:tG* novels. (Deadlines might possibly account for the latter omission, but not for the former.) And the glossary includes several oddities: "pulling a Steve" is surely an in-joke, and what the authors refer to as "hand destruction" is more commonly called "card denial"

For all its defects, *Mastering Magic Cards* does give a competent overview of the basics of deck design, though the prose is decidedly choppy and many of the examples rely on now-scarce cards from the *Legends* expansion set. But neither the uneven presentation nor the mostly predictable sample decks justify the volume's \$15.95 price tag. For that money, novice duelist will get better value from an online computer service's *Magic* discussion area or a subscription to one of the card-collectors' magazines. Baxter and Smith clearly mean well, but their execution isn't skilled enough to make this book a worthwhile purchase.

EXCALIBUR

Richard Gilliam, Martin H. Greenberg & Edward E. Kramer eds.
Warner 0-446-67084-7 \$14.99

You'd think that two dozen stories, each touching somehow on the single most famous sword in all of legend, would make for a repetitive anthology. The editors of *Excalibur*, however, have neatly avoided this potential pitfall and provided readers with a selection of tales that ranges from mystical to romantic to wicked, with a couple of side trips into the absurd for good measure.

One of their tactics is not to interpret the books title too narrowly. Several tales, for instance, concern the sword the boy Arthur pulls from a stone, thereby establishing his right to England's throne. Strictly speaking, this is debatable scholarship, because conventional Arthurian lore holds that Excalibur was a later gift from the Lady of the Lake. Judith Tarr's "Silver, Stone, and Steel" reconciles the matter in a delicately intricate story twining several strands of myth together, but Richard Lee Byers and Brad Strickland (among others) simply assume the two blades are one without thought or explanation.

The Lady of the Lake also appears in some form in several other stories. Among these are readable entries from Susan Schwartz and Eric Lustbader, but perhaps the most compelling of this subset is Susan Dexter's haunting "Where Bestowed," wherein a knight seeking Excalibur finds himself wielding an unexpected weapon. Merlin, too, is well-represented, though

only Jody Lynn Nye entirely resists the impulse to turn the old wizard into an antagonist of some kind. Nye's "Sword Practice" is, in fact, a gentle tale of a young King Arthur that contrasts pleasantly with the books often dark, often high-flown tone.

Other tales connect to Excalibur tangentially at best. Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Controlling the Sword" is one, its blade connected to Arthur's only by implication, but it's a powerful coming-of-age tale nonetheless. Randy Miller offers a wry reprise of the Arthurian legend wherein Arturo Reyes is a natural-born baseball star whose success comes in part from a very special bat. But where Miller's and Rusch's stories visibly, if obliquely, fit the theme, other choices seem out of place. Diana Gabaldon's "Surgeon's Steel" skillfully evokes its historical Scottish setting but stretches its sword-metaphor to awkward limits. Owl Goingback's contemporary chronicle of a crippled young Indian, his Vietnam-soldier brother, and an eagle-feather bustle is an enigma; though a compelling tale, its imagery and mythcraft isn't remotely parallel to Arthur's. The story is well-told, but it doesn't fit the book.

One last tale deserves mention for its sheer audacity—Esther Friesner's "Goldie, Lox, and the Three Excalibearers" Set convincingly in a Jewish deli in New York City, it finds waitress Goldie Berman forced to deal with Merlin, Morgan le Fay, and their insistence that she's uniquely qualified to assume guardianship of Excalibur. Friesner's handling of the assorted confrontations is hilarious and good-hearted, and like Nye's story, acts as an appealing counterpoint to its moodier companions.

There are also half a dozen poems in the anthology, but of these, only T. Winter-Damon's lyric in an Old English mode is truly distinctive. Though most of the verse is indifferent, and several of the stories are at best tenuously connected to the stated theme, *Excalibur* as a whole is a solid, well-produced volume. Those interested in Arthurian lore, and those merely interested in well-told stories, will both find it worthwhile.

THE FAERY CONVENTION

Brett Davis
Baen 0-671-87656-2 \$5.99

There are goblins with friends in the Senate, wizards building weapons for the Pentagon, and leprechauns in the bars on Capitol Hill. But though Brett Davis's first novel has a positively intriguing premise, the author's imagination exceeds his ability to keep a story under control.

Davis's protagonist is Joe Cork, half-elven investigator for the Senate Supernatural Affairs Committee. It's Cork's job, together with Senatorial aide Ellen King, to make sure that the impending Faery Convention goes off smoothly. If all goes well, representatives of America's population of

supernatural beings will meet to ratify the "Grimm Accord", establishing a faery homeland in territory ceded by Texas and Oklahoma. But someone is out to sabotage the convention, and it's Cork's job to keep things on track.

Events, however, get out of hand considerably faster than Joe can herd them together again. A previously unsuspected race of shapeshifters proves responsible for one plot against the Accord—but one turns his coat and joins Joe's team. Joe's Senate boss seeks magical help from the human wizard Merlin (not the original Arthurian character, but a descendant)—but Merlin proves to have his own agenda, and Joe soon learns that both the Senator and the President are in Merlin's pocket. Meanwhile, the remaining shapeshifters are still on the loose . . .

Davis is simply trying to keep too many balls in the air at once, and it doesn't help that the crowded thriller-oriented plot is offset by a light, often comic narrative tone. Several key story elements don't get enough attention to be convincing, among them the supposed utter secrecy surrounding the shapeshifter race. Davis portrays them as the previously unknown source of vampire and werewolf legends, but AD&D® players and folklore enthusiasts will easily recognize them as variant doppelgangers. Also too convenient is the initial assertion that mixed-breed Joe can't work faery magic, followed later by the revelation that yes, he can.

Last but not least, Davis raises and then ducks two serious thematic issues. There are clear parallels between the Grimm Accord and real-world politics, both to federal policy toward Indians and to the Communist witch hunts of the 1950s. But as the Accord disintegrates, so does any serious examination of the real problems for supernaturals trying to co-exist with humanity. Second and even more troubling is Davis's casual resolution to the assorted crises: rogue shapeshifter Othello simply assumes the President's form and takes over. While the original President's death is technically accidental, Davis and his characters utterly ignore the ethical issues and consequences of their action. This is a strange way for the "good guys" to come out on top, and the novel's blend of comedy and amorality is extremely unsettling.

It's also frustrating, because it's hard to tell from *The Faery Convention* where Brett Davis's literary strengths may lie. There are clever ideas in this novel, some genuinely amusing moments, and a fair amount of suspense, but they're all thrown together in regrettably cluttered fashion. What Davis needs is a tighter sense of focus, and we'll have to wait for another book to see if he finds it.

SUCH PAIN

Don Bassingthwaite
HarperPrism 0-06-105463-1 \$4.99

Is there a role-playing game system on

the market these days that doesn't have a series of tie-in novels to go with it? (Don't answer that; I'm not sure I want to know.) But White Wolfs move into the world of prose fiction looks to be more than an effort to cash in on the popularity of the *World of Darkness* milieu, and Don Basingthwaite's new MAGE* novel aptly illustrates the point.

Kate Sanders is a Technomancer, part of an order of mages dedicated to rationalism and order. Her assignment: to investigate a new San Francisco-based dance club called Pan's, which may be a front for a rival mage-group and a nexus of mystical power. And so it is, though not the way she expects: its secret owner, super-rich Aaron Barry, is a devotee of the Cult of Ecstasy, gathering energy from the sheer emotional power of the club's patrons. But the traditional opponents must join forces to unravel the puzzle posed by Stefan, a memory-clouded stranger.

Basingthwaite draws effectively on the rich background of the MAGE game setting, but his focus stays firmly on his three protagonists. Part of the mystery concerns a personal demon from Aaron's past, and the hunt leads to a mysterious death-mage called Saffleur who may have more of a connection to Stefan than he admits. There's good character work here, even for bit players like TV siren Tiffany LaRouche, and Basingthwaite's portrait of the wilder side of San Francisco is unabashed without wallowing in prurience. And the MAGE* world's rules of magic get a good workout without the narrative's descending into lecture-mode.

One modest quibble warrants notice—it's a little too much of a coincidence when a seemingly minor character, Kate's supervising Technomancer, proves late in the game to have a connection of her own with Saffleur and Stefan. But that's a minor criticism of a mostly well-stitched plot, and Basingthwaite weaves a finale that is meaningful yet not overdone.

That makes *Such Pain* a promising debut and a good introduction to the MAGE universe. That's good news for White Wolf, whose foray into publishing includes a number of direct ventures in addition to these novels under HarperPrism's imprint. Just one caveat: some booksellers have placed the *World of Darkness* novels in the "young adult horror" section, where they emphatically don't belong. These are mature books for mature readers, and should be treated as such.

THE PRINTER'S DEVIL

Chico Kidd

Baen 0-671-87668-6 \$5.99

If there's a single word that describes *The Printer's Devil*, it's "distinctive." That's no small achievement in genre fantasy, where it often seems as if every plot has been used a thousand times over and where English history seemingly begins with King Arthur and ends with Shakespeare.

Indeed, Chico Kidd's plot, reduced to its

barest bones, is familiar—a malevolent ghost possesses an ordinary young man from the present and sets about raising darker spirits still, much to the dismay of our hero's significant other. It's in the execution that Kidd brings freshness to the scenario.

The first distinctive characteristic is the mechanism of the magic. Modern-day Alan Bellman is, aptly, a bell-ringer by avocation, and it is on a visit to an obscure bell-tower in the English countryside that he runs across the first clue to the legacy of Roger Southwell. Southwell, it seems, was connected with noted bell-ringer Fabian Stedman (the latter a genuine historical figure), but there is also an alchemical mystery to unravel.

Southwell and Stedman, however, are not the predictable Elizabethans usually encountered in these literary waters. Instead, they're denizens of the 17th century, and Kidd's evocations of the period resonate with the unique religious and political tensions of that post-Elizabethan day. And the Stedman manuscript that forms part of Kidd's tale is plausibly peppered with scraps of Latin, helpfully translated in footnotes.

Kidd wields an assured hand over the novel's sometimes complicated point-of-view. We get a pleasant, low-key sense of the relationship between Alan and photographer Kim Sotheran, and a softly foreboding account of Alan's growing subservience to the machinations of Southwell's ghost. Kidd's skill in this regard is all the more remarkable in a first novel.

Finally, the quiet drama of the piece is sustained even through an intense climax whose pyrotechnics are as much emotional as they are ectoplasmic. It's difficult to present something fresh in a confrontation-with-Hell sequence, but Kidd pulls the feat off admirably.

The result is that *The Printer's Devil* is a surprisingly affectionate, introspective tale of supernatural suspense, wherein ghostly and diabolic forces twine with a love of art and scholarship to produce one of the most readable such yarns to appear in quite some time.

Recurring Roles

The "Deep Space Nine" side of the Star Trek franchise is still batting a thousand on the literary front; *Valhalla* (Pocket, \$5.50) is one of the infrequent Trek books that's also good traditional science fiction. Nathan Archer handles the "sentient computer" scenario, well-used in the Trek universe, with sophistication and intelligence. Meanwhile, Simon Hawke's *Blaze of Glory* (Pocket, \$5.50) takes the "Next Generation" crew into a confrontation with a colorful space pirate who appears to be in league with the Romulans. It's a smooth tale, but whoever named the world of K'Trall has seen the sixth movie (guest-starring Kim Cattrall) too many times. . . .

The news from Dominia is less pleasant.

Shattered Chains (HarperPrism, \$4.99) is a serious mistake by any measure. Writer Clayton Emery's tone in this book, and in its immediate predecessor, is sharply different from that of William Forstchen's *Arena*—but the centerpiece of this tale is the arrival of a major character from *Arena* in the camp of would-be wizard-fighters Gull and Greensleeves. Neither writer's work is well-served by the admixture. Fans of the *Magic*: the Gathering milieu should be patient; sources suggest that much better material than this is forthcoming.

Dagger Magic (Ace, \$19.95) takes Katherine Kurtz's and Deborah Turner Harris's "Adept" series to hardcover, and improves somewhat on the rushed third book. Oddly, though, they're about a year behind Hollywood, with a plot that recalls the recent film version of *The Shadow*. With Mercedes Lackey's "Diana Tregarde" series on indefinite hiatus, readers looking for straightforward occult suspense should look here.

Also worth seeking out is *Above the Lower Sky* (AvoNova Morrow, \$23.00), Tom Deitz's first venture into hardcover. Unconnected to his previous series, this novel combines a light science-fictional setting with Southwestern Indian lore and a battle between marine-bound magical opponents that recalls Diane Duane's *Deep Wizardry*. Deitz is always entertaining, and you won't find a more skillful practitioner of cross-cultural fantasy.

And speaking of cross-cultural work, you won't find a stranger tale in that mold than *All-Consuming Fire* (Doctor Who Books, \$5.95 US) from Andy Lane. Lane throws the good Doctor and his companions together with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, in a tale that rambles from England to India and from there to worlds infinitely farther away. Lane has done a good deal of Sherlockian homework for this project, and though both Whovians and Holmes fans are liable to brand the tale as implausible in the extreme, it's done with style and narrative sophistication.

Ω



Hunting for your next game convention?

If you're looking for a good time gaming, turn to this issue's "Convention Calendar" for current information on where the fun is.

The waters burst forth at the beginning as they will flow together at the end, fuming in chaos as terrible as the Immortal War itself. Maelstroms swirled across entire oceans, and no rock could long survive above the waves. Until, finally, the gods created the Watershed and brought order to the oceans and the world....

As their task was done, the gods made a pact: they would leave this place to mortals, and journey to a far, ethereal home. This they did—all save Dassadec, the Sleepstealer, who treacherously remained behind. His act is known as the Great Betrayal....

—Excerpted from *A Breach in the Watershed*

“Absolutely nobody builds a more convincing fantasy realm than Doug Niles...any reader will come away from this book fully satisfied, yet wanting more.”

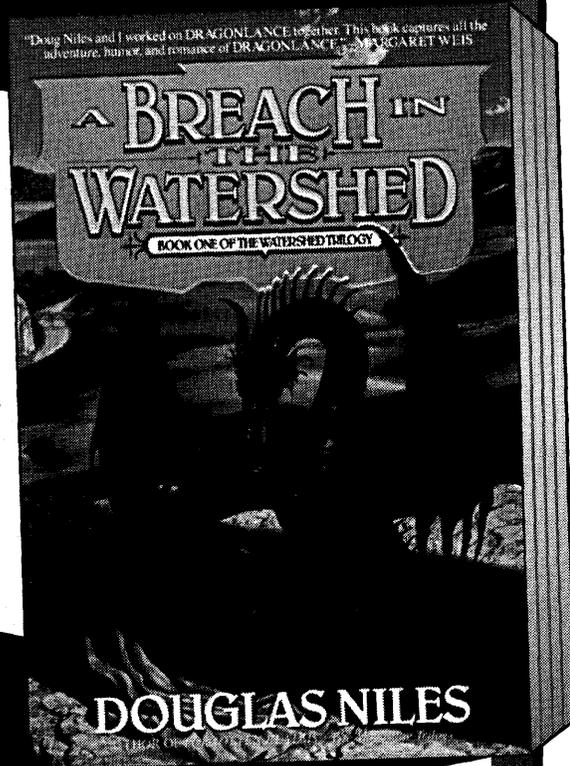
—R.A. SALVATORE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Siege of Darkness*

The first novel in an epic fantasy trilogy of a world where three magical waters feed three mystical lands.

DOUGLAS NILES

Bestselling author in the *Forgotten Realms* series

August Trade Paperback/\$13.00



Geldion's sword slashed across, connecting solidly.... The weapon flew out wide, out of Gary's grasp....

“Gary!” Diane cried, running desperately, reaching into the belt pouch Mickey had given her back in Tir na n'Og, looking for anything that might save the moment. Geldion snapped his head around, shifted as though he would strike Diane down first. His sword remained up high...and Diane's hand came up as well.... She pushed a little button and there came a flash, the likes of which startled Prince Geldion had never before witnessed. Blinded and thinking some evil sorcery had befallen him, Geldion stumbled backwards, and Diane...rushed into him....

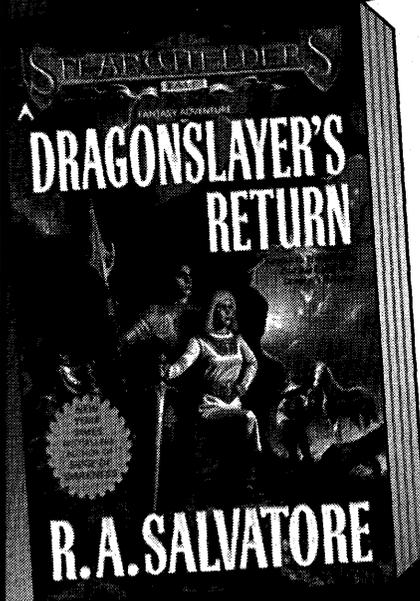
—Excerpted from *Dragonslayer's Return*

Gary Leger, the heroic Dragonslayer, must return to the land of Faerie for the ultimate challenge—to save the kingdom from the eternal curse of war.

R.A. SALVATORE

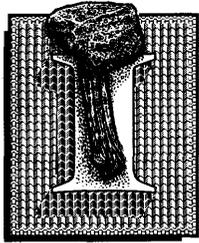
New York Times bestselling author

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ACE
SCIENCE
FICTION





Inside the dark tower, the sacrifices were going on night and day. They had started when the enemy first drew up outside the Necromancer's castle and began to erect their siege engines. The captives in the dungeons had gone first, which Dervain hadn't

heeded much; the poor wights were doomed regardless. But then the guards had begun to drag the castle servants off to the tower.

Dervain never looked up in that direction. No one did. He knew that there was power in blood, in its sacrifice. The cornerstones of the castle's foundations had been consecrated in human blood. And now, under siege by so strong an enemy, the Deathlord's situation was desperate. But it was a terrible thing to see a man he had known, spoken to, laughed with – to see him now in the bloodless ranks of the undead, marching with sightless eyes, animated by the Necromancer's will.

So far, none of Dervain's clansmen or crew had been taken to the tower. They were all hard at work fortifying the castle's walls. Yet he was quite aware that no one was exempt from their lord's need.

But Dervain's more immediate concern was with the main gate. It couldn't hold much longer under the constant assault. His ears still rang from the massive impact of the last catapult shot: stone breaking on stone, shaking it to its foundations. The castle had been built to withstand attack. Every granite block was precisely keyed into the next, each one carved with a glyph of bonding. Dervain had carved some of them himself, had helped to set the stones, to lay the spells intended to make the fortress an impregnable bastion against the Deathlord's enemies.

But now those enemies had drawn up their siege engines in front of the gate, and with the castle's towers broken they were advancing the catapults into even closer range, concentrating their aim on the massive granite keystone at the top of the gate arch. Dervain knew that only magecraft could direct their shots so true, with such force. When the keystone went, the entire gate would collapse, and then the enemy troops would pour in through the breach.

From the catwalk behind the battlement, he shouted down to his crew of stonemasons to hurry with that brace, to get it into place before the enemy could set up their catapults again. It was all they could do—keep reinforcing the wall and hope it would stand through another impact, and then another. Surrender wasn't an option for those who served the Necromancer. They would fight to the death, and beyond.

"Get it up there! Higher!" he directed the workers as they struggled with the thick timber brace, making sure it was precisely placed to reinforce the keystone. "Hold it!" The timber rang with the blows of heavy iron sledges hammering it into place, setting wedges to hold it firm. Dervain's clansmen all worked with desperate strength, their stocky, muscular arms and backs straining with the effort of their hammer blows; but the weariness showed on their sweating, haggard faces and the desperation in their eyes. They had all worked without respite since the siege began.

Breaking the Wall

By Lois Tilton

Illustrations by Larry Smith

As soon as the brace was set, Dervain pulled out a wood chisel from his belt and quickly carved the form of a bonding glyph into the timber, strengthening it with all the magecraft he possessed. He was a stonemason, not a carpenter, but he could work in wood if he must, just as the iron hammer in his belt would serve him as a weapon if the enemy finally broke through. He meant to try to break some of their heads, at least, before they brought him down.

There came a cry of warning, and even as Dervain grabbed for a support, he could feel the low whistle of the stone missile cutting through the air just before its impact. It struck with a force that tore his grip away and flung him across the catwalk, a deafening crash that seemed to split his skull in half. It was a moment before he could open his eyes, before he could grasp that the impact had thrown him against the footing of a crenel and he was still alive. Another moment before he was able to pull himself shakily to his feet, ears ringing. But the keystone was still in place, the wall battered but still standing. The brace had held. This time.

Below, his crew of stonemasons was already at work setting more shoring timbers. From the shattered ruins of the watchtowers, soldiers kept up the defense, arm-weary archers firing one arrow after the other, armorers frantically striving to repair the cracked arm of a ballista. They were conscripts, as Dervain and his clansmen were, as all were who served the Deathlord, yet they fought with the same desperation as free-willed men—for their lives.

On the back of Dervain's right hand was the scar of a brand, whitened by age, for he had been in the Necromancer's service for many years and rarely noticed the mark anymore. It was a glyph of compulsion, yet he needed no compulsion now to reach for his chisel, to complete the carving of the symbols that would fortify the strength of the beam bracing the keystone. But the chisel was gone; it had flown out of his hand as the last catapult shot hit. Dervain swore. Had it fallen off the catwalk? No, there, on the edge. He bent down for it, still dizzy from the blow, still so deafened that he couldn't hear the warning cry from the tower when another stone flew from the catapult's long arm, straight for the keystone of the castle's main gate.

He lay buried beneath a cairn of stone. Great square blocks, and broken ones, and sharp-edged shards. It had been either luck or unconscious magecraft that had kept him from being crushed by the falling blocks as the gate collapsed. His hammer, by another miracle, was still clutched in his right hand. The slab above him sat at an angle, roofing the space where he lay trapped beneath tons of fallen stone. Even the slightest shift might bring all the crushing weight down on him.

But there was a dim light filtering through, and air, which gave him hope. He had to try to dig himself out, or be buried here alive. He tried to breathe, coughed, and flinched with the pain of broken ribs. But the pain meant that he was still alive. And with that knowledge came a sharp burning sensation in his right hand, the touch of his lord's will: *Rise up! Fight!*

Dervain had seen other men—slaves, tortured

captives—writhe and scream aloud under the touch of the Necromancer's mind, but he had always served willingly, had submitted without protest to the branding, knowing protest would be futile. He had come to the castle as part of the conscript levy of his people, a raw apprentice stone-cutter, but he had been rewarded for his service. He was now a master both of masonry and magecraft, a valued servant, as loyal as it was possible to be to a master who placed no value on loyalty.

