

#232

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Weapons Great & Small

Dragon[®] MAGAZINE

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of the
Waves

Sorcerous
Sixguns

A Flurry
of Swords



Ruppel
96

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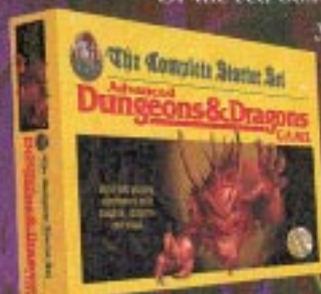


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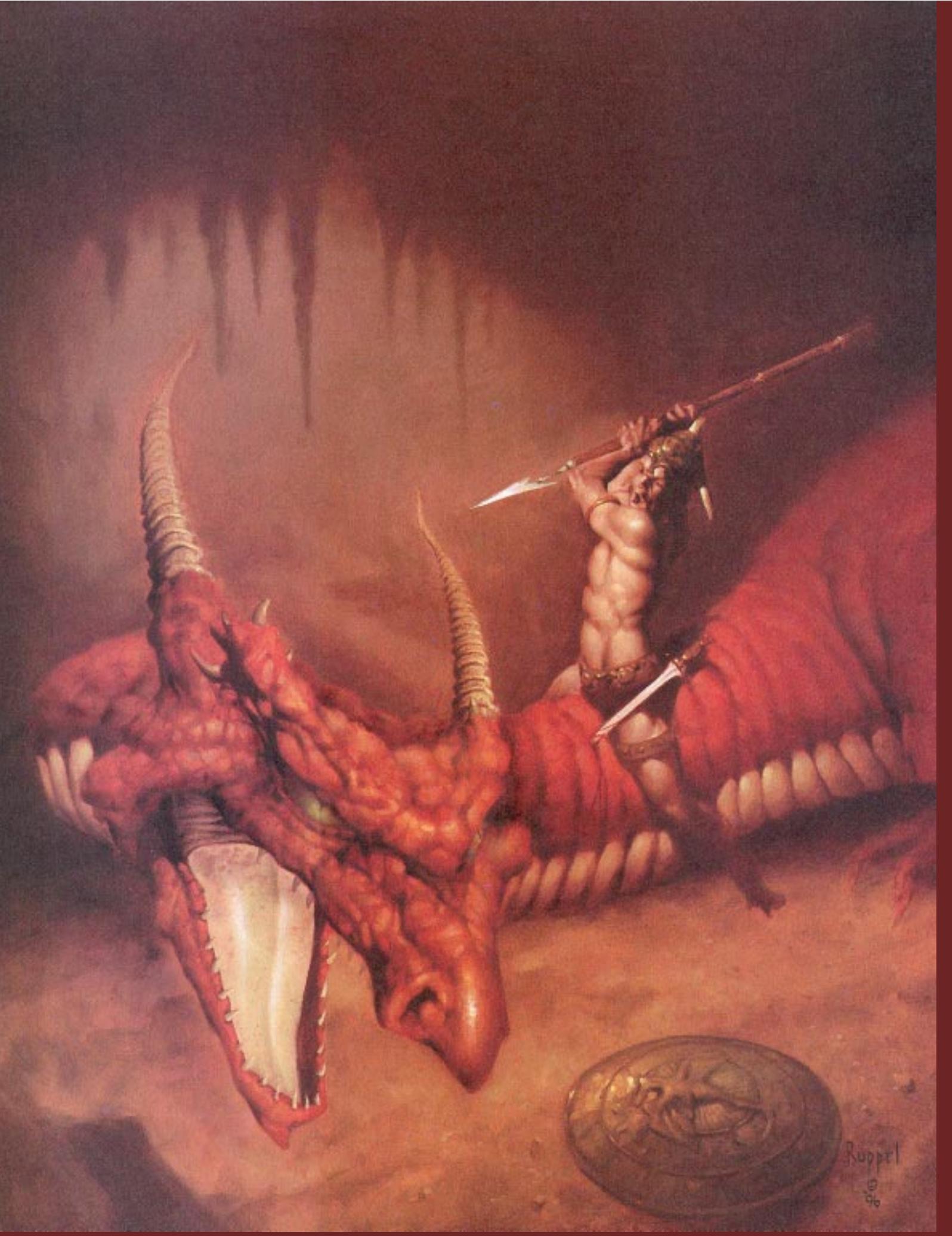
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Ruppel
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The Wurm's Turn

Sticks & Stones

What is a weapon? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a weapon as "an instrument of any kind used in warfare or in combat to attack and overcome an enemy." In this sense, almost all animals are armed. Most vertebrates have teeth, and many have claws. Venom is a highly effective weapon that appears throughout the animal kingdom. Long before humans first appeared, stabbing weapons appeared right on the animals. Consider the head of the triceratops or the tail of the stegosaurus. Even today an elephant has tusks and the rhinoceros a horn.

The original human weapons differed from those of other animals only in degree, not kind: they had teeth and nails. The first external weapons probably began with sticks, stones, and bones. Consider the famous scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* in which the proto-human uses the thigh bone of an animal to kill a rival for territory.