He used his skills now, groped to discover the shape of the stones, how stable they were, whether there were any openings he could crawl through to escape. Almost at once, his fingers encountered a groove carved into a smooth face, and he traced the familiar shape to the sharp broken edge of the slab, where the sudden heat made him snatch his hand away. It was the bonding glyph, the master-glyph of the keystone, and it had been broken in half, snapped by no ordinary force! Dervain suddenly caught his breath at the thought of such concentrated power directed against him. This went beyond mere magecraft, it was wizardry on a level to match the Necromancer's own!

Compared to it, Dervain's own craft was minor, but was it enough to free him? He could move within the confines of his tomb of stone, and wriggling painfully on his belly, feeling his way through the dark, he found an opening. Too small for him to crawl through—Dervain's people were short of stature, but stocky and broad shouldered. Yet if he could wedge more stone underneath that end of the slab, he might be able to lever it up just enough that he could squeeze underneath. First, though, working by touch in the dark, he took a scribe from his belt and began to scratch a stabilizing glyph into the keystone, so it couldn't shift and come down on him.

With his broken ribs, the work was slow and agonizing. And even as he made progress toward the light, his progress was matched by a sinking sensation of despair in his heart. Only yards away from where he was trapped, men were fighting now, killing each other. He could hear their screams, the sobs and prayers of the dying. This was what he would emerge into if he managed to dig his way out. There would be no quarter given in this battle, only death. And not even death would release the servants of the Necromancer. The brand on his hand throbbed, reminding him that he was not free to choose.

Dervain managed at last, using all his magecraft and his physical strength, to lever the slab of the cracked keystone a few inches higher, enough for him to squeeze under it. Now, ahead of him: the light, the clash of battle. Only loose rubble blocked his way, and he used his hammer to dig his way through it. He was no more than an arm's length from the light when his hammer caught on a larger piece of stone, shifted it. The mass of broken stone it had been supporting slipped, and instantly the makeshift tunnel collapsed, the rockslide fell down on him—tons of sharp, broken shards:

He barely managed to bring up his arms in time to protect his face. When he finally tried to move them and open his eyes, he found himself buried in the dark, and the air was so thick with rock dust it choked him when he tried to breathe. He gasped for breath; he was suffocating,

dying! But his people had been bred for generations in the caves and tunnels of the mountains, and he did not quite panic. Instead he used his shirt to filter the dust from the air, and the terror subsided a little. He had been so close to the surface, he could still manage to dig himself out. Only a few more feet.

So once more he began to dig, compelled now by his own desperation not to be buried here alive. After a while, breath came harder, and his head started to pound with the exertion of his efforts. There was a taste of bloody metal in his mouth, and his tongue was thick and dry, clogged with dust.

But he broke through at last, into the light, into the free air, and for a moment he could only gasp for breath, inhaling it deep into his lungs. Then, on his knees in the rock pile, eyes blinking in the light, he took in the situation. The entire gate arch had collapsed, and now the outer ward of the castle was a battlefield, crowded with a confused mass of men, all intent on killing each other. Many of them were already dead, but still fighting, slaves to the Necromancer's will. With a shock, Dervain recognized one of his own clansmen, Balorn, among the ranks of the undead, the shape of his skull distorted from some terrible mortal blow. For a moment, in pain and still dizzy, Dervain hesitated. How could he go down into that? He was no soldier; he had no armor, no weapon but his hammer. But even as the doubt entered his mind, the throb of compulsion came, stronger than he had ever felt it before: *Rise up! Fight! Kill them all!*

Accepting his fate, Dervain got to his feet, climbed down from the broken heap of stones that had been the castle's wall, and charged into the fight, shouting the ancient war cry of his people. One of the enemy spotted him coming, whirled to meet him with his sword. His opponent's face was blood-spattered, teeth bared in battle frenzy, but Dervain saw suddenly that he was beardless, only a boy. How could he kill a boy? But the boy had no such hesitation, instantly taking a sword cut at Dervain's belly that made him jump backward to escape being gutted. Then it was kill or be killed, and Dervain did his best, but his weapon was no warhammer, his ribs were broken, and his hands already cut and blistered from shifting the shattered stones. It was all he could do to evade his enemy's sword.

Suddenly the boy staggered, blood burst from his mouth, and he fell slowly with a spear thrust through his back. Dervain looked up to thank his rescuer but found himself staring into a gray face with flat, lifeless eyes. Controlling his revulsion, he bent to pick up the dead boy's sword, a more effective weapon than his hammer had proved to be.

More of the enemy were converging now on this part of the field. The lich who had saved Dervain's life fell to the furious swords of a knight—the undead were awkward fighters, too clumsy to defend themselves. This one lay harmless now, decapitated, returned to the death from which the Necromancer's will had summoned him. But the enemy knight turned next on Dervain, who again could only try to defend himself against an opponent in armor. He managed to deflect one stroke, but the next blow sent a shock running through his arm that made him

drop the sword from his numbed fingers.

It was over now. He was finished, no more strength to resist. He flung his arms wide, threw back his head, openly inviting his enemy to strike it off, because above all he wanted not to rise again, not to join the empty-eyed ranks of the undead. The knight raised his sword—

From the direction of the Necromancer's tower there came a flare of light, so blindingly bright that the eyes of all mortal men on the battlefield were dazzled; and a scream, pitched far above the range of mortal hearing, yet every man threw up his hands to protect his ears. At the same time, the brand on Dervain's hand suddenly flared in searing pain, as if the white-hot iron were once again being applied to his flesh. And everywhere within the castle, the undead were falling to the ground, where they burst into smoldering flame.

The Necromancer was dead. His power was gone, and everything he had bound to him was now freed.

Dervain simply stood where he was, stunned and exhausted, as everywhere the Necromancer's forces let their weapons fall to the ground. The knight who faced him slowly lowered his sword, shaking his head as one who could not believe what he had seen and heard. Both sides were looking around in wonder and relief to see the fighting stopped, no one with the strength left to strike another blow.

It was over. It was all over at last.

There had never been a shortage of dungeons in the Deathlord's castle, and the sacrifices had emptied them all. Dervain and his surviving clansmen found themselves locked into one dark, low-roofed cell, undoubtedly chosen by their captors as suitable confinement for their kind.

None of them were in any condition to care about the conditions, at first. They managed in the darkness to bind up each other's wounds as well as they could, but otherwise they had no strength to do anything but collapse onto the filthy straw of the cell.

It was a day before someone finally spoke the question aloud: "What now? What are they going to do to us?"

It was Badorn asking, younger brother of Balorn, whom Dervain had seen among the ranks of the undead. For a long moment there was an uneasy silence in the cell as no one answered, not wanting to reveal their innermost fears. Most of the possibilities facing them were grim: execution, torture, slavery. They were all well aware that their victorious enemy had no good reason for mercy toward the Deathlord's servants. These were men from the lands that had resisted his rule, who had banded together against him, putting aside other, more ancient enmities and feuds to fight against this common foe.

Finally Dervain realized they were all waiting for him to answer, looking to him for guidance. They were mostly his clansmen, and several of them had been stonemasons in his crew. And he alone among them was a mage.

"I think," he said carefully, "that if they meant to kill us, they would have done it by now."

"They'll send us to the mines," Dellin muttered bleakly. "Work us to death."

From a pile of dirty straw in one corner, Thainin, the worst-wounded among them, painfully lifted his head.

"Easiest to just let us die down in this hole. Less trouble than an execution."

"But we had no choice!" Badorn burst out, holding up his hand with its recently branded scar. "And we were only stonemasons, not soldiers!"

Dervain said nothing. Their people had been subjugated by the Necromancer's armies generations ago, had learned the futility of resistance. They had lived peacefully under his rule, and even prospered. There was a cost, of course: the annual levy of young people into the Deathlord's service, from which few of them ever returned. But no one had to force Dervain to go. He had welcomed the opportunity, given his hand willingly to the brand in exchange for the craft he would learn. And was there a difference, really, between the soldier who bore a sword in the Necromancer's service and the stonemason who built his dungeons?

Who built his dungeons!

Dervain got abruptly to his knees, wincing from the pain in his ribs. Kneeling at the wall, he traced the shape of the stones with his hands, wishing there were more light in the cell. As a senior stonemason, he knew the plan of most of the castle, excepting only the Necromancer's tower.

Whispering, he asked, "Who has any tools? Anything that could serve?"

In a moment, most of the others were crowded around him, handing him belt buckles, nails, spoons, even a knife. Their captors had taken their weapons but not searched them thoroughly. "You think we can dig our way out of here?" Dellin asked.

"If anyone can," Dervain answered. "We must be somewhere below the southwest corner of the outer ward." His hands finally located the stone he sought. "This one, yes." Using a nail as a scribe, he incised the glyph of unbonding onto the face of the stone, and then the one adjoining. He exhaled in relief as the mortar between them cracked audibly.

Inspired by the chance for escape, they set to work in shifts, chipping the mortar loose to free the selected stones. Like Dervain, they could all work by touch in the dark. Their race was at home in the dark places under the earth, in caves and mines.

Then Thainin, at watch by the door, let out a warning hiss. Footsteps in the corridor outside the cell. Someone coming.

Even as they desperately tried to conceal the evidence of their work, the door was flung open and blinding torchlight filled the room. Guards in armor kicked them aside, and one held up a torch to illuminate the loosened stones with the unbonding glyph carved into them. "Magecraft!" one of them exclaimed angrily.

"Yes, I knew I could feel it here," said a voice that was softer, but grim. No one else dared speak.

Dervain blinked in the torchlight. There were four of the guards, but his attention was drawn immediately to the black-clad man with the staff who stood beyond the doorway of the cell, looking hard at each of the prisoners, one by one. Dervain dropped his eyes away before he could be trapped by the wizard's stare.

"The Necromancer is dead," the wizard said finally, breaking the silence. "His power is broken. It no longer

binds you."

His glance swept across the captives once again. "We mean no harm to those who were compelled to serve this evil against their will. But there is a mage among you. Deliver him up to us, and the rest of you can go free to return to your homes."

They were wrong, Dervain thought, if they thought he was more free, or the rest of them less. But it was a small enough price they were asking. "I am the mage," he said.

But to his surprise, the injured Thainin sat up. "No, I am the mage."

"They both lie," Dellin insisted. "I'm the one you want."

One by one, all the rest of them stepped forward as well, even young Badorn, although the enemy wizard barely glanced at him when he made his claim. "So be it," he said scornfully. "Then you may all rot in here together."

"No!" Dervain raised his hand. "The rest of them are only stonemasons. I am Dervain, master of magecraft." And concentrating with all his will, his hand traced a sign, which glowed faintly for an instant in the air before fading.

"So," said the wizard, satisfied. "Take him out of here."

The guards shoved Dervain out of the cell and into an adjoining one where the wizard could stand upright. "Leave us," he told the guards, then frowned at Dervain. "They are loyal, your people. Or perhaps they were compelled to defend you."

"We are clansmen," Dervain said, which was all the explanation necessary for one of his race.

"I could have mercy on them," the wizard went on. "But for such as you, who had the power to resist the Necromancer's evil—there can be no forgiveness. None."

"You make it sound . . . simple." Dervain looked down at his right hand. "We all bear the same brand."

The wizard scowled. "You claim you had no choice?"

Dervain slowly shook his head. That, he could not claim.

"No power to resist?"

"I never dared to oppose him. I never tried."

The wizard's lips twisted in contempt. "And because you never dared to use your power, thousands died. Thousands were sacrificed while you—and those like you—did nothing. You never tried."

"I . . . I *have* no great power! I'm only a stonemason. I used my craft in building walls, that was all."

"So you built walls." The wizard looked around the cell where they stood, with the filthy straw on the floor, the iron manacles bolted into the walls and floor, the scent of pain and hopelessness that seemed to breathe out from the stones. "Walls like these.

"So be it." With his staff, he struck the wall, and there was a sudden flare of heat so great that Dervain was forced to turn away to shield himself from it. When he faced the wall again, the stone blocks had melted and reformed into a sheet of solid rock.

"Behind this wall are your clansmen," the wizard told him. "We will see now if your power is strong enough to release them. If you can open this wall, they will go free, to return to their homes."

"And if I can't?"

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The wizard looked back from the doorway of the cell. "For their sakes, you had better hope that you can."

Then the door slammed shut, leaving Dervain in darkness, except for a faint red light that seemed to glow out of the wall. As he watched, it slowly faded. He dropped to his knees, overwhelmed by weariness and despair. He had built dungeons, he had been locked into dungeons. Now he was sealed into a tomb.

When he opened his eyes again, the dark was absolute. He got painfully to his feet, stepped up to the wall. The heat was fading quickly.

The enemy wizard hadn't left him a choice. He had labored before because his lord demanded it, for his own freedom, for his life. Now, for the sake of his clansmen, he had to do this thing, this new labor. Not for his own sake—the wizard had made it clear there was no forgiveness for one of his kind—but for theirs.

As he had done in the other cell, as he had when beneath the broken stones of the castle gate, he placed his hands on the wall, feeling with both his sense of touch and his magecraft for the keystone, for the glyph that would unlock the solid rock.

It was a cruel kind of test. If he succeeded, if he freed his people, then he would have proved he had the power to resist the Necromancer's compulsion, if he had only tried. But if his craft was too weak, if he proved that any attempt at resistance would have been in vain, then it was his clansmen who would pay for his failure.

Perhaps the enemy would have mercy if he failed. Perhaps. . . he ought to fail. He was only a stonemason; he had no choice in what he had done.

But he couldn't take the chance. For the sake of the rest of them, for the men who had stood up for him in that cell, he had to try.

But this wall was featureless and even. He couldn't see, and there were no blocks of stone or mortar joints to guide his touch, no carved glyphs or marks scratched into the smooth glossy surface. Nothing to help him, nothing to give him the key, not even after he had gone over every inch of the walls, every corner.

He tried again, this time abandoning his touch and concentrating solely on his magecraft, trying desperately to see through the darkness—some sign, some pattern. But there was only the blank wall, sealed against him by a power too great for him to master. He was failing—not by purpose or intent, but failing nonetheless. He would never escape this cell; his bones would lie here forever, entombed in the rock. And his clansmen, who had looked to him for leadership—would they be released once he was finally dead?

Surrendering hope, he cried out aloud, "You see! There was nothing I could have done! Nothing!"

There was no answer but his own empty words, echoing at him from the unforgiving walls.

And because in the end he couldn't give up, not as long as he still lived, Dervain tried again. This time he closed his eyes, even in the darkness, let his magecraft be his only sense, sight and touch altogether. And this time he felt it: the red shape of the heat, the form, the key.

He concentrated on it with all his will, and the image clarified in his mind. It was an intricate, interlocking

pattern, but he recognized its elements: the signs for bonding and breaking, for opening and closure, for fire and retribution—all combined into a single, complex glyph. To create such a design was far beyond his skills. He had never dared to use more than a single symbol at a time, for to combine them wrongly could have terrible, unforeseen consequences. And yet to activate this glyph, he knew he had but to trace its pattern the same as any other.

He opened his eyes, and the glyph was visible, written in glowing red heat upon the wall's surface. As he brought his hand closer to it, the color brightened, the heat intensified, like metal in the heart of the forge. It burned! He snatched his hand back, but as he did, the color began to fade, to disappear, even as he strove with all his will to preserve it there. Only when he raised his hand again did the glyph cease to fade.

Then Dervain's heart sank, for he realized just what kind of trap the wizard had set for him, the nature of his punishment. Yet he had a choice. There was always a choice. He saw that clearly now. He could turn away, let the symbol on the wall cool and fade away, and lie down to die in this place, knowing he condemned his kinsmen to die with him.

Or he could trace the shape of the glyph . . .

A sob rose in his throat for what he must do. So much he had endured already—pain, defeat, and imprisonment. But Dervain's people did not abandon each other, no matter what it might cost. Too many had died already in the Necromancer's service. His clansmen in the next cell were all that had survived.

He raised his hand, began to trace the shape of the first sign. The pain brought tears to his eyes, but he blinked them away so they did not blur the image he was tracing. The symbols for bonding and breaking. The scar on the back of his hand burned as if it were being branded into his flesh again.

The sign for opening. The scar began to blister, and Dervain had to clench his teeth against the pain to keep from snatching back his hand. Yet the wall remained solid.

The sign for closure. And now the heat from the wall was so intense it was singeing his beard, his face. He could smell burning flesh, and he dared not look at his hand.

Finally the glyph of retribution, and by now the image on the wall was glowing incandescent, so bright it hurt his eyes. No! Dervain protested to himself. *No, I can't.*

But he did, and whether it was his own will, or the compulsion of another's, or the spirits of the tortured souls that haunted the cell, he would never know. It was like plunging his hand into molten stone. A scream burst out of his throat, as terrible as any cry that had ever come from the Necromancer's tower.

Then the barrier before him melted and collapsed into a heap of formless rock. With his last shreds of consciousness, he could hear voices calling out his name.

The sunshine was dazzling after the darkness of the prison cell. The air was fresh and clean.

The small group of freed captives passed through the castle's broken gate slowly, for some of their clansmen were still unsteady on their feet, even after the healers had come to them. To the north, the mountains hovered like a low purple cloud on the horizon: the homeland of their people.

Dervain paused, blinking in the unaccustomed light. So long ago he had left the mountains, when he was just a lad. He wondered if there was anyone alive who might still know him there.

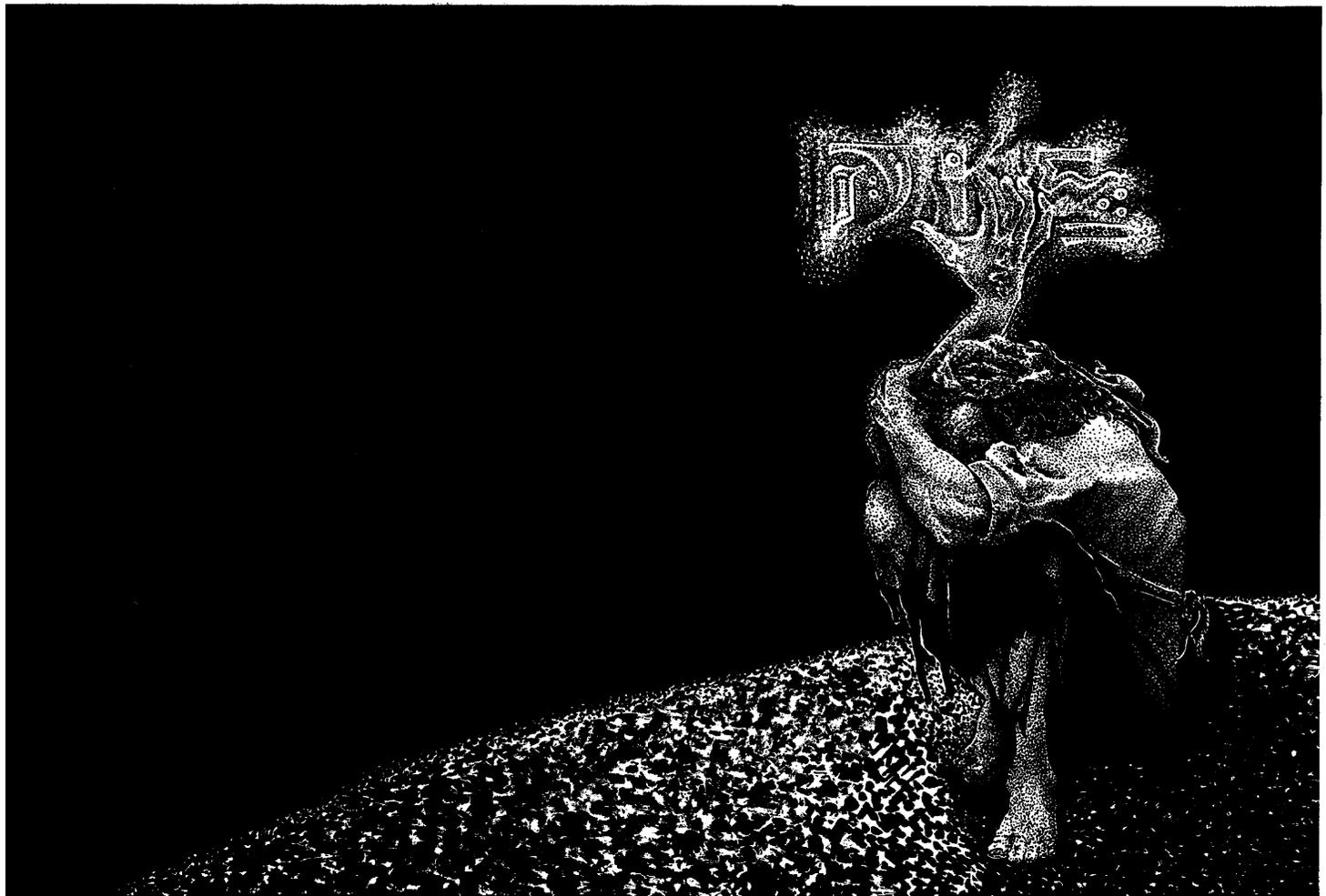
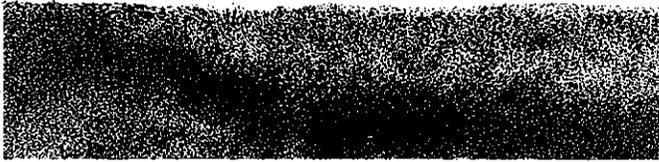
He turned slowly to look back at the castle. Already, the tower was cast down. Men were digging in its foundations, and the stump of Dervain's right hand throbbed again as he watched. He did not want to think what they might find there.

Other crews were at work dismantling the walls, separating block from block, casting them down as they had already done the tower. There had been power bonded into those walls, into each block of stone—power and evil. It would not be utterly destroyed until every last stone was broken, down to the very foundations.

Dellin was calling to him. "Dervain! Is something wrong? Do you need help?"

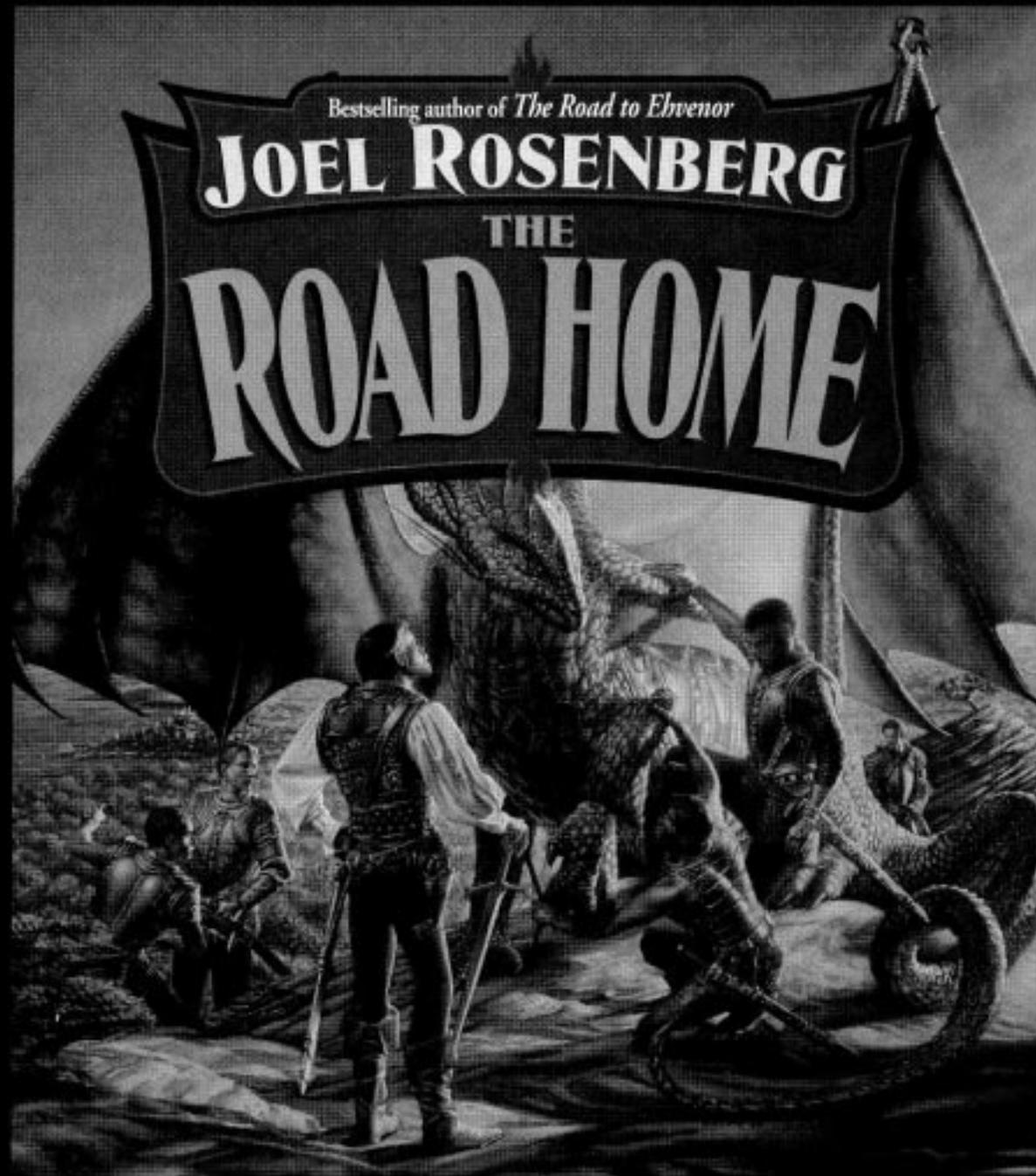
It would be a long, long labor to dismantle the Necromancer's fortress, to eradicate the last vestiges of his power. But Dervain knew that he came from a long-lived race.

"No," he called back to his clansman. "You go on without me. I have work here yet to do."



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by Skip Williams

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This month, "Sage Advice" explores various optional rules for the AD&D® game.

The *Player's Handbook* says that priests must have Wisdom scores of at least 9. If this is so, why does Table 5 show spell failure chances for scores lower than that?

For several reasons. The most important one is that the priest's Wisdom requirement applies only to new characters. That is, a character must have a Wisdom score of at least 9 to become a priest when initially created, but the character doesn't stop being a priest if some misfortune later lowers his Wisdom to 8 or less.

Do spell level limits for Intelligence and Wisdom apply to spells cast from scrolls? For example, can a priest with a Wisdom score of 15 cast a 7th-level priest spell from a scroll? Could a wizard with a 15 Intelligence cast a 9th-level wizard spell from a scroll?

A scroll is essentially a precast spell waiting for someone to come along and trigger it. A character who can read a spell scroll can use the spells on it without regard to *any* other restrictions. Both player characters (PCs) in the example could use the spells on the scrolls. Of course, the priest cannot read the wizard scroll and vice versa.

Should the damage a giant's weapon inflicts be adjusted for the opponent's size? For example, a hill giant's club inflicts 2d6 + 7 hp damage and a fire giant's two-handed sword inflicts 2d10 + 10 hp damage. If the opponent was larger than man-sized would the damage become 2d3 + 7 for the hill giant and 6d6 + 10 for the fire giant?

No. A giant rolling extra damage dice for an oversized weapon always uses the weapon's man-sized damage rating as the base.

The *Complete Book of Humanoids* allows some pretty large creatures to become thieves (voadkyns, minotaurs, and hornhead saurials). Can these creatures backstab man-sized opponents? What weapons can they use when backstabbing? Are there any penalties when they move silently or hide in shadows?

Humanoid thieves certainly can backstab man-sized opponents, but some restrictions apply. Being smaller than an opponent can interfere with backstabbing because the thief can't always reach a vital area; this is seldom a problem if the thief is bigger than the opponent. Like any other thief, a humanoid thief must wield a melee weapon from the thief weapon list (club, dagger, knife, broad sword, long sword, short sword, or staff) when backstabbing.

Table 14 from the *Complete Book of Humanoids* gives racial adjustments for all thief skills. Most of the larger races have no modifiers to the move silently ability, and several actually get bonuses to the hide in shadows ability—thief abilities are the products of skill and training, not size. However, large creatures's size might be a handicap in some situations. For example, a minotaur might have a hard time moving silently through a forest where its head brushes against overhanging branches. The DM must handle these situations on a case-by-case basis.

The psionic science *Disintegrate* affects creatures if they fail their saving throws vs. death magic. Does this mean creatures that are immune to death magic are also immune to this power?

No. In this case, the term "death magic" simply indicates which column on the saving throw chart to use. It doesn't mean that there is any magic that causes death involved.

Does immunity to magical charms also make a creature immune to psionic charm effects?

Yes. Most forms of telepathic control, such as Domination, function as magical

charms with regard to creatures with special immunities.

Your answer to the question about elven archers in issue #215 was helpful, but I have a few more questions. The rules say that the elven archer can choose only long sword, short sword, and dagger as melee weapons at the start. Does the -1 attack penalty apply to these weapons? Does the -1 attack penalty apply to these weapons if they are not chosen until later in the archer's career (such as at 3rd level when the PC gains another weapon proficiency)? The rules also say that elven archers don't get attack bonuses when using melee weapons. Does this include bonuses from magical weapons? Artifact weapons? Weapons of quality? Do archers get damage bonuses from high Strength scores or magic? Can an archer specialize in a melee weapon to get the extra attacks and maybe the damage bonus?

Reading the kit description strictly, I'm inclined to suggest that an elven archer suffers a -1 attack penalty with any melee weapon he chooses as part of his initial weapon selection, which is limited to the three weapons listed above. Attack bonuses from a high Strength score are not negated, but the -1 penalty applies. Damage bonuses of any kind are never affected. So an archer with a Strength score of 18/51 wielding a long sword has a +2 attack bonus and a +3 damage bonus. (The PC gains +1 for an elf attacking with a sword, a +2 attack bonus for Strength, and the -1 attack penalty for an archer using a melee weapon; the PC also gains the standard +3 damage bonus due to his Strength).

When using any melee weapon other than a long sword, short sword, or dagger, an archer loses all attack bonuses from Strength and race, but the general -1 penalty does not, apply. An archer gets the full benefit of any attack bonuses from other sources, such as magic.

Archers cannot specialize in melee weapons.

If a lich polymorphs into a living creature, can he still be turned?

Yes. A *polymorph self* spell doesn't

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change the user's basic nature. The polymorphed lich also retains his paralyzing touch and fear aura.

The Complete Paladin's Handbook says that a paladin can't be dual-classed with any of the warrior classes. Doesn't the Player's Handbook say that humans can assume any number of classes as long as they meet the requirements?

The *Player's Handbook* did say something of the sort once, but not anymore. Page 62 of the current printing limits dual-classed PCs to four classes, one from each character group. Because the paladin class is part of the warrior group, a dual-classed paladin cannot choose another class from that group.

Standard paladins are not obligated to wear armor, and could become dual-classed paladin/wizards. Paladin kits from the *Complete Paladin's Handbook* that do require armor (the wyrmslayer for example) cannot become dual-classed paladin/wizards.

Suppose a human character becomes dual-classed and becomes proficient with a weapon that he also was proficient with in the old class. Is the character now considered a specialist because he has learned the proficiency twice?

No. To specialize in a weapon, a character must be a member of a class that allows specialization (which is available only to fighters in the core AD&D® game rules) and spend the necessary proficiencies from that class's allotment of weapon proficiencies.

Characters can get bonus proficiencies from a high Intelligence score. Do characters who become dual-classed get those bonus proficiencies again because they are starting their careers over?

No.

Characters can improve their non-weapon proficiencies by spending extra slots on them. Could a character get an attack bonus by spending an extra slot on the blind-fighting proficiency?

No. Spending an extra slot on a proficiency improves the character's score with that proficiency. Blind-fighting has no score, so it cannot be improved by spending extra slots.

Can a character specialize in hurled missiles such as daggers, hand axes, or javelins? If so, would the character get the melee weapon bonus (+1 attack, +2 damage) or the bow bonus (+2 attack at point blank range)? If an ambidextrous thrown dagger specialist uses both hands to hurl daggers, what are his rate of fire and combat modifiers?

Characters certainly can specialize in hand-hurled missiles. Such PCs gain the rates of fire shown on table 35 of the *PHB*. These specialists gain no attack bonuses; the only thing they get is the improved rate of fire.

A PC hurling missiles is already assumed to be using both hands somehow; the other hand might be extended for balance, or might hold extra missiles, or what have you. The character can use a shield while hurling a missile (or perhaps hold onto a rope or other support), but that's all.

Can a character use a decanter of endless water in geyser mode for underwater propulsion? What would his movement rate be? Would an ability check be required to maneuver?

Sure, a *decanter of endless water* produces enough pressure in geyser mode to knock the user over, so it should be able to push somebody along under the right conditions. I'd suggest a speed of about 6 for any frictionless or zero gravity setting. You might want to reduce the speed slightly for huge and gargantuan creatures, say 3. And you might want to give tiny creatures a little extra speed, say 9.

I wouldn't recommend an ability check for maneuvering—just treat the creature as a flier with a poor maneuverability class, say D. You might want to require an initial Wisdom check to see if the creature actually starts moving or just falls down or drops the decanter. (An unattended *decanter of endless water* in geyser mode might skitter along at a speed of 15 to 18, depending on the surface it's moving across.)

Just how extensive and powerful is the magnetism power of the turquoise version of chromatic orb spell (from the Complete Wizard's Handbook)? How close does a metal object have to be to a piece of magnetized metal to be drawn to it? If an orb were cast at a wall of iron, would the entire wall become magnetized?

According to the spell description, the magnetism has a range of three feet. Only ferrous metals (metals containing iron) can become magnetized or become stuck to magnetized metal. If a turquoise orb is cast at a *wall of iron*, only a roughly man-sized area of the wall becomes magnetized (a section about four feet in diameter and up to a foot thick).

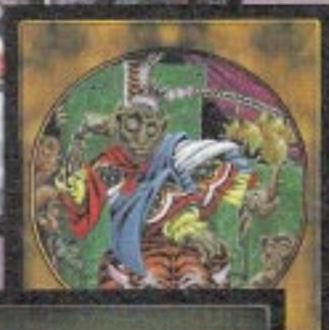
Although the spell description implies that magnetized objects that become stuck together cannot be separated until the spell expires or is dispelled, I suggest you allow a PC to pry them apart with a successful open doors roll. PCs in magnetized armor cannot attack without making a successful open doors roll each round and suffer the standard +6 initiative penalty for fighting in an alien environment (see *PHB*, Table 55).

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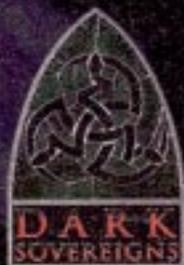
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“Why do most men feel threatened by women players?”

I would like to thank the creators of the AD&D® game for creating a place where I can be perfectly normal. All through high school I felt out of place; I daydreamed all the time about elves and dragons, never knowing that there were other dreamers like me out in the world. When I met my husband (almost 5 years ago) he introduced me to the world of role-playing. It was one of the best things ever to happen to me. Finally, there was a way for me to relieve my overactive imagination. I discovered a world where my ideas meant the difference between life and death—I could unlock and create worlds never seen before!

Our playing group started with my husband (boyfriend at the time), my best friend, and myself. For the first three months we met in secret because I was afraid my mother would not let me play. But eventually I told her and convinced her to sit in on a game. She loved it. Now I spend my free time working on a new world with rifts and pockets of all the other games I can find, creating a world for everyone. Thank you for making me feel special and giving me the chance to see that weird isn't always a bad thing.

For the rest of my letter, I'd just like to emphasize one point: why do most men feel threatened by women players and DMs? I recently met a group of all male players that felt AD&D was a “man's” game. So I invited them over to a small session and put them in the best place for male chauvinists, the Underdark. It was hot, it was messy, and it was quick. They completely underestimated the seductively evil drow. First off, because they were elves and, mostly, because all the important ones were female. They apologized, left, and are still quaking with fear (at least, what's left of their characters are). So girls, I just want to say don't be bullied. Female PCs are as deadly as males.

Heather Darling
New Berlin, NY

In response to the editorial “Women on the Verge” (issue #216): I am a woman who has been role-playing for about 12 years now. I started off with AD&D game's first edition, in a time when a female role-player was rare . . . and the target of every pick-up line there ever was. Some guys even used their characters to try to get me to go out with them! I remember

saying “My character isn't that way” a lot (it seems a female adventurer back then was good for only one thing) and being in a lot of campaigns where the DM devised ways to get my female character romantically involved with his favorite PC or NPC. A woman just couldn't stand on her own!

Boy, have times changed! Now I play in AD&D 2nd Edition, SHADOWRUN*, VAMPIRE*, and some BATTLETECH* games, as well as DMing my own AD&D campaign on my own world. Female players still seem in short supply comparatively speaking, and a lot of fellas still act as if the only reason we're there is to be hit on, but there's a definite difference in attitude and actual role-playing. And I'm running into new problems as a female GM.

First, female adventurers (PCs) are treated as commonplace. This has its good points and bad points. Finally, a woman can contribute to a game without needing a man to lean on. The freedom is wonderful! No longer are my PCs expected or required to be involved with a fella just on principle. In my case, I think my man-hater, Misha, helped a lot to get that kind of respect. She turned the tables around—men were the weaker sex, good for only one thing! However, I've noticed that, while most men stare and initially treat an attractive woman differently, an attractive PC adventurer (Cha or Con of 14 +) is ignored. Very few seem to be able to role-play that *initial* “Wow!” reaction. Also, while women are more involved in role-playing, they have yet to be commonplace. It's nice to be accepted into the group but, again, that initial “What the . . . ?” reaction is missing. Still, I'll take this casual acceptance over the “You need a man” attitude any day.

As a GM, however, there's still a struggle for acceptance. In over half the groups I've run, it's been much harder to get the respect and cooperation most men enjoy. And the sad thing is that I have more trouble with women players than with men (though I do get trouble from men, too). I get more arguments over my rulings, more complaints, and more competition between players than nearly every male GM I've gamed with and its annoying as hell!

If I try to compromise, I'm a pushover and everyone ignores me. If I lay down the line, I'm a bitch and insensitive or even stupid. My judgements about the areas

which are a little unclear are always called into question. And I've tried everything, including techniques employed by successful male GMs I know, but nothing has worked so far. I am the only female GM I've ever seen, although I've heard of others, so I'm paving the way with our group in a lot of ways, but it sure isn't easy! At this point, I've taken to listening to others' opinions when a question comes up, but making—and sticking to—my own decisions in the end. It doesn't solve all the problems, but most of my players seem to be finally realizing that I have final say and that arguing, whining, and complaining are pretty pointless. It's still a struggle, but I think I'm finally making headway. I'd love to hear from other female GMs about their problems and how they solved them, especially if they have been running for a few years and finally have a fairly smooth time of it. A little encouragement wouldn't hurt either! Drop a line.

Denyse J. Zane
10016 Alder Ave.
Bloomington, CA 92316-1904

In my campaigns I try to add some consequences to magic and other fantasy elements. Many of the articles in DRAGON® Magazine show a similar viewpoint, so I would like to see how you deal with the *haste* spell. As I see it, this spell has some astounding consequences, yet I have never heard anyone else mention them. I speak not of the spell itself, but of its side-effect of aging a creature one year.

Does anyone else ever play this to full effect? In my games, people have died from having this spell cast on them. The *Player's Handbook* states that the spell speeds up the metabolic process, and that can have dire consequences! The best example I can find is a character featured in one of my campaigns. She was born when someone cast the *haste* spell on her mother in the middle of combat. The woman was only a few days pregnant, yet she died horribly as she gave birth under the influence of the spell. The infant was saved by a friend, who raised her, but *haste* was one of the factors that stunted her growth later in life.

Some people say I'm picky, and that I shouldn't take the spell so literally, but I think this can add some flavor to the game. In my campaigns, social restrictions are put on spells, and *haste* is one of the

few that requires a doctor's permission to cast legally. Metabolism is a tricky thing to play with, and this spell can do a lot more than just speed a person up. I want to see what other readers thought of it. To give you some ideas, here's how I see it:

1. Cells grow. The spell accelerates the cells' metabolism, so nails and hair also grow. Nails crumble as they get longer; that part shouldn't impair combat ability. Hair is another matter. Hair grows a lot in a year, and it can get in a character's eyes fast.

2. Cells die. Any injuries, diseases, etc. that the target (victim?) has will be part of the effect. This means that colds and other viruses will disappear, wounds will close, infections will spread, and tumors will grow. However, even with wound closure, I don't think this is any replacement for healing magic, especially since fast healing isn't always the best. My ruling is that any recent, unintended wounds double in damage because of infection, blood loss, and metabolic stress. Open wounds will close but remain bruised and sore, and any scars are permanent (unlike priestly healing).

3. Cells require food. Aging a year in eight minutes (the minimum duration) means those cells can metabolize only what a character just ate, plus any extra energy the body has stored in fat cells. This means that anyone who has a haste

spell cast on them will be hungry soon after. We can say that magic stretches that chemical energy a bit, but a year is still a long time. That big, buff barbarian may have lost a few pounds more than he expected, perhaps even losing muscle mass (and consequently suffering a temporary Strength loss).

4. People grow. Not only is this spell a method of losing weight, but it can change other features. Hair may go gray, wrinkles may show, completely changing someone's appearance. Younger creatures in the area of effect may grow to maturity, even as they remain childlike in spirit and mind. I would not allow this spell to cause excessive physical growth because of the food requirements just mentioned; perhaps only 50% of what would be normal for the entire year. Stunted growth and childishness? Sounds like you DMs have your work cut out for you.

Anyway, I'm not trying to ruin anyone's fun, and I hope you get some good role-playing opportunities out of this. Give me some input, and by all means, somebody write an article!

Leyshon Campbell
No address given

I would like to comment on the powers and advancement rate of the ranger class. Rangers advance much too slowly for the

powers they gain. First of all, rangers aren't so much more powerful than other fighters that they should advance more slowly. Rangers can attack with both hands, but they usually have a lower THACO and damage than a fighter with the same experience points, because rangers can't specialize in weapons and they would be at a lower level than the fighter. Fighters eventually gain two attacks per round, with specializing. Rangers can move silently and hide in shadows, but they are more vulnerable to attacks since they don't wear good armor. Rangers also have strict rules regarding their ability scores, so fighters have more hit points because they don't have to put points into Wisdom and can use them for Constitution instead. And the ranger's priest spells—a ranger at that level doesn't need first-level priest spells! The soldiers that fighters get are much more useful. Also, rangers have some alignment restrictions while fighters have none.

As to rangers' advancement—they start out all right, but around 7th level they become very slow. For example—for 9th level a ranger needs 300,000 XP while mages, a much more powerful class, only need 135,000—less than half! For 11th level, rangers need 900,000 XPs, while mages only need 375,000! And even if they advanced at the same rate, mages would be more powerful. Mages should advance even more slowly than rangers. That brings up another issue—mages advance too quickly after 7th level.

Paladins also advance slowly, but they gain new powers with levels, while the ranger doesn't get any new powers after 2nd level. The paladin also has magical powers that make him different than and stronger than fighters, while rangers aren't that different. How can you compare the ranger's silent movement or animal empathy with the magical healing or undead turning powers that paladins have? Paladin's powers are much more useful, and they improve with level. A +2 to all saving throws and -1 to evil opponents' attacks is equal to the rangers two-handed fighting ability. Other than fighting with two hands, the ranger doesn't have any really useful powers. Who needs hide in shadows or silent movement once you have a thief or psionic help in the party? Psionics make excellent spies, able to gather useful information with ESP. You always need more healing, and so the paladin's laying on of hands is very useful. What do you really need animal empathy for? I don't remember ever having my party fighting against an animal who was a real threat. Rangers should not advance as slowly as paladins do.

If any of you also experienced this problem of slow advancement with your rangers I would like to hear about it in "Forum".

Daniel Arenson
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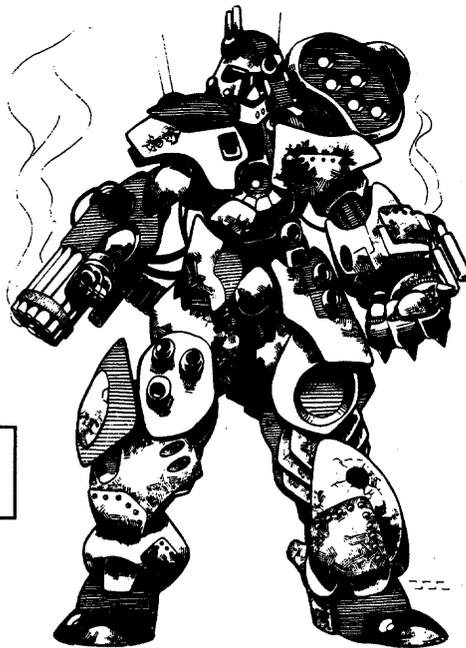
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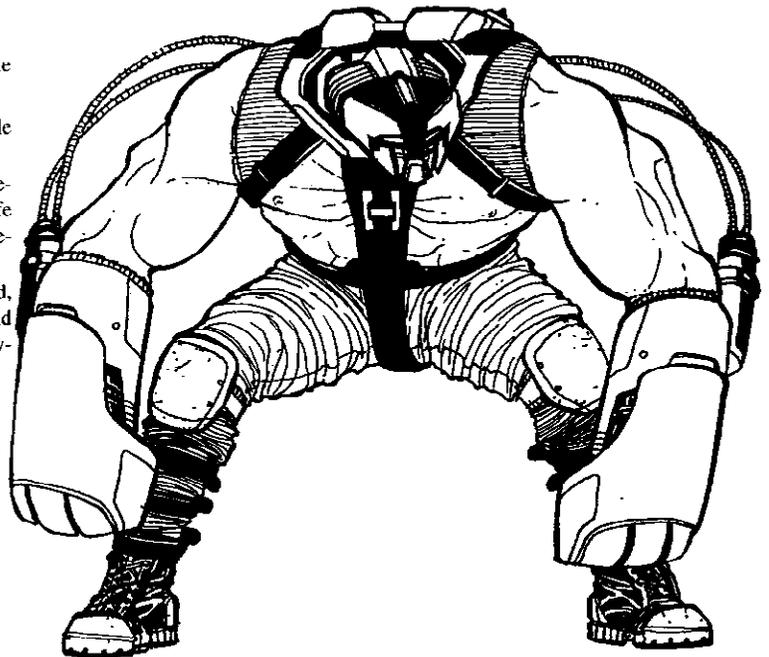
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I would like to make a few quick comments on two letters in "Forum" from issue #217. First off, Stephen Carter's otherwise fine letter was marred when he said, "You can call the mission a corporate extraction . . . but how are the PCs' . . . goals . . . and actions . . . different from the goals of rescuing the princess held captive [by] the evil wizard?" Well, I've dealt with both "Cyber Hero" for the Hero System and CYBERPUNK 2020, and in both of them, corporate extractions are out-and-out kidnapping, done to acquire human resources to increase the profit of the company that ordered the extraction. Quite a different feel from rescuing a victim, I'm sure you'll agree.

Jamie Nossal's letter is very timely, and very true. I have felt this way for a while, and am glad someone spoke up. Frankly, I would enjoy it immensely if DRAGON Magazine put a moratorium on letters of complaint about the "unbalanced" powers and abilities of various classes. If someone thinks he has a good idea for "balancing" the classes, write it up as an article; otherwise, could you please cut the rest of us some slack, and give it a rest?

Christopher David
Snoqualmie, WA

As a service to DRAGON Magazine's readers, permit me to offer three of my own newly-created magical paths. The

source formats are the same as those used in the article in issue #216. They are:

The Road of the Hand: *burning hands (1), chill touch (1), fist of stone* (1), shocking grasp (1), choke (2, CW), ghoul touch (2, DW), fiery fists (2, SOL), fist of the adder (2, SH), flying fist (2, FA), Maximillian's earthen grasp* (2), skeletal hands (2, BN), spectral hand (2), hand of darkness (3, DU), Maximillian's stony grasp* (3), mummy touch (3, FA), pain touch (3, CW), paralyze (3, FA), vampiric touch (3), Caligarde's claw (4, FA), Bigby's interposing hand (5), desert fist (5, AA), mummy rot (5, CW), Bigby's forceful hand (6), claws of the umber hulk* (6), ghoul gauntlet (6, BN), lich touch (6, FA), Bigby's grasping hand (7), finger of death (7), Malec-Keth's flame fist* (7), Bigby's clenched fist (8), Bigby's crushing hand (9), energy drain (9)*

The Siren's Path: *charm person (1), float (1, AA), friends (1), hypnotism (1), lasting breath* (1), sea sight (1, AA), converse with sea creatures (3, AA), strengthen water creature (4, AA), suggestion (3), water breathing (3), charm monster (4), shatterfull (4, AA), airy water (5), command water spirits (6, AA), domination (5), lower water (6), mass suggestion (6), part water (6), ship of fools (6, AA), charm plants (7), mass charm (8), life water (9, AA), maelstrom (9, AA)*

The Warrior's Road: *armor (1), catapult (1, FA), magic missile (1), sand jambiya (1, AA), scatterspray (1, FA), shield (1), bladed thirst (2, FA), fire arrows (2, AA), flying jambiya (2, AA), ice knife (2, CW), Melf's acid arrow (2), Melf's minute meteors (2), strength (2), bone club (3, CW), flame arrow (3), icelance (3, FA), invisible mail (3, CW), night's jambiya (3, SH), sand sword (3, AA), spirit armor* (3), acid bolt (4, DU), enchanted weapon (4), missile mastery (4, FA), stonesskin (4), thunderance (4, FA), thunder staff* (4), wind blade (4, AA), invulnerability to normal weapons (5, CW), magic staff* (5), blade of doom (6, FA), dragon scales (6, CW), invulnerability to magical weapons (6, CW), Tenser's transformation (6), Mordenkainen's sword (7), sun stone (7, AA), black blade of disaster (9, DU)*

I hope the above are useful to gamers who want to include path magic in their campaigns, particularly if they want new paths to follow, but don't have the time to design their own. Variety is, after all, what this game is all about.

Gregory Detwiler
Williamsburg, PA

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The Wizard!

Warmer Than Expected

Three

I was bustling about the study, tidying away books, magazines, and a Clueless Warrior card that had somehow found its way under the table—my sorcerous visitors get peevish when they're reminded that some of us view magic and monsters as elements of something so frivolous as a game—when Elminster melted briskly out of the nearest wall and grasped me by the arm.

Manfully fighting down an impulse to leap up into the air and shriek, I blinked at him and managed to stammer out, "You haven't given me time to *hide* yet!"

He merely snorted. "The armor's getting a rest this time, lad—and ye needn't waste time cleaning up, either."

"They're not coming?" Disappointment warred with a momentary hope that my larder might survive the night more or less intact . . . but disappointment won.

"They'll be here, lad—but Dalamar's bringing a guest with him, look ye: a guest ye don't want to have anywhere near this place of thine. When she's around, things tend to get, ah, destroyed."

"Chairs? Tables? Houses?"

I raised my eyebrows at him, hoping to prod him into a colorful tale about this

destructive mystery guest, but Elminster merely gave me a cold and knowing eye and said, "I haven't time to tell ye about her now, but let it suffice that 'things' in this case refers to islands, mountains, castles, city districts, lakes . . . that sort of thing."

I gulped. "How far away will ye—er, you—be meeting?"

"That firepit in your woods that ye took me to once, by the stream. Ye still own it, do ye not? Haven't built a house over it, or put a road through it, or done anything 'progressive' like that to the spot, have ye?"

"Uh, no," I riposted brilliantly, "but . . ."

"Good! Now shut thy wagging mouth and hie thyself up those stairs like a good dolt, ere we waste the hour and they arrive to find us all unprepared. I want you in bed and pretending to be asleep in about three breaths from now, *so—move!*"

I moved.

"*There's* a good lad!" the Old Mage's voice floated up the stairs to me. I'd scarcely dived under the covers when there was a little puff of air and Elminster stood in the bedroom. He stared around at the towers of books, framed fantasy posters, and clutter, sniffed pointedly—and

then peered at one of the more spectacular unicorn-riding ladies on one of the posters and hmm-hmmed in a rather more approving tone. I said nothing.

I've learned enough about Elminster in our times together to know when it's best to keep firmly silent.

Soon enough he turned to me and said briskly, "Right—harken and know ye this: I've cast a translocation shift in thy study that should redirect all incoming mages to the firepit. Now I'll cast a farscry on ye . . . so mind ye hold still . . . and then I'll need ye to tell me where ye've hid—ah, stored—the things we'll need."

A few breaths later, I was treated to the eerie sensation of looking at myself lying in bed, shamming sleep. My viewpoint seemed to be about five feet from the foot of the bed, at about headboard height.

"Is this farscrying?" I asked. "It might be handy for cutting your own hair, or seeing behind you to do something up, but—"

"Ye're seeing and hearing through my belt buckle," Elminster informed me, and his voice boomed and buzzed oddly in my ears, as if coming from higher up in my own body. Then things abruptly changed, and I was looking at the carpet. "Now

ye're looking through my decoy ring," the Old Mage informed me.

"Decoy ring?"

"The plain brass one I wear that has no magical powers, but helps ignorant folk reassure themselves that I'm walking around loaded down with an arsenal of meteor swarms and the like," El told me dryly. "Now if ye practice looking high and clear, and then medium and mundane, and lastly low and dark—sounds odd, I know, but try it—the spell cycles between the ring, the belt, and thine own eyes. Practice this now."

I did, and although it felt rather disorienting at first and made my stomach turn over at least once, I soon got used to it. "This has possibilities," I announced.

Elminster gave me a look. "I know just the gutters ye leave what ye're so pleased to call thy mind in, remember? This should allow ye to eavesdrop on this even's gathering in relative safety. But don't expect me to leave ye as a freeloading voyeur upon my person for long!"

He pointed at me with an imperious finger and added, "Now cease wasting my time forthwith, and tell me: where do ye keep thy firewood? Matches? Kindling? Sausages?—And none of those rude-looking things ye call 'weiners,' thank ye very much. They seem to represent the first feeble reachings of thy culture toward achieving undeath for no-longer-needed body parts! Mustard squeeze bottles? Oh, aye—I'd like to take one of those with me, if I may. I'll be attending a nobles' party in Waterdeep in a few nights, and it looks like just the thing to tease the ladies with."

My mind reeled at the thought of the Old Mage squirting highborn bodices and faces with mustard like a young kid with a water pistol, but I managed to stammer out answers readily enough. Elminster stood at the heart of a whirlwind of items sailing in from all corners of the house—a steaming coffeepot I hadn't been able to find in years and my biggest, carefully-hidden bag of marshmallows among them. As he teleported them away to the stream-side clearing in the woods, I saw my collection of medieval swords floating up the stairs in a deadly stream.

"You're not going to be fencing out there, are you?" I asked anxiously. "Dead bodies may lie behind every adventurer in the Realms, but they're a bit harder to explain away around here!"

Elminster gave me a withering look. "Ye expect me to sizzle thy steaks, mushrooms, peppers, and marshmallows on sticks of *wood*? Wood *burns*, ye know!"

"Ah—"

He waved an imperious hand. "Enough! The time is nigh! Read this!" He thrust a paper under my nose that bore a single word on it: Threem. I looked at him.

"What's this?"

"Have ye read it?"

I nodded, and he snapped, "Well, what does it say?"

"Threem," I announced grandly. "Wha—" "Good! Hold that paper in thy hand, *don't* put it down, and *don't* forget the word. Say it not again until I bid thee to—but be right sharp to let it leave thy lips then! Understand?"

"Yes, but—"

"No time for 'whas' and 'buts' now, lad—roll over and feign sleep, or death may well be thy swift reward!"

And in the next instant, I was looking at the crackling flames of a fire in the fast-gathering dusk out in my woods, and watching floating winebottles emptying themselves deftly into several brandy sniffers the size of human heads, that my wife had bought to put plants in.

I was wondering just where those plants were right now when Mordenkainen suddenly appeared out of thin air, calmly snared a passing glass, and raised one eyebrow. "Tell me your good reason for this venue when the time is right," he told Elminster.

"*She's* my good reason," the Old Mage's voice boomed around me, and he pointed off to the left. As Mordenkainen's head turned, I changed to ring-sight, and was treated to the sight of a nearby vine rising up into cobra-shape with an angry hiss—a swaying, rearing serpent-form that swelled and grew taller until suddenly a woman stood there.

A proud lady stood among the trees—and her hard beauty seemed to crackle with menacing power. Cold, deadly green eyes stared out of a face that seemed sculpted of white china, and her soft white skin seemed lit by a cascade of unruly hair—of gold tinged with flame-orange.

She wore a skin-tight garment that seemed to be made of serpents' scales, and left much of her ivory thighs and flanks bare. A green half-cloak swirled around her as she strode forward through the dead leaves in thigh-high serpent-scaled boots, and all the time she stared at Elminster with an unmistakable challenge in her chill gaze.

As she stepped around the fire, the air at her elbow shimmered, darkened and became Dalamar. The dark elf hissed urgently, "You were supposed to wait for me to introduce you, great lady. Elminster—"

"Knows me already," the woman said in tones of soft menace, never taking her eyes away from the Old Mage's calm gaze.

When she was a pace away, she came to a smooth stop and extended her hand for Elminster to kiss, but he merely smiled and shook his head, so she turned with floating, languid grace and offered it to Mordenkainen instead.

He bent over her fingers politely, and I saw triumph flash in her eyes. I switched back to looking out of Elminster's belt buckle to get a better view.

When Mordenkainen rose unhurriedly and released her fingers, I saw blood on his lips and hooked white fangs protruding from her knuckles, where there had

only been smooth white flesh a moment before.

The woman laughed gloatingly, but the Lord Mage of Greyhawk stepped back and raised his glass to her. "Nay, lady," he said in calm, level tones, "I wasn't born yesterday . . . a few days before that, perhaps, but not yesterday. No poison can harm me."

As she stared at him in hatred and mounting fury—those emerald eyes burned as brightly as the fire, hiding nothing—Elminster stepped forward and introduced her smoothly. "Shaaan the Serpent-Queen," he announced, pronouncing it 'Shay-an.'

Dalamar stiffened. "The introduction should be mine, old man," the dark elf said sharply. Elminster waved a hand, bidding him continue.

"This lady mage came before the Conclave the night before last," Dalamar told them, "asking our aid in stopping a gigantic, runaway Eater-of-Magic that is roaming the planes. I promised her the assistance of all wizards of the Conclave—and brought her here tonight to ask both of you to lend your expertise and spell-might to the endeavour of stopping this threat to all mages."

The dark elf looked from one silent man to the other, and back again. "You seem unimpressed," he added in a cold, thin voice.

"Aye," Elminster said dryly. "Shaaan tried this same tactic on me some centuries ago . . . twice." As his gently mocking eyes met the glare of the sorceress steadily, his pipe rose from his lips and drifted away into the night.

"What?" Dalamar asked, voice rising. "How dare you insult a lady so! Do you stand there, old man, and tell me that—"

"He lies," Shaaan said quickly. "We are old rivals; Elminster of Shadowdale will use every opportunity to thwart and discredit me!"

"Then he shall pay for it!" Dalamar snapped, raising both hands in a flourish.

A full wineglass suddenly slapped into one of the dark elf's hands, a dill pickle into the other. Dalamar stared from one to the other, startled, and Mordenkainen said, "Eat, lad, and drink—and perhaps you'll live longer."

"I am curious, Shaaan," Elminster asked quietly, "why you bothered to come here, knowing I'd be present."

The Sorceress in the green cloak drew herself up and spat triumphantly, "Because the trip has brought me close enough to the mightiest mages of three worlds to do—*this!*"

Her body fell away into nothingness, to reveal a pillar of white-hot flame that exploded into three beams of ravaging force, stabbing out at the heads of the Wizards Three!

As I gulped, the heavy thunder of that racing energy abruptly ceased, and the woods around shimmered as if they were full of captured stars. Everyone stood as if

frozen, and the white beams hung motionless in midair.

Fascinated, I watched Dalamar look carefully around at the frozen figures around him, take several quick paces to one side, drop the glass and the pickle, wipe his hands hastily on his robes, and take something small from a pouch at his belt.

The shimmering went, and then came again, and this time it was Mordenkainen who moved, drawing a wand from a sheath inside his boot. Keeping it aimed at the pillar of flame that had been the Serpent-Queen, he stepped swiftly away from the bolt aimed at him, to a position directly behind her.

The shimmering spun away—and then rose again, and I saw the motes of matter that made up the body of the sorceress reassemble themselves until she stood as beautiful—and as deadly—as before, glaring around the clearing at the moved mages and her own frozen bolts of power.

She drew a long, thin needle of a blade from one of her boots and spun around to face Mordenkainen, raising it to stab down at one of his eyes—until Elminster's thrown stone smashed it out of her fingers. The deadly pionicard struck the waters of the stream with a flash and twinkle, and was gone.

Shaaan spun around with a snarl of rage and pain, clutching at her bloodied fingers. "You! Always you stand in my path, Old Mage!" She seemed to catch her breath and her temper at the same time, and her eyes glittered. "Just how is it that you can break a time stop?"

She drew a second, identical blade from her other boot and came around the fire, at him, moving with deadly grace. "Perhaps," she breathed, eyes glittering, "it's one of the secrets your dead mind will relinquish to me . . . so very soon!"

I distinctly heard Elminster's yawn as she leapt at him, knife flashing. "D'ye know just how many times folk have—" he began, but the rest of his sentence was lost in the frantic pant she made as she thrust, and the Old Mage's grunt of effort as he caught her wrist and grappled with her.

"Ha!" Shaaan cried in triumph, and drew back the nails of her other hand, wet with Elminster's blood.

Elminster merely chuckled. "Scratch my cheek at will, little vixen," he said. "I've employed Dauntra's cloak too." And he reached out a long arm to encircle her shoulders as he leaned forward against her.

I could see nothing as their bodies jostled together, but switched again to ring-sight in time to see the sorceress try to bite Elminster,

He turned his head aside and he began to murmur something that sounded like a spell—so she brought her knee up sharply.

An instant later, I heard her moan of pain.

"Oh, did I forget to mention my new

steel codpiece?" Elminster asked innocently. He embraced her again, thrusting their bodies together and bringing the back of his hand—with the ring on it—against her cheek.

"Say the word *now*, dolt," he announced calmly . . . and it was a long moment while Shaan struggled under his grip before I realized he meant me.

"Yes, ye," he said, as if he could read my thoughts. "Her spell-shield prevents me casting anything."

I gulped, cleared my throat, and announced boldly, "Threem!"

And Elminster's arms were suddenly empty. He stumbled forward, catching his balance just before he stumbled into the fire. I briefly saw several good steaks sizzling away above the flames, skewered on an array of patiently-floating swords.

The world shimmered again, and Elminster asked calmly, "Another glass of wine, gentlemen?"

Mordenkainen chuckled, looking around at where the wizards were standing. "We've all been busy, I see." The *timestop* and *forcebolts* had faded away together, leaving the campfire crackling away by itself.

"Where—what happened to that woman?" Dalamar asked hesitantly, shaking his head as if he'd just awakened from a dream.

"I confined her to the Floating Helm of Tharados," Elminster told them calmly.

"Until someone meddles with it, she's stuck in her own little prison in the Astral plane, drifting endlessly about. I hope she knows some good songs and limericks."

Mordenkainen looked at the dark elf. "Is her charm spell gone, or are you still going to try to smite us with spells?"

Dalamar gave him a baleful look. "Don't remind me," he said. "I seem to spend a goodly amount of our times together in a state of profound humiliation."

"That's because ye seem to like the taste of thine own shoe leather so much; Elminster told him gently. "Here, try another pickle."

Dalamar took it, but instead of eating it used it to make a rude gesture at the Old Mage, who clucked in mock disapproval, rolled his eyes in feigned shock, and said dryly, "Ye're obviously on better terms with pickles than I am, lad. How d'ye like your steak?"

"Just the hot side of raw," Dalamar said rather ruefully, regarding the darkening meat.

"I'll start another," Elminster told him, handing him an ice beer. Dalamar sniffed at it and then peered into the depths of the tall brown bottle suspiciously.

"Do you have any of what this world calls 'hot dogs'?" Mordenkainen asked wistfully. "I had one once, while plane-hopping some years back, and . . ."

Elminster favored him with a withering

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look, and I chuckled.

Mordenkainen stared down at me, and a chill finger traced its way up my spine—they could all hear me! “A ring of ventriloquism,” Elminster explained, holding me out. “A bauble an apprentice gave me to try out. I’ve been twisting a few tricks into it, to surprise her with.”

“Speaking of surprising sorceresses,” the Lord Mage of Greyhawk replied, “tell me a little about this Shaaan. ‘The Serpent Queen’ you called her?”

“She started a snake-cult in the Tashalar, years back—with herself as its head,”

Elminster replied. “All a sham, of course, running on a brace of spells that affected snakes.” He shuddered, and following his gaze, I saw that he was watching a sword sheathed in a line of weiners slide to a stop over the flames of the campfire, and begin to rotate slowly.

“Shaaan’s a ruthless troublemaker,” he added. “She uses her magic to indulge her cruel sense of humor more than for any thing else.”

“Then why not destroy her?” Dalamar asked, eyeing the weiners with a puzzled look, as if he were trying to decide what sort of spell could cut cylinders of flesh out of an animal—and if it could be put to other uses.

“Not so easily done, lad,” Elminster said quietly. “She’s among the most wary of mages. Her specialty is magics that can chain together many spells to a single contingency trigger, and I haven’t the time to trace down just what slaying her—or stripping her of her wits—would do, all across Faerûn.”

“All across your *world*?” Dalamar echoed. “Just how powerful is she?”

“Mightier in sheer spell-might than I am,” Elminster said mildly. As the other two wizards stared at him, he smiled faintly and asked, “Mordenkainen? D’ye remember the Company of Crazy Adventurers? I believe ye met young Savengruff of that fellowship once.”

Mordenkainen nodded. “Adventurers more powerful than most, to be sure. Legends in Waterdeep yet, if I’m not mistaken.”

“The same,” Elminster said. “Picture them a dozen strong, and in peak fighting form. They observe Shaaan working a spell that consumes the bodies of living folk standing around her, so they pursue her. She teleports away—and their three mages are skilled enough to trace her and jump the entire band to the same spot: an island about a mile long, in the sea not far off Mintarn.”

Dalamar’s brows rose. “Battle royale?”

Elminster’s pipe came up out of the stream with the Serpent-Queen’s pionard balanced in its bowl and flew, dripping, over to him.

Elminster murmured a word, and the needle-thin knife rose up into the air and began to spin, dwindling swiftly as it turned end over end. In a few breaths it was gone.

The Old Mage frowned at where it had

been and replied, “Nay. She told them to begone; she was too busy for a fight. They declined to do so, so Shaaan trusted to her spell-shield, as she did with me here, and told them she could blast all of them to dust. They scoffed—and she bent down, touched the island, and disintegrated it all, leaving them swimming in the open sea. She stood on the waves, watched them struggle to shed armor before it dragged them down, wished them all fair fortune in the remainder of the day—and then teleported away.”

“Gods above and below,” Dalamar whispered, shaking his head. “*T’d* be impressed.”

“She wouldn’t be another of your wayward lov—er, apprentices, now would she?” Mordenkainen asked, watching weiners sizzle.

“Not this one, nay,” Elminster said firmly, “and if it’s wayward apprentices we’re speaking of, Lord Mage, haven’t you recently acquired no less than three rebellious young beauties yourself?”

“Your spies are capable,” Mordenkainen chuckled. “Shall we invite the ladies here to share these hot dogs you’re so unfond of?”

Elminster looked at Dalamar, and Dalamar looked back at Elminster.

Then they shrugged together, turned their heads in unison to Mordenkainen, and nodded. “Do that.”

The Lord Mage of Greyhawk nodded, bowed, and said, “A simple ring teleport.”

Dalamar’s eyes narrowed. “How can you know they’ll all be in the ring?”

Mordenkainen beamed. “Before I came here, I left the door to my main spell-library unlocked. A long-standing enchantment prevents any book bearing a dweomer from leaving the room. The room is round and—surprise!—corresponds exactly to the dimensions of the ring I’ve created.”

The Wizards Three were still laughing when three startled-looking ladies in night-robes appeared beside the fire—and the world shimmered again.

Elminster stood calmly shaking a sack out of a belt pouch and then unbuckling his belt and dropping it into the sack. An instant later, he was tugging off the ring and looking straight at me. “Before the giggling starts,” he said dryly, “I shall bid ye goodnight, sir scribe. Don’t try creeping down through the woods to watch, either . . . unless an immediate career as a frog appeals strongly to ye.”

“But Elminster,” I said, as he drew me off and held me out over the open, dark maw of the bag, “I have a duty to a lot of readers, who want to know all about the three of you—”

“Ah, but to find *that* out—and to stay around for the rest of the evening—you’re too young,” the Old Mage told me, as the ring fell end over end into the waiting darkness, “by several centuries.”

And humming “Me and My Shadow,” he firmly closed the bag.

For your campaign

The next morning—by peering at but pointedly not asking about the smudges of rouge and kohl on the Old Mage’s face, I managed to get Elminster to tell me enough to lay AD&D® game details of some of the magic hurled around before you.

The spell Elminster used to “redirect” the arriving guests, *translocation shift*, is much used by archmages in Faerûn to ward unwanted visitors away from wizards towers, royal apartments, and treasury vaults into dungeon cells, oubliettes, moats, and similar unwelcoming locales. I was able to see Shaaan’s visit by means of an old, rare spell known as *farscry*.

The Serpent-Queen tried to poison Mordenkainen by means of a *handfangs* spell—and he resisted its effects by means of a *Daurtra’s cloak* applied beforehand (a precaution Elminster had also taken). She then tried to slay all three of the mages—her intended goal all along, Elminster suspects—by means of a *brainblaze* spell.

Two of the Wizards Three used *time stop* spells to try to avoid the bolts hurled at them and to ready their own magical responses.

By means of a spell Elminster isn’t privy to the details of, which she cast on herself along with *permanency*, Shaaan is able to detect the use of a particular spell of each level—and so divined their use of *time stops*, and followed theirs with one of her own, intending to undo what they’d done.

She found Elminster unaffected by any of the time stops—active and aware during all of them (though he didn’t find it necessary to reveal that to either Mordenkainen or Dalamar; after all, a mage must keep *some* secrets), thanks to his *temporal freedom* spell.

Protected by her personal spell-shield (a total-body aura whose details Elminster has never known), Shaaan then tried to slay the Old Mage by physical means . . . but he got me into contact with her (via the ring) while my body proper was beyond the range of her spell-shield, and thus free to activate the ring’s magic: transport to the *Floating Helm of Tharados*.

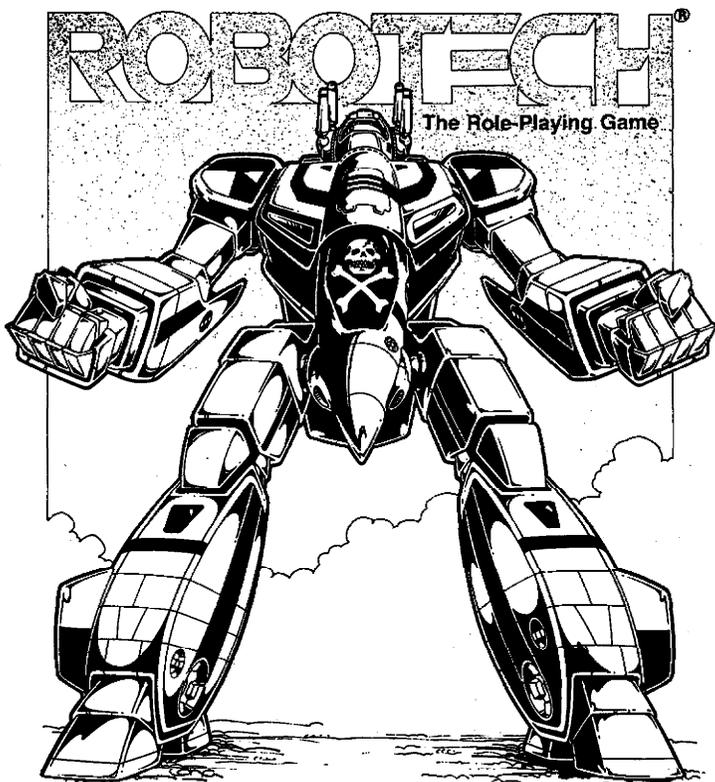
This magic item and the six spells already named are detailed hereafter.

Magic Item

Floating Helm of Tharados

This apparently unique item is named for the Netherese archsorcerer who devised it, and appears as a gigantic “great helm” of the sort worn by the wealthiest plate-armored knights in the more advanced kingdoms of several worlds. “Gigantic” in this case means a little over 5’ tall; the *helm* is theoretically wearable by individuals of several giant races and will protect them against magic. Its interior is a magic-dead zone, and this protection is reputed to extend to the entirety of any body whose head is within the *helm*. Human adventurers are advised that there is no

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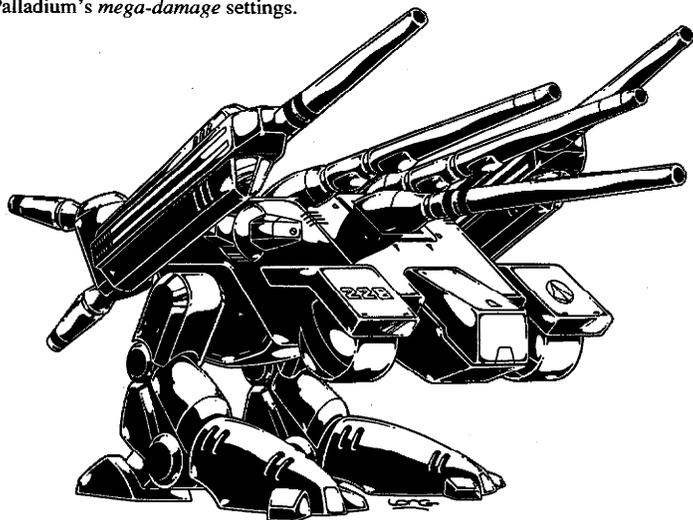
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recorded belief that the *helm* can be made to change size.

Tharados believed in comfort, and the *helm* magically provides water (choice of sugared or regular) and fishpaste (choice of spiced or plain) from two interior nozzles located where the corners of a giant-sized wearer's mouth would be. Air and wastes can freely pass into and out of the open bottom of the *helm*, but Tharados (or someone else) sealed that open space to the passage of living matter with an invisible magical field of unknown composition but great strength.

For some centuries, the *helm* has been drifting about the Astral Plane with purposeful speed on an apparently random course. It was originally equipped with a word of summons ("Threem") that would bring it swiftly to the hand of its summoner if it were stored elsewhere with battle imminent, or allow it to be hurled at foes and then retrieved, as long as that summoner wore a certain plain, powerless brass ring. Since its relegation to the Astral Plane (by unknown hands), this word has served to transport beings to the *helm*, rather than the *helm* coming to them. If such a being wears the ring, he can choose to "fall" through the shielding magic at any time, ending up in the Astral Plane free of the *helm's* prohibition on magic—but if he lacks the ring, he is a prisoner until he dies (whereupon his body falls through the shield) or is rescued by someone able to override the *helm's* magic and bring them out. Rumors persist of a word of quiescence that quells the *helm's* shielding magic and other powers for a considerable period, allowing a creature trapped inside to escape.

Some mages once used the *helm* as a private retreat from foes, to recuperate and to study, or as a way-station in the Astral Plane on planar travels, but this usage has fallen off almost entirely since Elminster (and the other Chosen) discovered that the *helm* still existed, during the Harpstars War. From that time on, it has seen use as a prison—though several mages have found (unspecified) ways of escaping it alive. Others have died or been slain by predators of the Astral Plane or newly arrived prisoners (the *helm* can hold more than one person, though in a very cramped manner), and their dead bodies subsequently aided by previously-cast contingency spells that functioned once the remains were outside the *helm*.

The *helm* still roams the Astral Plane; many visitors there have been startled to see it looming up through the void with menacing speed—and although it's not normally possible to be scooped up into the *helm* by an accidental encounter, the *helm* does strike solid objects it encounters with considerable force (items must save vs. crushing blow, and beings take 4d12 hp damage, or half that if they are alert, free to move, and make a successful Dexterity Check).

GP value: 6,000 XP value: 60,000

Spells

Handfangs (Alteration, Necromancy)

Level: 4 Components: S, M
Range: 0 CT: 4
Duration: 1 rnd/lvl Save: None
Area of Effect: Caster's hands

Using a flake or chip of bone from any source, and a subtle, almost unnoticeable gesture, the caster of this spell conjures bony fangs or hooked teeth that protrude from the back and/or knuckles of one or both of his hands, or a single other extremity, though the fangs appear only on bare flesh, not beneath footwear or clothing.

The fangs are sharp enough to saw through bindings, tear cloth, or slash opponents (for 1d2 hp damage), but they have a more potent attack: the first time *handfangs* touch living flesh, they inject a virulent poison that slows a victim for 1d4 rounds (no saving throw) and instantly inflicts 1 hp damage/level of the caster. The poison's effects can be removed by a *neutralize poison* spell, but *slow poison* is ineffective; there's nothing to "slow." This nerve-numbing attack functions only once per casting, not once for each fanged hand.

Farscry (Alteration, Divination)

Level: 5 Components: V, S, M
Range: Special CT: 5
Dur.: 12 rnds + 2/lvl Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This spell allows the recipient to hear, see, speak, and even touch distant beings and objects on the same plane. The spell recipient's normal vision and hearing are employed by the spell, allowing the affected being to transfer the focal point of his senses from his own body to other objects by thought alone (only one focal point may be used at a time). He can transfer to another, if desired—within a given round.

The spell requires one to three focal points from which the affected being can *farscry*; these must be solid inorganic objects with a smaller surface area than the spell recipient's head. The objects must be touched during casting, but they are not consumed or altered by the spell.

By means of the *farscry* spell, the recipient sees and hears things as if he were standing where the focal points are, but he cannot "turn" or move a focal point to change their view. The spell is not impaired if the focal point is moved by another being or by other causes. The recipient can speak normally through a focal point and touch what the focal point touches—in fact, anything that heats or otherwise harms a focal point harms the spell recipient (though he can end the spell by force of will at any time). The transfer of the recipient's sense of touch through the spell also allows him to activate magic items by touching them with the focal point and speaking through it. Touch spells can also be cast through the focal point,

and words of activation spoken through it, but despite the best efforts of a score of mages down the years, no way to cast ranged spells through a *farscry* link has yet been found—and at least three eminent sages of the magical arts believe it is an impossible goal.

The focal point radiates a dweomer, and the spell recipient's speech is emitted from it, but other sounds around the recipient are not transmitted. The focal point does not change its appearance or exhibit a visible "eye" or other spell manifestation.

The material component is a glass, crystal, or amber ring (which must be translucent, not 'frosted') of any shape or size, that bears the engraved or painted symbol of a human eye.

Daurra's cloak (Necromancy)

Level: 6 Components: V, S, M
Range: 0 CT: 6
Duration: 1 rnd/lvl Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This spell protects the recipient against all known venoms and poisons (including poisonous gases, but not choking smoke or other physical airborne dangers) in the caster or another being touched during casting. Despite its name, the spell is not a visible aura, shield, or cloak, but an internal body state that automatically negates any poison coming into contact with it—allowing a being who knows they'll face poison to prepare for it beforehand.

The spell duration is based on the caster's level, not the level or hit dice of a recipient being. The spell is thought to be effective on all mammalian creatures, and it requires a human hair, a drop of human blood, and at least two drops of a known (liquid) poison in its casting.

Translocation shift

(Alteration, Evocation)
Level: 7 Components: V, S, M
Range: 0 CT: 1 turn
Duration: 10 days/lvl Save: Special
Area of Effect: 1'/lvl diameter sphere

This spell creates an invisible field of protection that guards against beings arriving via *dimension door*, *gate*, *plane shift*, *teleport*, *teleport without error*, or phase shifting (into or out of the Ethereal plane) within its confines. All beings attempting to enter the area by such means (and other translocation spells, magical items, and psionic powers) are redirected to a different destination on the same plane, chosen by the caster of the *translocation shift*. The chosen site must be safe, but it may imprison the traveler or it may be surrounded by waiting dangers.

A *translocation shift* field is unaffected by dispel *magic* and all other priest and wizard spells of less than seventh level sent against it. The *shift* has no effect on the caster, persons speaking a verbal password chosen during casting, or beings bearing a pass-token (any inorganic item)



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chosen and touched during casting. A "shift field" need not be linked to a pass-word or token, but never excludes its caster.

The spell's saving throw begins with an Intelligence check for incoming magic- or psionic-using beings redirected by the shift field. If the check fails, the spell has its normal effect. If the check succeeds, the being realizes that something is awry. It may try to alter its destination, resulting in safe arrival (i.e. not teleporting into an area occupied by a solid object) in a random destination on the same plane—not the one the field was set up to direct them to, nor any alternative spot they choose in mid-travel! A successful saving throw vs. spell results in a final destination close to the one the arriving being was trying to reach; failure indicates arrival in a spot near where the shift field tried to send them.

The material components are a handful of diamond dust (crushed diamonds worth 75,000 gp or more) and a bit of rubber or tree gum.

Temporal Freedom (Alteration)
Level: 8 Components: V, S, M
Range: 0 CT: 1 round
Duration: 1 day/lvl Save: None
Area of Effect: One being

This spell confers immunity to aging upon the caster or another being touched

during casting. This includes immunity to magical aging, such as that caused by a *haste* spell or by a reversing *potion of longevity*, aging due to monster powers, such as those of a ghost.

It also provides protection against all spells that affect the passage of time near the protected being, such as *Phezult's sleep of ages*, *temporal stasis*, and *time stop*. Spells that affect only the recipient's internal metabolism (such as *haste* and *slow*) aren't impaired by a *temporal freedom* spell.

A being within the confines of a *time stop* who is protected by *temporal freedom*, for example, remains free to hear, see, and act—but could pretend to be frozen until the caster of the *time stop* drew near, turned away, or left himself open to attack. *Temporal freedom* is unaffected if the protected being uses additional magic.

The material component is a pinch of bone dust.

Brainblaze (Alteration, Evocation)
Level: 9 Components: S
Range: 0 CT: 1
Duration: 1 round Save: Special
Area of Effect: Special

This spell allows the caster to transform his body into a pillar of pure life energy.

The body appears to "fall away" to reveal a pillar of bright white light of the same height and in the same location as the body occupied. This pillar can "float," hanging in midair, if no surface exists for it to stand on, and it cannot be harmed by non-magical means. (A caster could use this spell to avoid the effects of a hail of arrows or other physical attack that could not be avoided.)

The caster must make a successful Constitution check to reform his body; failure means the essence of the mage is doomed to wander, aware but silent, until some means of gaining a body or receptacle is found (this typically requires the aid of another magic-using being).

The pillar of life energy evoked by the spell cannot cast spells but can hurl bolts of itself at any living target, using the caster's normal THAC0. Such attacks do not diminish the pillar's vitality and fade away at spell expiration if they miss. Struck targets suffer 1d10 hp damage per level of the caster. Undead suffer double damage from such attacks, but half of the damage they suffer is also permanently lost by the caster.

If a *brainblaze bolt* contacts a mind that contains memorized spells, it can steal a random spell from the mind; the caster instantly gains the stolen spell and may cast it after the *brainblaze* spell's expiration if he has the necessary material components. The stolen spell is always from one of the three most powerful spell levels memorized by the target, or the most powerful level if fewer than three spell levels are represented.

Alternatively, the caster of a *brainblaze* can send forth two bolts that burn a target for 1d8 hp damage per experience level, three bolts at 1d6 per level, or four bolts at 1d4 per level. All of these bolts strike with the caster's THAC0 and have the power to steal spells, simultaneously.

Any being that touches the main pillar of life energy is also subject to spell-stealing and loses 1d10 +2 hp per level of the *brainblaze* caster. The pillar flies at a Movement Rate of 22, with Maneuverability Class A; it strikes with the caster's normal THAC0.

Elminster tells me that Shaaan employed an unusual charm spell on Dalamar, but he does not have enough details of it to pass on anything useful in game terms. He's working on finding out enough about her personal spell-shield to present to me, but isn't eager to bring her back from the *helm* to conduct a close examination.

"Mayhap I can find an overzealous Harper mage to volunteer for the task . . . and then Khelben and The Simbul and I can go rescue him," he mused when I saw him last. He didn't look like a man who expected to find such a wizard, but he did say the Three had enjoyed themselves so much that they'll be meeting again "quite soon." I'll keep you posted. Ω

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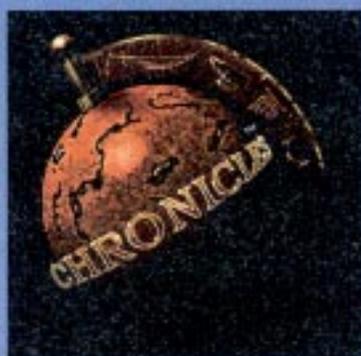
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The Game Wizards

by Lester Smith

I like puzzles, especially three-dimensional ones. There's something fascinating about the challenge of piecing together seemingly disparate objects into a unified whole. At first, the pieces seem unwilling to fit together. But experimentation leads to inspiration, and *voila*, the many become one.

Designing a game is often like solving a puzzle. I'm sure that many people assume that game design is a matter of "blue-skying": deciding what you want to do, then accumulating whatever materials are needed, and spending whatever time is necessary to reach your goal. But designing a game is a type of publishing, and publishing always has parameters. Truth be told, that's where a lot of the fun comes in. To paraphrase William Wordsworth's "Nuns fret not" sonnet, there is a "solace" to be found in boundaries, whether they be the frame of the weaver's loom, the structure of the poet's sonnet form, or the material components available to the game designer. Like someone assembling a puzzle, the game designer visualizes a desired "shape," sizes up the possibilities of the materials available, and then lets inspiration build on that framework. If done right, the end result transcends the component bits and achieves its own beauty and permanence.



The Design Puzzle

In the case of the DRAGON DICE™ game, my boundaries consisted of a set of publishing desires on the one hand, and the realities of dice molding on the other.

Our publishing desires included several considerations. Naturally, we wanted to create dice unlike anything ever seen before. And we wanted a game with lots of choices for the player, rather than simply a "roll and compare" fest. We wanted polyhedral dice, in multiple sizes, and in multiple colors. And we wanted something as portable as a card game, yet expandable.



Of Dice & Men

But the realities of molding dice are unlike those of printing cards. You can print a sheet of 100 cards and every card on that sheet can be a different color. With dice, on the other hand, everything in one run is molded from the same color plastic, formed to the same size, and inked the same way. Cards can be designed in multiple different sheets and still use the same printing press. With dice, every change in size or shape requires a different mold, and if you want dice color to change for different dice functions, as I did for representing multiple fantasy races, each color also requires a new mold. Suffice it to say that distinctive dice are much more difficult to make than distinctive cards are, they take much longer to manufacture, and there are far fewer places in the world to have them produced.

On top of all that, cards have a lot more space for artwork than reasonably sized dice do. Dice, on the other hand, are far more tangible, being fully three dimensional. Take a look at a twelve-sided dragon from a DRAGON DICE basic set, for example, and you'll immediately see what I mean.

After an initial concept meeting or two with my cronies at TSR, followed by a crash course in dice manufacturing with representatives from Koplów, I set about creating my vision. Considering that this article precedes the release of the actual game, let me quickly summarize the rules.



Rules Synopsis

In the DRAGON DICE game, players command dice armies in an attempt to seize terrain while avoiding dragons. (The game can be played with two or more players.) Armies consist primarily of six-sided dice representing different types of soldiers from several fantasy races (coral elves, dwarves, goblins, and lava elves in the basic set, with a fifth race—the amazons—added to the first Kicker Pack, which also adds ten-sided monster allies for all five races). Each soldier (or monster) has its own mix of symbols on its faces, and has one face with an identifying icon. Depending on its type, a die might have magic, missile, melee, maneuver, or saves on its various faces; the rarest dice even have special effects, such as flight or cantrips. The bigger the die, the rarer it is, the more difficult it is to "kill," and the more effect each face has in play (though the smaller dice are slightly more cost effective, and more flexible in use, than a comparable point value of larger dice). Terrain is represented by eight-sided dice of varying colors, and the first player to control two terrain dice with his armies wins the game.

The aforementioned dragons serve as spoilers. Too powerful to serve in any army, these dragons are raw elemental forces of the land. (Which is why each dragon die is of a single color, to match one of those elements.) Once conjured up at a particular terrain, dragons attack anyone and everyone at that location. So you only want to summon a dragon when you need to whittle down an opposing army, don't have enough conventional forces to do so yourself, and don't plan on ever going back to the now-dragon afflicted terrain.

Represented on the terrain dice is an abstracted turn sequence. At the low end of the sequence, any armies at the terrain are very far apart, far enough to cast magical spells, in fact. Toward the middle of the sequence, armies are close enough to fire arrows and other missiles at one another. At the high end, melee is the only option. Once the die is turned to its eighth face, the terrain is captured, giving its possessor defensive bonuses and a choice of actions, plus a special benefit linked to the type of terrain. The sequence changes slightly from terrain to terrain, to represent the special nature of maneuver and battle there. The flatlands, for instance,

Continued on page 122

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What's a Wizard to Do?

by Anne Brown

Some projects are blessings in disguise. When I learned I would be part of the BIRTHRIGHT™ game development team, the idea of working on the new campaign setting seemed kind of neat, but the concept of a world heavy in politics and economics was—well, about as dry as the dust on my old college history textbooks.

Since I've never had a particular interest in warfare or politics, I quickly rolled up a wizard named Aurelia when we started playtesting these new rules. Okay, I thought, I love wizards. Let's see what this game can do for my favorite character class. I created a wizard with a slightly above average bloodline, which granted her some special abilities. As a blooded character, she was allowed to rule a domain, which turned out to be a nice little collection of magical holdings on the southern coast of Anuire. I passed up the option to rule actual tracts of land—that seemed too messy.

The first several sessions were rather lean. I couldn't make any of my die rolls, and wizards can't collect much money if they don't rule lands. I was getting nowhere. Then one day, Sue Weinlein made an offer I couldn't refuse. Queen Sue was under attack from assorted local armies. "Hey, I'll pay you to be my court wizard!" she offered. I went for it.

I now had some actual income, as well as the backing of the queen. Things were looking up. I got to spy on people, hang around the queen's court and harass people, and annoy the guilds with my wizardly powers.

Then came the day that Rich Baker walked into the playtest with realm spells—high-powered spells that can be used only by blooded wizards who rule a domain. Great! Cool new things for a regent wizard to do!

Queen Sue was still under attack by numerous armies, so I scanned the list of realm spells. Move *troops* caught my eye. "Hey, Rich, I think I'll move a unit of enemy troops out of Sue's province," I said. He turned a little pale. "That really wasn't my intention," he said. "I figured people would use that spell to move their own troops."

"It doesn't say that I *can't*," I wheedled. The others around the table quickly came to my defense. Rich assented. "Then I'll move this unit of knights," I announced, peering at the map and choosing the domain of a spider abomination. "Right into

the Spiderfell!" The rest of the group howled with laughter, Rich wrote himself a note to change that spell, and Jon Pickens called out (on the Spider's behalf), "Thanks for the canned goods!" Playing a wizard was suddenly interesting!

In the time since that playtest, I've dreamed up many more interesting things for wizards to do. Magic in Cerilia is inherently different from magic in other game worlds. For those of you who aren't enamored by the idea of playing in a war-torn land of political unrest, I'd like to pass along my ideas for making the game more interesting.

Cerilian Magic

Cerilia is designed to be a land imbued with magic. Its magical energy comes from the physical features of the land—waterfalls, gorges, cliffs, and deep caverns all contribute to this energy known as *mebhaighl* (meh-VALE). Areas of fantastic natural features create more *mebhaighl*, while barren plains and deserts provide less energy. Places that are highly populated or developed inhibit the land's natural energy. The result is that wizards must choose their lands wisely; if a mage hopes to cast powerful realm magic, he must know where to tap into the sources of such magic.

Mebhaighl does not affect ordinary wizard spells like those found in the *Player's Handbook*; such enchantments are no different in Cerilia than they are anywhere else. Realm spells, on the other hand, are dependent on having sufficient *mebhaighl*. Realm spells can be cast only from a magical source—thus, it's in a wizard's best interest to find those sources, develop them, and maintain them.

Some wizards may find the lure of the throne exciting, and may wish to rule lands as well. This can lead to infinite exciting and rewarding adventures. But from my experience, a wizard in Cerilia will be more successful in magical endeavors if she allies herself with a king or queen who sees to the burdens of politics and war. This leaves a wizard free to pursue interests of magic.

One of the more interesting elements of politics is this: as rulers improve and civilize their lands, the *mebhaighl* in those lands *decreases*. Wizards may suffer as a result. On the other hand, wizards who *weaken* the economic power of the lands around them actually benefit from

strengthened *mebhaighl*.

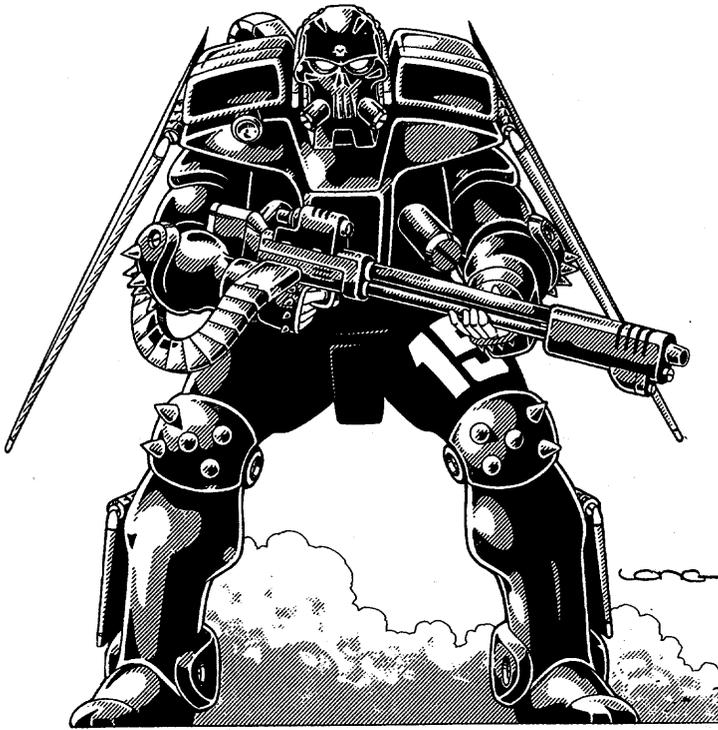
So what's a wizard whose major holdings are in magically weak areas to do? Simple—she runs a pipeline to a magic-heavy land. Wizards are allowed to create ley lines that channel energy from *mebhaighl*-rich sources to places weak in magic. A mage can then draw energy from a powerful magical source high in the mountains and use that magic hundreds of miles away, even in the middle of a bustling city.

A wise king or queen will make an effort to place a wizard on the payroll. By allowing a court mage to maintain some weak local sources as well as powerful remote sources, the ruler can benefit from awesome magic potential. It's also in a ruler's best interest to *protect* those sources; of course, this can lead to dozens of adventures and territory disputes.

Even a wizard who chooses not to rule a domain can find extensive employment and adventure opportunities. During times of war, a wizard might be kept busy day and night simply scrying on various enemy armies—and could easily become a double-agent through such an arrangement! Wars also require magical weapons and armor, defensive devices, or items of healing that only a wizard can provide. Even low level illusionists may find themselves in demand on a battlefield.

Because of Cerilia's predisposition to war, wizards and their magical item handiwork are less common here than in other game worlds. But that also makes them more valuable. And in light of Cerilia's primary enemies, the *awnsheghlien* (twisted monstrosities of evil bloodlines who wield extraordinary powers), wizards take on even greater importance. Warriors may steal the spotlight and dominate the political power structure, priests may control the hearts of the faithful, but the wizards control the real power in the land—just ask Roger Moore. His wizard-king summoned thousands of legions of undead that ran rampant across Anuire, and it took at least six other rulers working together finally to squash him.

If you're like I was, and you're thinking that the BIRTHRIGHT setting has nothing to offer your wizard, think again. The magical powers available in Cerilia can make wizards the envy of the other classes—and can make a wizard's life more exciting than ever before. Ω



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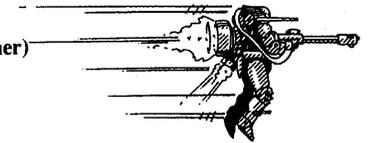
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On May 11-13 fans witnessed the phenomenon known as **Neverwinter Nights** at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles. Neverwinter Nights is a graphically-based, interactive multi-player game on America Online.

During prime time you can find as many as 300 gamers simultaneously playing **Neverwinter Nights** (keyword: NWN). Rob Repp, TSR's Digital Projects Manager says, "This isn't a new phenomenon. Thousands of AD&D players are techies. They are smart, computer literate, and they love networking. They created the first text-based interactive games in the networks years ago."

TSR's online service also gives members who log on special t-shirts, modules, and prizes when they discover secret windows in the forum. TSR's future plans include setting up a complete service on the **World Wide Web**; creating a multi-user dungeon with TSR characters and settings; and exploring interactive voice and video on the AOL forum.

Some out-of-print or otherwise unavailable material is also available on AOL, including **DMGR2 The Castle Guide**. Roger Moore has updated and added some new material to **The Shadow Elves Gazetteer** which will be available electronically in the future.

TSR designer and creative director **Bruce Nesmith**, best known for his work with the **RAVENLOFT® SPELLFIRE™**, **GAMMA WORLD®** 4th Edition, **DARK SUN®**, and the soon-to-be-released **DRAGON DICE™** games, has left TSR after 10 years with the company's Game Department. He will be joining Bethesda Softworks (known for their computer role-playing games *The Elder Scrolls Arena* game and sports games, such as *Wayne Gretzky's Hockey III*). Their headquarters are NOT in Bethesda, Maryland.

Alan Pollack, a frequent contributor to DRAGON® Magazine and DUNGEON®

Adventures, has joined TSR's world famous art studio. His most recent cover for DRAGON Magazine was issue #214, and he is the man responsible for last year's infamous "TSR Gothic" April Fool's cover (issue #204). He has relocated to Lake Geneva from New Jersey.

Nelvana Communications Inc., and TSR will release an **animated movie** based on the popular **DRAGONLANCE®** setting in late 1996. The script, written by veteran screenwriters Judy and Gar Reeves-Stevens, is based on original game material, some of it previously unreleased, the rest linked to the "Dragons of Hope" and "Dragons of Desolation" adventures. Nelvana is best known for their work on the cartoons *Jim Henson's Dog City*, *Beetlejuice*, *Tales from the Crypt Keeper*, and *Babar*.

John DeChancie (of *Castle Perilous* fame) has been signed to write the first two **Castle Falkenstein** novels. The first is a wild blend of 007 and the Wild Wild West, called **From Prussia with Love**, and involves all of the main characters from the CF rule book.

The **Warhammer FRP** game is back in print, to be followed by a reprint of the *Shadows Over Bogenhafen* supplement and two new supplements, *Apocrypha Now* and *The Dying of the Light*.

Hogshead Publishing is also releasing **FRUP**, billed as "the craziest role-playing game ever published!" They just might be right: Following in the British tradition (Terry Prachett, Monty Python, Douglas Adams), FRUP centers around... three RPG rulebooks that crash to earth in the middle of a fantasy kingdom and are proclaimed as a message from the gods. The books become the world's religion and all the characters are convinced that they're characters in a different role-playing game.

MicroProse will be releasing a computer game version of **Magick: The Gathering** that promises to be every bit as hot as the original collectible card game. This computer version is two games in one; the stand-alone game lets beginners learn the rules to build their confidence, the multi-

player game lets players go online or play head-to-head via modem against other players.

White Wolf, in conjunction with GT Interactive Software, will release a CD-ROM version of their **Vampire: The Masquerade** game sometime this fall. GTIS has added a high-tech twist to the game while remaining true to the mission of enveloping players in the vampire culture. What's the twist? Well, GT isn't saying. It could be a breakthrough in computer games, or it could just be a marketing ploy to generate sales. Stay tuned.

Rumor has it that White Wolf will be taking over the distribution chores for the **Whispering Vault** RPG from Pariah Press. The combination of Pariah's design and the Wolfies' wider distribution net should introduce the game to a broad new audience (that's the plan, anyway).

Omni Gaming Products Inc., has purchased the license to **TORG: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars** RPG from West End Games, Omni will release new adventures and sourcebooks, and there are also plans to revive a 32-page expanded version of **Infiniverse**, the bi-monthly guide for TORG.

And in computer game news, Legend Entertainment Company has signed **Michael Dorn (ST:NG)** and **Patricia Charbonneau (Robo Cop II)** to star in the upcoming multi-media deep space adventure, **Mission Critical**. Look for it this fall.

Two new designers have joined TSR's staff: **Bill Olmsdahl** of West End Games, and **Mike Nystul** of Pariah Press. Both are design veterans with years of experience. Olmsdahl will work on design in the new DARK SUN setting with fellow former Wester-Ender, Bill Slavisek. Nystul will collaborate on core design work with TSR vet Colin McComb, beginning with a major boxed set for the PLANESCAPE™ multi-verse. Welcome aboard, guys!

Correction Corner

In issue #217 we mentioned that the game **Talislanta** was purchased by WotC. What we meant, of course, is that WotC had bought all publication rights to Talislanta. Talislanta is owned by Bard Games and designer Steve Sechi, who licensed it to WotC. WotC returned the rights to Steve last year, and he's hoping to get Toronto's **Daedalus Games** to take it on.

In the same issue, we also said that WotC gobbled up most of Pagan Press. Well, WotC did hire **John Tynes**, Pagan's creative force, as a full-time employee, but Pagan Press is still a separate entity. We apologize for the misprint; those responsible have been sacked.

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

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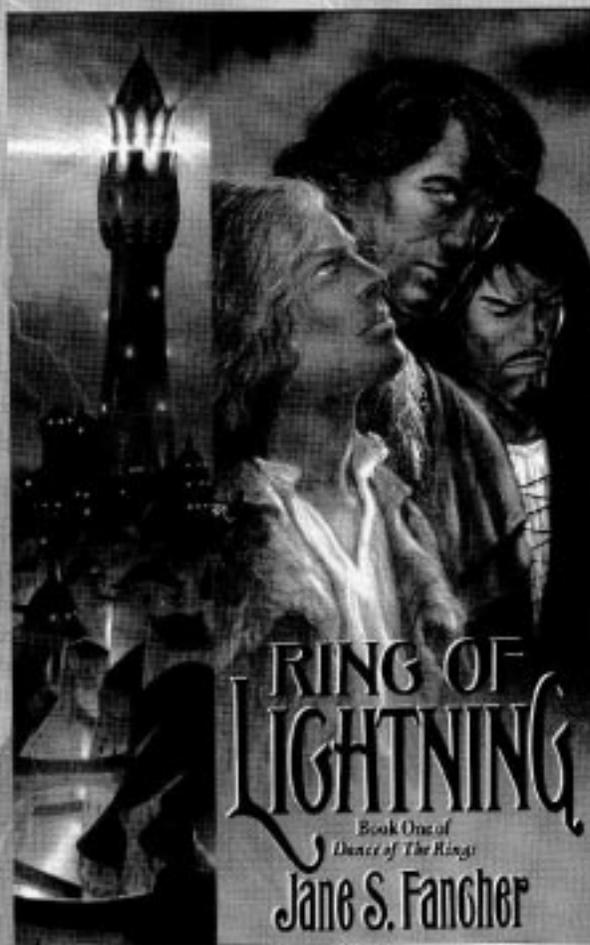


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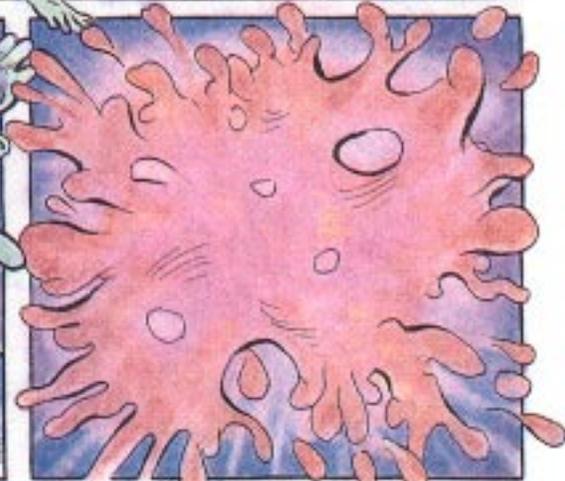
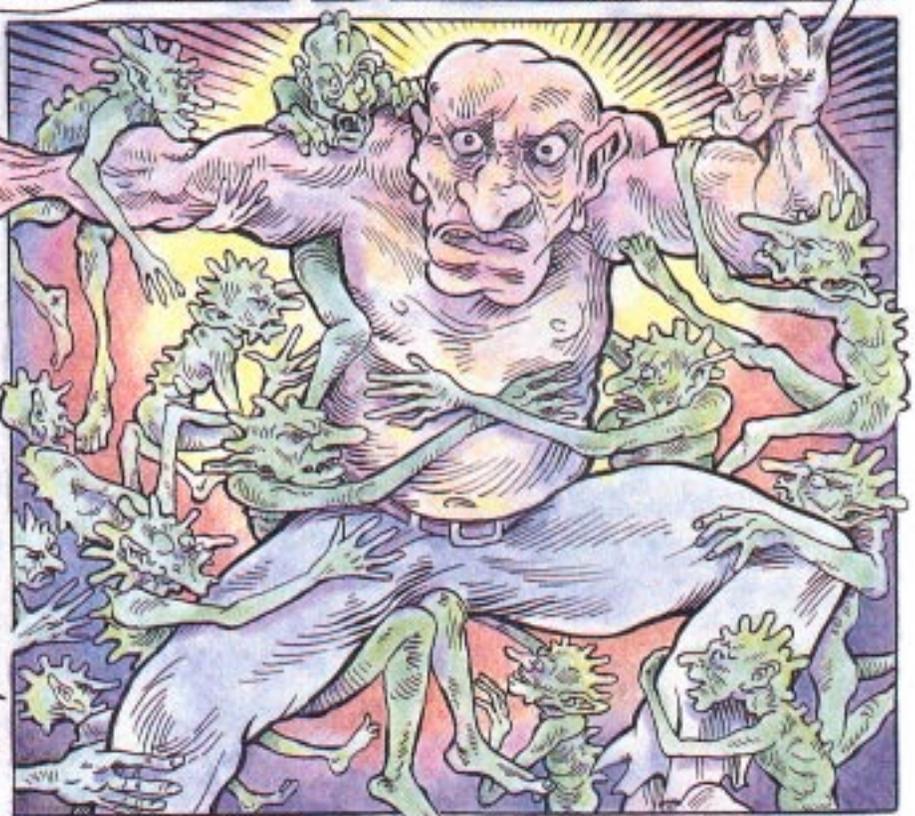
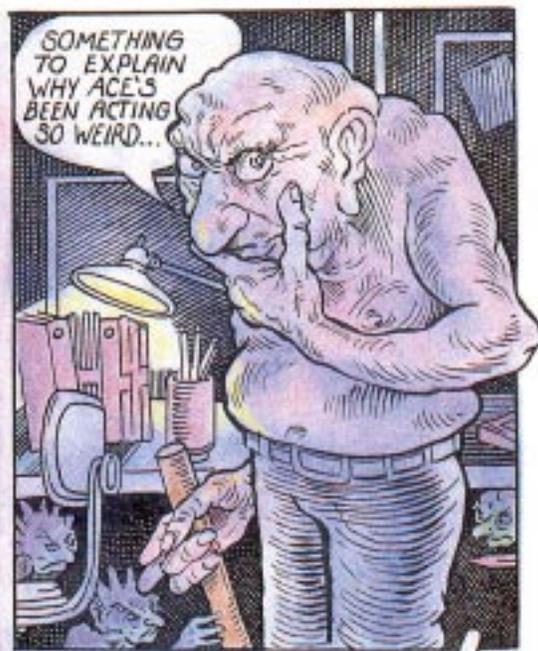
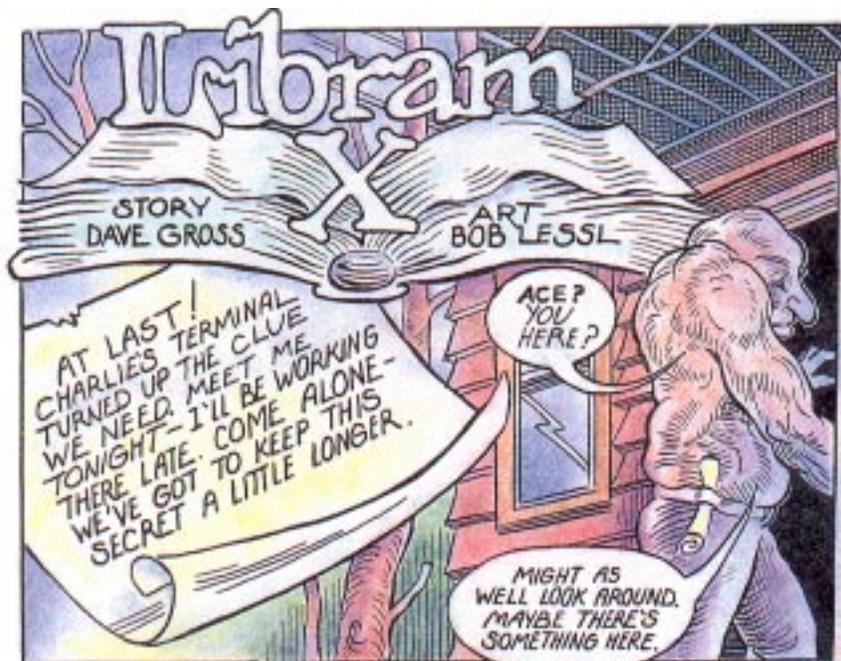
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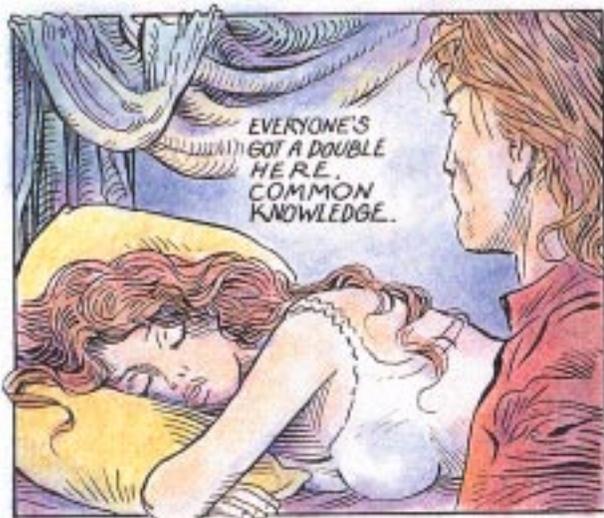


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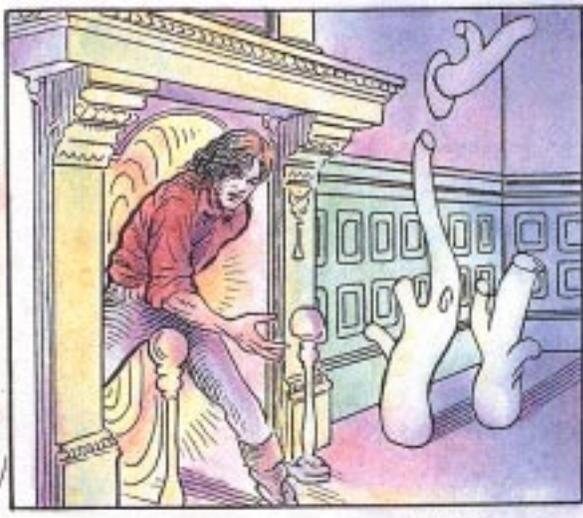




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OF COURSE, MOST DOUBLES AREN'T EXACT TWINS. JEN TOLD ME ABOUT MEETING HERS, A SORT OF CENTAUR-JEN. WEIRD.



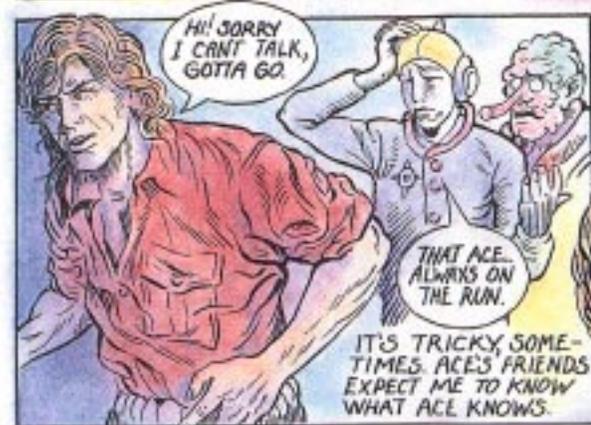
SO IT'S BOTH EASIER, AND HARDER FOR ME. I CAN PASS FOR ACE. I'VE EVEN FOOLED HIS CLOSE FRIENDS

ACE! YOU'VE BEEN GONE A WHILE.

GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!



HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS.



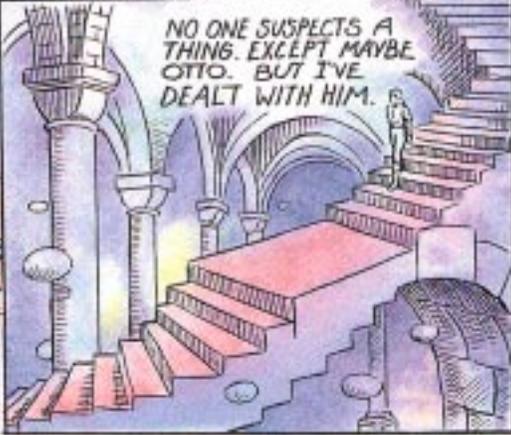
HI! SORRY I CAN'T TALK, GOTTA GO.

THAT ACE. ALWAYS ON THE RUN.

IT'S TRICKY, SOMETIMES. ACE'S FRIENDS EXPECT ME TO KNOW WHAT ACE KNOWS.



LUCKILY, WE'RE A LOT ALIKE. WE ACT ALIKE WE LIKE THE SAME THINGS.



NO ONE SUSPECTS A THING. EXCEPT MAYBE OTTO. BUT I'VE DEALT WITH HIM.



ACE?

THE FIRST DAY WAS THE WORST. AND NO ONE HAD TOLD ME ABOUT JEN, AND I...



ENOUGH. WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR STORIES. WHAT OF THE LIBRAM?



WELL, I WAS TRYING TO EXPLAIN...



>SIGH< ACE HAD A MAP IN HIS ROOMS.



I DON'T HAVE IT ON ME. BESIDES, ITS NO GOOD WITHOUT THE KEY CHARLIE'S THE ONE WHO HAD THAT INFORMA.

THE LIBRAM, BLOODRUNNER.

GIVE US THE MAP.

BRING US THE MAP AND THE KEY.



BUT...



WHAT!/?



ONE THING MORE...

WE SHALL TOLERATE NO FURTHER DELAYS. YOU HAVE ONE MORE DAY BEFORE WE PASS JUDGMENT ON YOUR CONTRACT.

WE WEARY OF EXCUSES. YOU BECOME TOO MUCH LIKE ACE. YOU BECOME UNRELIABLE. A LIABILITY.

BRING US THE WOMAN CALLED JEN.



YOU DON'T NEED HER!



SHE DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING I CAN'T LEARN FOR YOU!



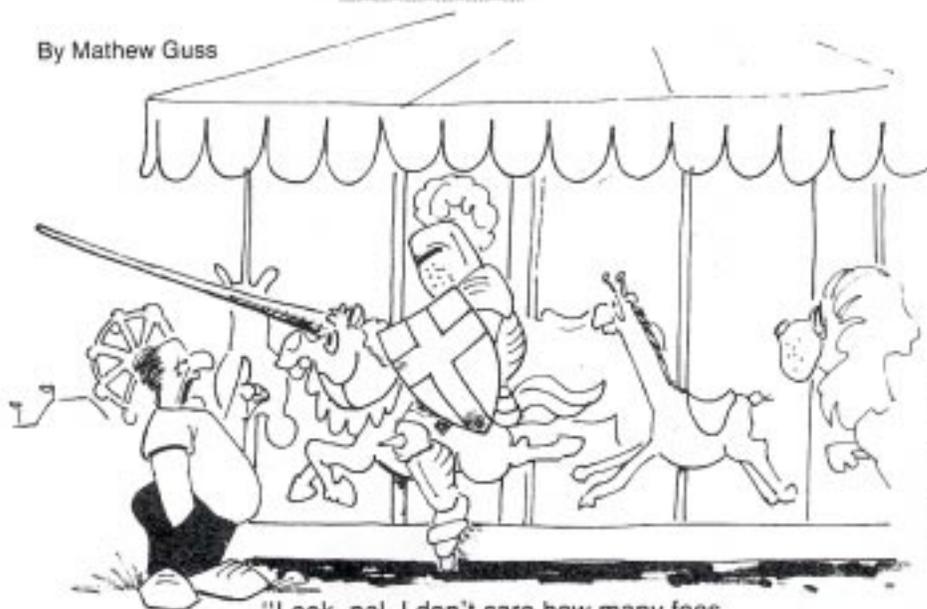
SHE WAS CLOSE TO ACE AND MAY KNOW SOMETHING OF THE LIBRAM.

SHE IS ALSO SAID TO HAVE HAD A HAND IN TARANT'S DEATH. THE LAW REQUIRES SHE BE PUNISHED

BRING THEM TO US BLOODRUNNER-THE MAP THE KEY AND THE WOMAN. OR WE SHALL SEND SOMEONE FOR YOU.

Dragonmirrh

By Mathew Guss



"Look, pal, I don't care how many foes you've vanquished. It's still one rider per ticket!"

By Walk Hackensmith



"This darn moat control never works!"



"We'd better stop, Bert. I'm getting kinda bloodthirsty."

By Aaron Williams

SWORDPLAY

By Matthew Guss

OKAY, ARNOLD, BABY, IN THIS SCENE YOU, AS KING KRONIN DO BATTLE WITH KEVIN KRUSTNER AS THE EVIL PRINCE NASTLEY, AND YOU HACK HIM TO PIECES!



OKAY! QUIET EVERYBODY! ARE YOU READY ARNOLD?



"That wasn't quite the idea, Arthur."



By Jeff Haas



OKAY, ARNOLD, BABY, IN THIS SCENE YOU, AS KING KRONIN DO BATTLE WITH DOW CRUISE AS PRINCE NASTLEY, PRETENDING TO HACK HIM TO PIECES...



Yamara™

By Barbara Manui & Chris Adams

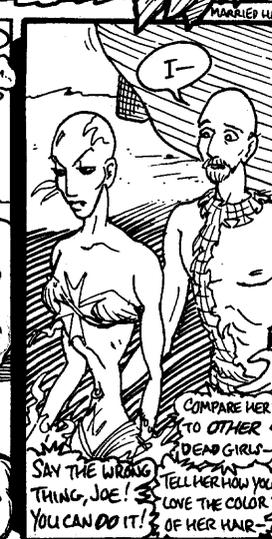
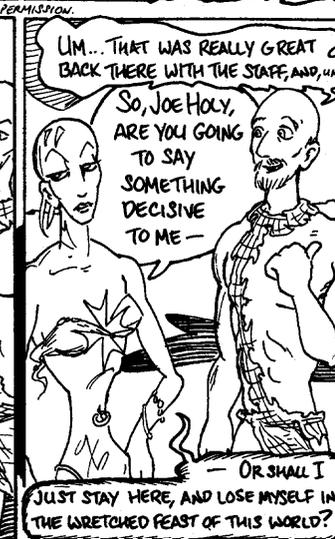
ON THE WORLD OF

HARD FUN

WELL, YOU LEFT, AND THEN GLATHWELD SHOWED UP AS A FROZEN YOGURT VENDOR? AND HE SAID YOU'D ALREADY DEFEATED HIM? SO, HE LOOKED DOWN AND OUT, AND HE WAS AMAZED AT YOUR STRATEGY, AND HE GOT ME TO DESCRIBE IT IN DETAIL, CAUSE I THOUGHT YOU WERE DONE WITH IT? AND THEN HE GAVE ME SOME TURKISH DELIGHT AND THESE COLLECTIBLE CARDS... BUT HE'S DEAD NOW, RIGHT? SO LIKE, WILL YOU FORGIVE ME? HEH HEH YOUUU

WELL, I BELIEVE HIM AND IF MY WORD ISN'T ENOUGH - NEL, WHAT DOES YOUR HEART SAY WE SHOULD DO WITH FREEZIP?

WE COULD MAKE IT QUICK AND PAINLESS.



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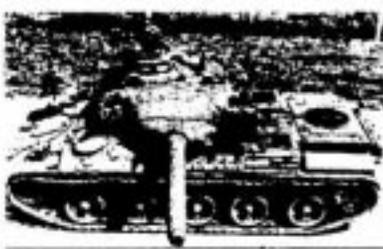
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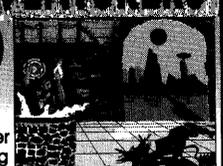
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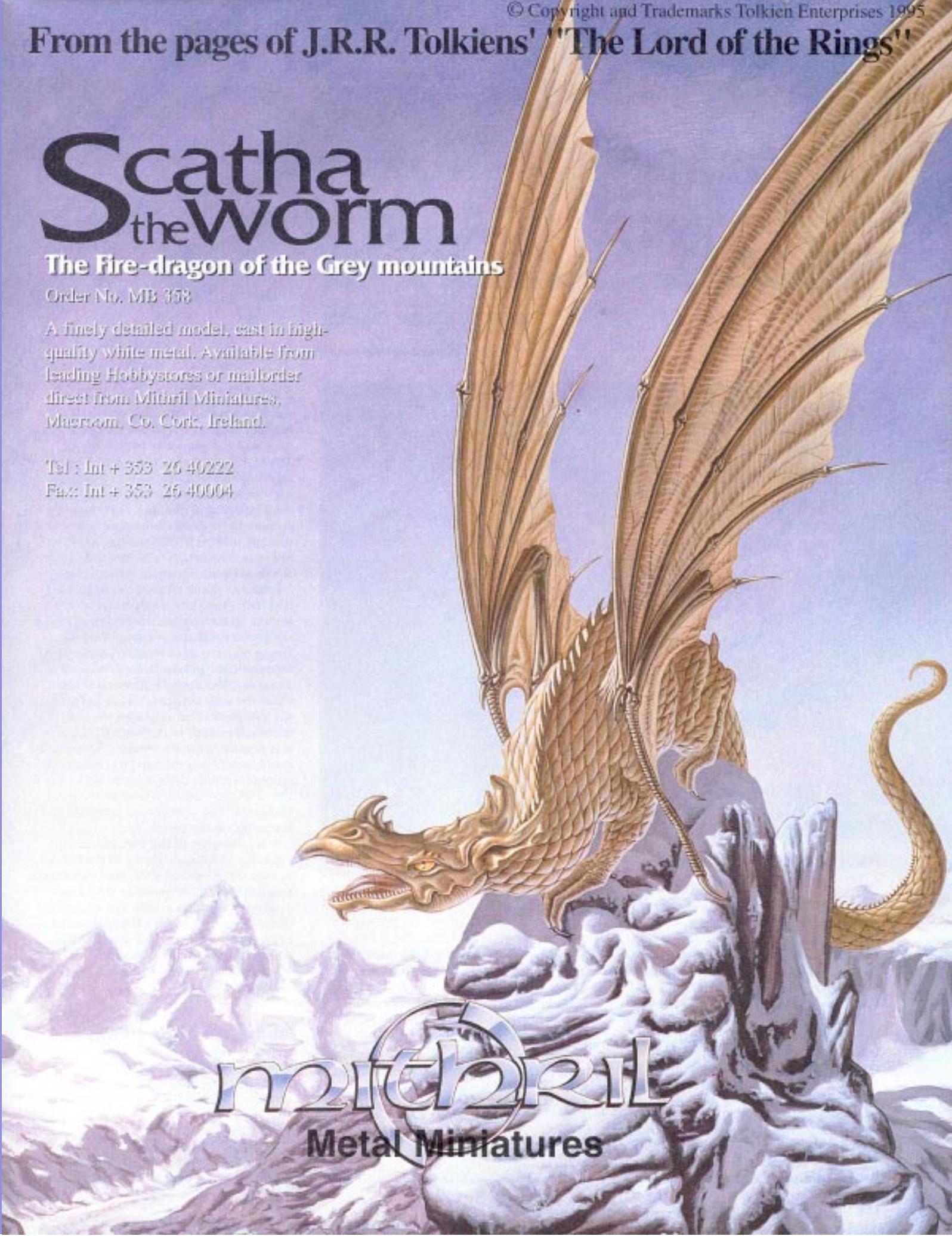
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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



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Starter Castle (Hudson & Allen)

A fond farewell

Seven years ago I was getting ready for the first combined GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ convention, and doing what I could to stimulate interest in miniature gaming. Roger Moore gave me a chance to reintroduce a consumer-friendly miniatures column in DRAGON® Magazine. The column's goal was to provide painting tips, industry news, battle scenarios, and objective reviews of fantasy, science fiction and historical miniatures. I promised that I would follow the guidelines, and "Through the Looking Glass" was born in issue #135.

Over the years I covered how to construct a miniature workspace (issue #143),

a Battle for Retirement Village (issue #148) and two complete BATTLETECH® campaigns (issues #161-163) supplied by my club. I tried to help people understand Desert Shield and Desert Storm by presenting a number of books, historical

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

miniatures, and rules that would allow you to see the consequences of different military options. In the last two years we have covered some key WWII events. Through it all I researched my columns carefully to avoid mistakes. My goal has been to bring miniatures to life through descriptions and pictures. Several other authors have offered contributions to this column, and I wish to thank all of them. But now the curtain falls, and this will be the final issue containing this column.

I want to thank all the companies that had faith in me and sent products for review. In some cases the reviews pointed out problems that a company was not aware of; most have reacted positively to improve their products. Even when we disagreed, the manufacturers still provided me with support. I want to thank all the companies that provided me with the materials needed to research the figures and provide accurate reviews. The column could never have retained the standards I wanted without them. Last of all, I want to thank all the readers who sent in letters and ideas. This was always your column—I just supplied the pencil.

It is somewhat fitting that I close my remarks with a correction. In the February issue the column contained references to a BATTLETECH® product that was available when the article was submitted. Since that time *Solaris VII* has gone out of print. You should look for it at auctions and out of the way hobby shops.

May the "little people" always go where you want them to.

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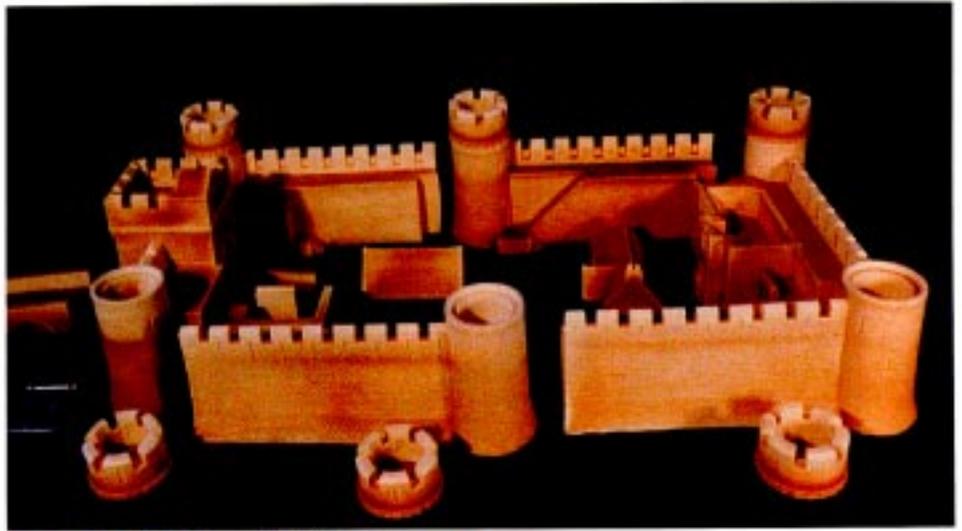
This castle is an expanded foam product scaled to fit 25 mm, but fully capable of housing 28 mm figures. It is the successor

to the kits that I reviewed as "the Deep" in issue #185 and the "Great Gate" and "Mini-Castle" in issue #197. The new castle was designed with the gamer and the artist in mind.

The trip through the castle begins with the cobblestone causeway leading to the drawbridge. Close inspection allows you to see repair spots on the random stone sides, but the arch and handrail are of worked smooth stone. (Technicians note: If you cut away the foam on the inside of the arch, it improves the appearance immensely. All you need is a sharp knife and patience.) The road ends abruptly in bricks and a stone bridge that supports the cast metal, wood-grained drawbridge. The planks appear to be held together by hinge nails driven into the strap-reinforced molded wood frame underneath. Several very small imperfections mar the top surface, but they may be deliberate, as they enhance rather than detract from the piece.

The next section is the gatehouse assembly. The tower assembly is in a rough "L" measuring 13½ by 10¾ inches. The cobblestone road continues into the castle and passes the stable on the right before it ends. The stable interior is 2 by 4¼" and has piles of straw, bedding, and a water trough. You can access this area by removing the wood shake covered roof piece. This roof has arrow slits for firing into the courtyard, and a slot so the roof only goes on one way. There is a door that enters the guardhouse molded in the corner closest to the wall. The roof of the guardhouse is covered in stone and is part of the defense zone between the tower and gatehouse proper, and is actually part of the wall. All the castle towers measure 7½" high and have a 2¾" diameter. The arrow slits molded in the merlons must be opened carefully with a knife or painted black. The tower walls resemble random stone, with finished stone framing all window or arrow openings. The roof can be removed, exposing a wooden floor with a trap door, a metal-reinforced door leading to the walkway, arrow slit, and shutters. At least three figures with normal bases can fit inside. The wooden top of the tower features a center trap door. All of the tower caps are difficult to remove and replace; sand carefully around the inside rim to improve the fit.

The actual gatehouse is a three-piece assembly. The lower third is part of the molded base and contains a cobblestone road and an elevated ledge on both sides, for fighting or for inspecting wagons; this portion has notches for the metal drawbridge to fit. The doorway arch is smooth, worked stone and extends into the second part. Part two contains the top of the arch, with stonework front to back and a pair of slots to run the drawbridge chain through. The two notches allow the part to fit only one way. Two molded doors mark passage to the walls.



Starter Castle (Hudson & Allen)



Wood Elf Archers (Harlequin)

The last part contains a stone-protected doorway and the large fighting platform with steps in the walls. This piece sat slightly off on my castle and required light surgery before it lined up correctly.

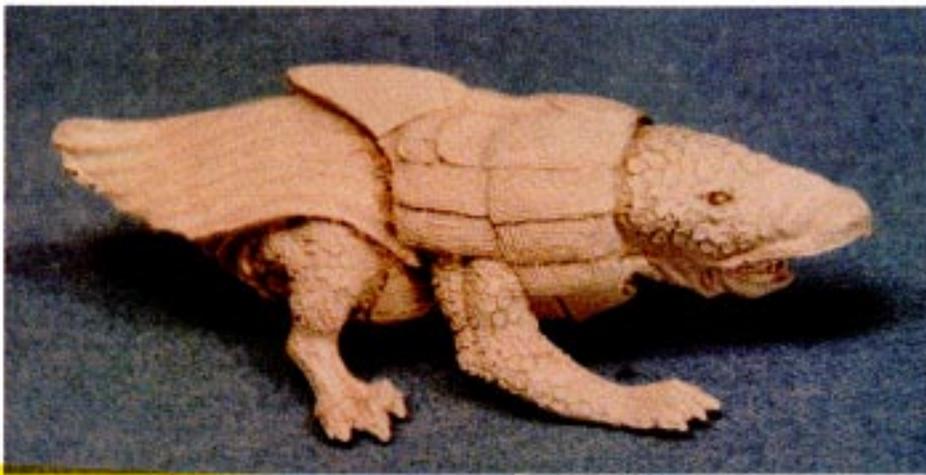
Although the kit contains four 13" wall sections, there are only two distinct types. The first type has a tower identical to the gatehouse at the left end, while the right is slotted to butt up against another tower. Its battlements stand 5" tall at the top of the merlons. The walkway is 17 mm wide and holds a 25 mm hex base with room to spare, or a double row of regular figures. Access to the tower is through a stone building with a shake-covered roof, wooden door, shuttered windows, and a small flight of stairs. The second wall type has a flight of stairs leading up to a walkway that is noticeably narrower near the tower.

The back wall contains a three-level manor house, although only two levels are showing. The windows are done in a gothic style with metal-reinforced glass, almost like church windows. You will have to do some small repairs here, as the frames did not completely cast. The house can be entered through a well-detailed lower door or by the steps leading to the

third level. This upper level is a great hall, complete with wood floors, padded benches in the bay area, patches on the wall, and Tudor-style bracing. By the door entrance, an engraved fireplace holds a pile of logs and a fire grate. The chimney's hood is smooth stone and lines up with the chimney on the roof.

This piece rates five stars for the amount of artistic thought behind it. Unfortunately, many of the parts fit together only one way, and gaps exist between wall ends and towers. For a good fit, you'll need to cut away spare material slowly and carefully on both pieces; it is easy to make a mistake. I talked to the company about the castle's problems, and they have assured me that they have been repaired.

On the positive side, the pieces from previously-reviewed sets in the same line fit the new units nicely, so you can use the old walls as the outworks and use the new set as a core to a walled city. City System (TSR stock #9262), with its paper city buildings and road plans, would make an excellent inner city, if you can find a copy. Suggested retail price is \$249.95 for the 18-piece set (including chains for the drawbridge).



Bulette (Ral Partha)



Bone Gnawers (Ral Partha)

Harlequin Miniatures U.S.

P.O. Box 50081
Amarillo TX 79159

4002 Wood Elf Archers

**** 1/2

This pack consists of three elves scaled to 25 mm and mounted on textured bases. These figures are molded in the classical Games Workshop or Grenadier style, so they will fit in with existing regiments or can form the nucleus of a new regiment. Each elf bears a belt buckle with the same unit marking. Elf one is preparing to defend himself with a sword while his bow is gripped tightly in this left hand. He is wearing a cloth tunic over elven chain, and a pair of high, cuffed boots. His girdle-like belt supports a pouch and two bags on his left hip, and the riveted holding straps for a quarrel of arrows. The quarrel is lightly decorated, and the shafts of individual arrows and the feathered end can be easily picked out. The face is almost Oriental, having higher cheekbones and a much thinner chin than I am used to. His hair falls to his shoulders in ripples that match the fabric folds, except for a vertical ridge around the outer edge of the crown.

Elf two is wearing one additional layer of cloth, and the quarrel is slung over his back; otherwise he is very close in appearance to the first elf. His sword is held close to his body in his right hand, while the left tucks his bow in tight. The hair falls straight back without a ridge, and the face is slightly more square. This figure has one major problem, which will either require careful metal work or artistic talent: The space between his left hand and his knife is solid and will need to have a space either cut out or painted. You will also have to work on the belt buckle, since it is nowhere near as clean a cast as the other two.

The third elf is just finishing firing his bow, as can be seen by the positioning of his right hand. This elf is dressed almost identically, the major differences being the fur at the top of the boots and the hood over his head. There is also no sign of a sword.

I liked these figures. Except for the one problem mentioned earlier, the mold lines were either hidden or required no work, and there was minimal flash. I did cut the bows away from the bodies in all three cases, but this is a personal preference

and not something you would have to do. This set of three is reasonably priced at \$5.50, although I wish it was less expensive so I could build a full unit.

Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

5938 Carthage Ct.
Cincinnati OH 45212

RP 11-479 Bullette

As a DM, I can think of very few mundane creatures that can throw a party of adventurers into a panic as quickly as a bullette. This land shark will eat everything whether it is nailed down or not. Its armor turns it into a medium fast-moving tank that will force the players to work together to survive. This figure is from the AD&D® miniature line and is designed to be a non-lead preying piece. The creature is 63 mm long from the tip of his nose to the end of the tail, and 23 mm tall. The belly and legs have the same plate structure and texture as a snapping turtle and should be easy to paint. The plates on the upper front half of the body have large numbers of closely grouped circular ridges, while the rear plates have flowing ridges. The miniature has a rougher pebbled skin on the face and head, and the eye orbits are not as defined as they are in the illustration, otherwise the match-up is very close. Highly recommended as a terror weapon, especially at \$5.95 per figure.

RP 69-019 Bone Gnawers—Male; Homid & Glabro forms

These two figures represent two different phases of a werewolf. Figure one is a typical gang member walking down a garbage-strewn alley. The ragged shoes part the paper and rag trash as bare ankles show between the shoes and cuffed jeans. The figure is wearing a full-length leather coat with small lapels and no belt. A blue jean vest covers his upper torso to the neck. His right hand clutches a chunk of meat or the neck of a broken bottle, while his left hand clutches a bottle of wine. Long, greasy hair falls over his shoulder, and a cigarette hangs limply from the right corner of his mouth. The eyes are covered by sunglasses, and a soft cap tops his head. The indifferent look could say "nigger at work" in almost any present or near present genre. This figure had no flash.

The Glabro form is minus the trench coat and shoes. The base reflects a different part of the alley, complete with drain grate. The feet are now paws, and the fingers have lengthened. The shirt is torn at the elbow on the right side, and the bottle or meat remains in his right fist. The left hand now bears a Molotov cocktail, and his face radiates malice.

This set is worth it, just for the street thug if you play dark future games and definitely worth it if you play WEREWOLF.* Suggested retail cost is \$4.25 per package.

WARHAMMER

WARHAMMER ARMIES DARK ELVES



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Warhammer Armies – Dark Elves describes the history of the Dark Elf race since the Sundering – the cataclysmic result of the bloody civil war which divided forever the Dark Elves from their High Elf kin, and drove the Witch King and his savage followers northwards into the Land of Chill.



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WAR MACHINES AND MAGIC

This book also contains rules for the Dark Elf war machines such as the deadly Repeater Bolt Thrower and the mysterious Cauldron of Blood, together with a selection of new Magic Items. The 'Eavy Metal' pages cover a wide variety of Dark Elf regiments and include many full-colour banner and shield designs.

WARHAMMER ARMIES – DARK ELVES IS NOT A COMPLETE GAME.
YOU WILL NEED A COPY OF WARHAMMER TO USE THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK.

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**GAMES
WORKSHOP**



Centaur (Raj Partha)

RP 20-539 Centaur

The centaur is just over 27 mm long and 39 mm tall to the top of the head. The horse body is well sculpted and stands on a rock oval base. The hair on the hooves appears to be moving as the legs are at a stop. The right front leg is crossed under the body, and a small misstep could cause injury or a broken leg. The human torso has an ivy belt and a hairy chest. The muscle structure is correct for the amount that the body is twisted. The right hand clutches a long, braided staff that seems to wrap around the horse's back and hind quarters instead of straight as expected (it is easier to cast). The left hand clutches a crystal knife poised to stab downward. The head is equine with a Mohawk mane, large elfin ears and a serious expression.

This piece could be used for several different fantasy games besides SHADOWRUN.* The figure had several pieces of flash from breathing holes and there was a raised mold line along the spine, but they were all easily cleaned. The small line between the front legs will be harder to fix, but still possible with a little work. The figure might work well as a centaur shaman. Suggested retail price of the figure is \$3.50. not a bad value.

Heartbreaker

PO Box 105
Folsom PA 19033

Gamecraft

A16 Gardner's Row
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Liverpool, L3 6JT UK

323 Female Ork Beastmaster *****

This non-lead set is scaled for the larger 28 mm size and consists of two separate pieces, a beast and its rider. The beast is an EARTHDAWN* turtle measuring 37 mm from nose to tail and 23 mm across. The shell is molded to resemble a series of interconnected plates on the underside

and engraved shell on the top. Leathery legs and feet and a small tail are fairly standard, but the head is definitely not normal. Imagine a dragon turtle with a shorter neck. The head has three small horns and an overhanging brow ridge on a pug face. Two oval nostrils ride over a tooth- and tusk-filled mouth and a flat jaw bottom. This turtle makes a snapping turtle look tame.

The female Ork riding the shell is dressed in ragged clothes and a large horned snake. The face is slightly flattened and weary, and her tusked mouth is open as if she is speaking. Her feet are clad in sandals and her pants are wrinkled as she sits crosslegged on the turtle's back. Her jewelry is simple: a necklace of round stones, a flat necklace, and two bracelets on her left arm. Her upper chest is visible between the coils of the snake, and both arms are bare. Her left hand supports a bird, while the right holds the shaft of a barbed spear. Individual scales and stomach plates are visible on the snake, and the nose more resembles a beak than a snake's nose. It is ready to protect the rider.

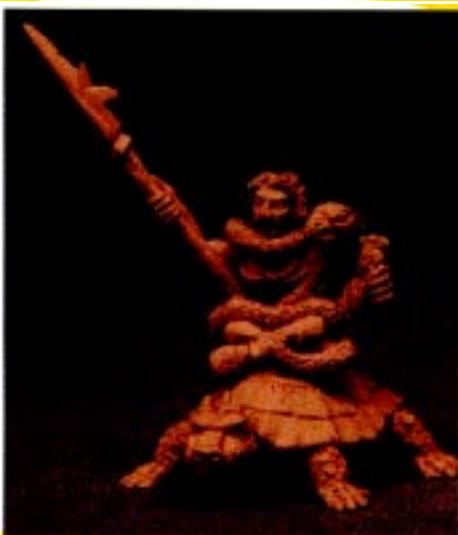
This is an attractive figure that could be used outside of the EARTHDAWN game with a little preparation. It could be a camp follower for a Chaos Ork army, or an active fighter. By the way, this figure is an almost perfect copy of the Ork Beastmaster shown on page 69 of the softcover EARTHDAWN rulebook by FASA. There was no work involved with this figure except opening the package. Cost for this pack is only \$4.95.

3510 Elf Wizard

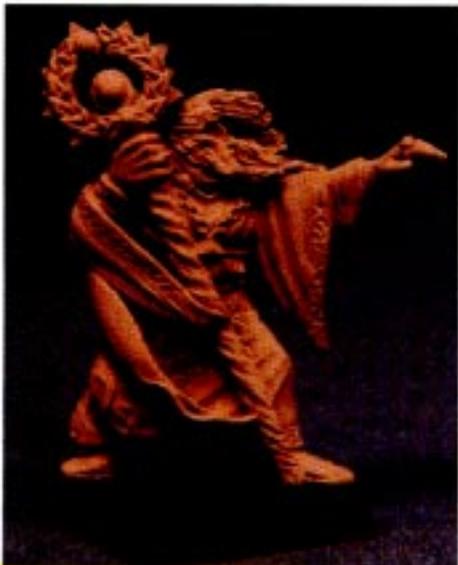
The wizard is a 28 mm scale, non-lead figure literally casting a spell with the wind. The figure is molded as if a huge wind is blowing from behind him, and his clothes and hair are consistent with this. An elven face sternly concentrating is all but obscured by the hair. He is dressed in a simple robe with rune-embroidered sleeves and hem. The robe is secured by a jewel-studded girdle. An amulet on a chain hangs down to his chest, and there are two rings on the left hand and one on the right to help him deliver his magic. His booted feet are planted firmly on the ground. A twisted staff adorned with wreaths and jewels is clutched in his right hand. By far the most striking article is his high-necked cloak. The cloak embroidery features a great dragon rising from a sea of flames to sail into a starry sky and wrap himself around the raised planets. There is scale and wing detail on the dragon that will challenge even an expert painter.

This is an excellent figure that could be a jewel. The downside of this figure is that the back of the staff looks unfinished, as if all the detailing of the cloak left nothing for detail on the staff head. There was no flash or visible mold lines. This figure is well worth the \$2.50 price.

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

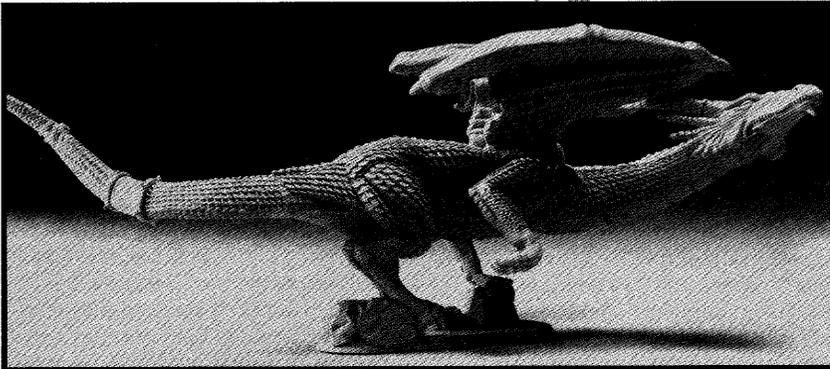


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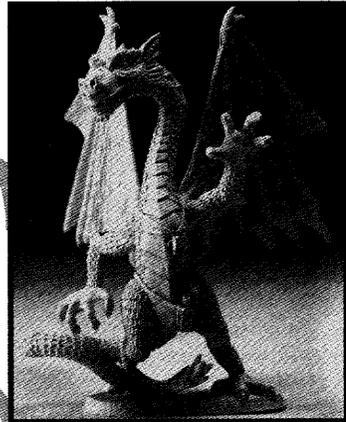


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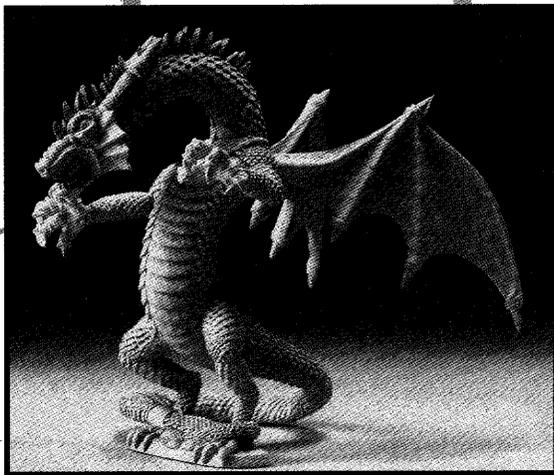
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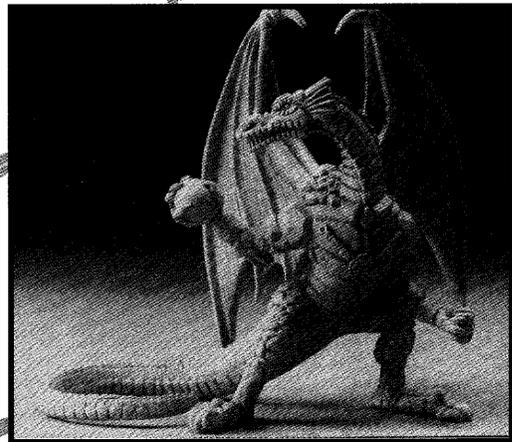
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Dragon Dice

Continued from page 100

have lots of melee and missile faces, while the highlands have more magic faces. Armies try to outmaneuver one another in these terrains, each seeking to adjust the turn sequence to whatever action is most advantageous, and eventually to turn the die to its eighth face, thereby capturing it.

When an army tries to maneuver or conduct an action, its owner rolls that army of dice and adds up the icons on all faces that match the action. For example, to make a melee attack, a player rolls the army and counts up melee symbols. Identifier icons count as one point of whatever is being rolled for at the time.

Typically, opposing armies can respond with a roll of their own. An army being targeted for melee or missile hits, for instance, rolls for saves against those hits. Any remaining damage removes dice from the battle, though certain magical spells and special effects can "resurrect" lost dice.

Magic can summon lightning bolts, conjure flash floods, generate automatic saves, and a multitude of other things. After a magic roll, the spells are chosen from a list of five different types of magic—earth, air, fire, water, and death. Each point of magic rolled is worth one point from the spell list, and the army's color determines which spells are available. Casting spells in terrain that matches the army's color enhance



Strategies of Play

The game is designed to be playable right out of the box, and while every box has a random assortment of dice, care was taken during design to maintain a balance of power in each starter set. Quite a lot of math went into each die's design, followed up by thousands of hours of playtesting. The end result is that any particular collection of dice has a pretty even chance against any other collection of equivalent point value, assuming equally clever players. Consequently, strategy plays a large part in any Dragon Dice combat.

For the beginning player, the first strategic decision boils down to how to arrange the dice into armies, and which terrains to invest with those forces. Players must each choose one race as the home defense army, and a second race as the campaigning and conquering army. The remaining two races are a ravaging horde used to

plague another player's homeland. Choosing small dice to make a large horde gives a player a better chance of starting play before anyone else, but it also means having a weaker home army and campaign army. It's one of many trade-off decisions for each player to make.

Once the battle has begun, players decide where to act: a player can command only two of his three armies each turn. As the game proceeds, the initial three armies (home, campaign, and horde) can be whittled down and consolidated into fewer forces, or they can be divided among even more locations, as the player chooses.

At each terrain die, players must decide whether to drive immediately for the eighth face, a strategy that quickly puts the armies in bloody melee, or to hang back at missile or magic range, hoping to weaken opponents from a distance. Of course, the selection of dice in an army has a crucial influence on this decision. For an army containing lots of archers and spellcasters, for instance, rushing into melee would be a mistake.

But this sampling of decisions only scratches the surface. A player must choose which spells to cast, which dice to eliminate as casualties of enemy attacks, whether to maneuver or wait for the opponent, and a multitude of other things.

As a player collects more dice, the options open up even further. Suddenly you can choose how large a conflict to play, whether to concentrate on a few large dice or many small ones, whether to focus on one race, or two, or many, whether to concentrate on footmen, or archers, or cavalry, or mages, how much to depend on monsters, how many dragons to bring to the table, and what colors they should be, and whether to split the overall forces into roughly even armies or concentrate all but a few into one huge battalion. You get the idea.

Before ending this article, I'd like to recommend two common goals to keep in mind during play.

First, while some players like to draw virtually all their dice into one location early in play, for maximum impact, I recommend keeping at least two reasonably sized forces on the table. Sure, consolidating into one force makes that group strong, but it also gives your opponents a clear target for spells and dragons, while also restricting you to just one action each turn. Keeping at least two forces makes you harder to pin down.

Second, I think it's important to restore dice as often as possible. For example, given a choice between casting a spell that hurts another army and casting one that resurrects my dead, I'm going for the resurrection. By extension, that means that I try to keep my magic users alive to cast those spells, sacrificing footmen, archers, or scouts instead when attacked.



Plans for the Future

Reaction from retailers and consumers who have seen mock-ups of the DRAGON DICE game at trade shows and conventions so far has been extremely positive. Naturally, excitement is high here at work.

I write this, the first sample dice are back from the factory, and they're everything we hoped for. And manufacture of the rest of the dice for the basic set and *Kicker Pack I: Monsters and Amazons* is well underway. What's more, Steve Miller has finished design on *Kicker Pack II: Firewalkers*, and I've finished *Kicker Pack III: Undead Legions*. Each of these Kicker Packs adds its own unique spin on play, lending even more depth to an already flavorful game.

Also, Interplay Productions—the makers of the hit *Descent* computer game—is well along on design of an electronic version of the DRAGON DICE game, one which allows player vs. computer, modem-to-modem, and even multi-person play on the Internet. What I've seen of that project is extremely cool. I'm looking forward to logging on and playing virtually myself. Maybe I'll see you there. 



Adventure, ho!

Want to curl up with a good book and set your mind free? See "The Role of Books" in this issue for reviews of the best in recent fantasy and science-fiction novels.

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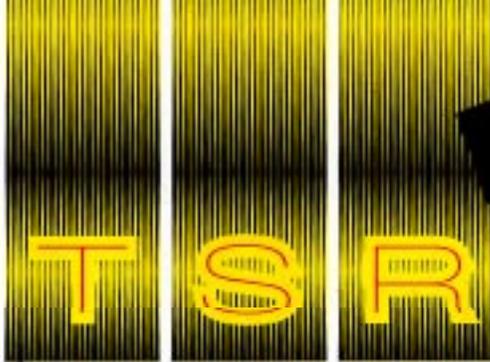
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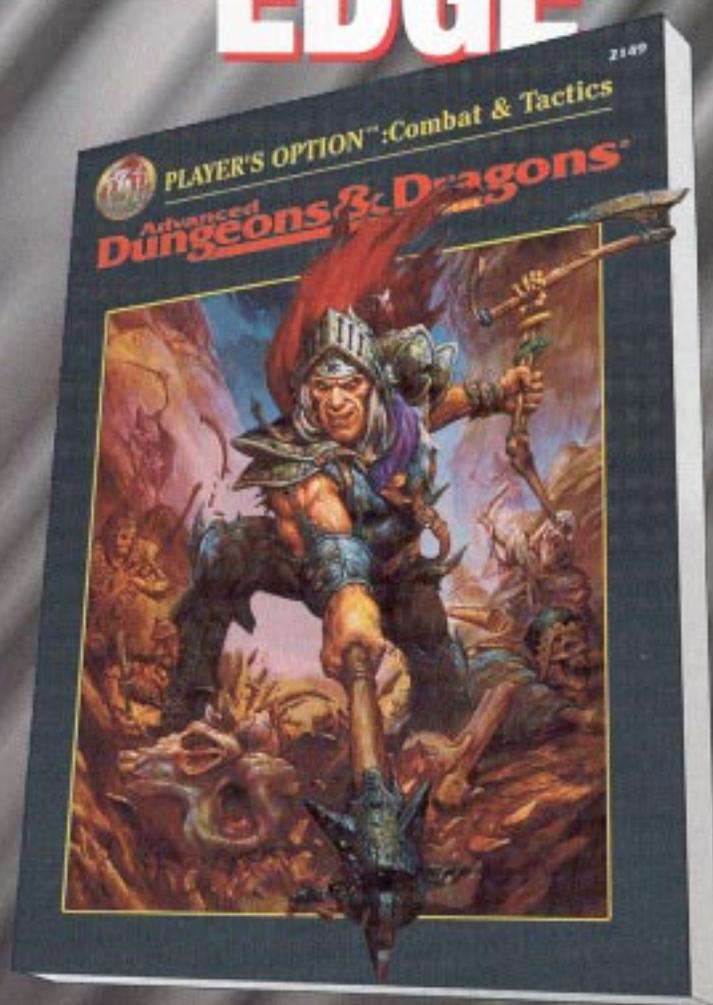
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