Then rock struck rock, edges were formed, and rocks became tools. Sticks were sharpened with the rocks. Rock struck rock again, fire was created, and the pointed sticks could be hardened. Fire and iron produced spear heads, then the knife and the sword.

The sword is a truly magnificent weapon. It is actually a very sophisticated combination of a stick and a stone: a point for stabbing, an edge for cutting, and the flat of the blade for striking. Part of the beauty of the sword is its simple utility. It is compact, easy to carry, and useful for both attack and defense.

The sword figures strongly in fantasy fiction and legend. Arthur would never have ruled Britain had he not drawn *Excalibur* from the stone. Without *Durandal*, Roland may never have held off the infidels long enough for Charlemagne to defeat them.

Apart from the sword, there are even more subtle, elegant, and seemingly magical weapons. The pen can defeat the sword. The written word has caused nations to rise up and overthrow dictators. Words from beyond the grave, preserved in print, have rallied people to great and noble causes.

Only humans can injure or slay with a word or a gesture, a wink or a nod. A word can wound more grievously than any mere knife or sword. To be struck by a sword is a kindness compared to the injury inflicted by a word. The spoken word is also a mighty defensive weapon. A witty comeback, parrying a verbal thrust, has defeated many attacks. A gesture works as well as a weapon. To "finger" someone is to point him out for arrest. A nod of feigned complicity to another, indicating to watchers that a conspiracy exists where there is none, is genuinely Machiavellian.

Weapons are limited only by the imagination. The grossest are the fist, the foot, the elbow, the knee, and the head. Some of the finest are invisible. Warriors should be prepared, for they never know what weapons they might face.



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Weapons of the Waves

Rich Baker

Seapower can be the key to conquest in any nautical campaign.

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En Garde!

Cindi Rice

Shh! Here are the secrets of the deadliest swordsmen in the SAVAGE COAST™ campaign.

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And the Walls Came Down

Steve Berman

The most famous of siege engines, by way of legerdemain and legend.

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A Flurry of Swords

Gregory W. Detwiler

A sword is a sword is a sword. Right?

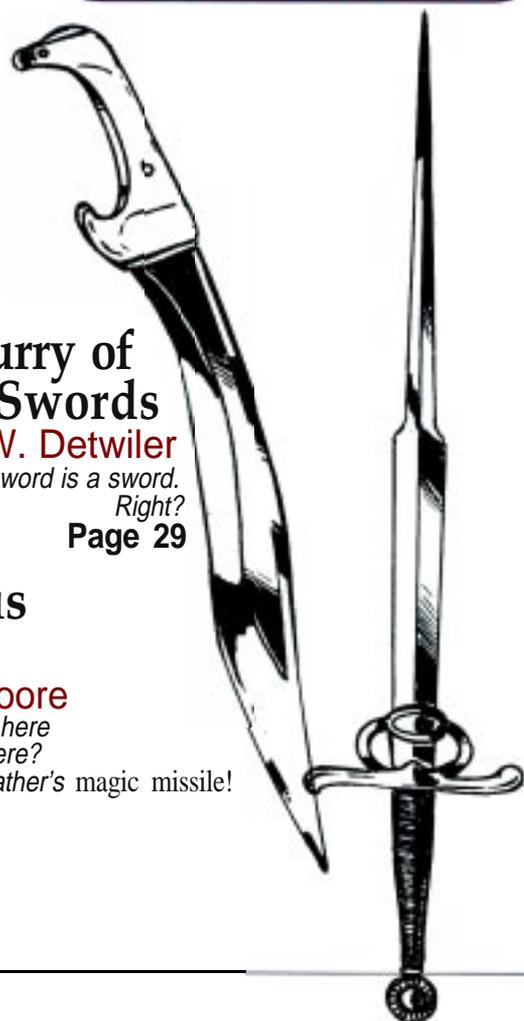
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Roger E. Moore

What barks over here and bites over there?

This ain't your father's magic missile!
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Tell us what you think.

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Dear DRAGON® Magazine,

Having just picked up issue #230 and finding another GREYHAWK® setting article within its pages, I felt it was time to write you. "The Orbs of Dragonkind" is one of the best articles I have seen in this magazine in my 14 years of playing the AD&D® game. Maybe I am being a bit biased, seeing as how the article deals with artifacts of the GREYHAWK campaign, my personal favorite. I had almost given up looking for new GREYHAWK material after the *Ivied the Undying* sourcebook ended up spliced into two different issues of DRAGON Magazine (#204 and #206), and I am guessing that those were just the best parts. But I digress. This article and "The Greyhawk Grimoires" from issue #225 have been like finding scrolls of ancient wisdom salvaged from the Library of Alexandria. (Was that also destroyed in the Rain of Colorless Fire?)

Obviously, I find the "Campaign Classics" section of your revamped magazine to be the most interesting and most useful. Having bought DRAGON Magazine since #225, I confess that I have never seen so many useful and

interesting articles. They are well thought out and cover interesting topics, not to mention well written. The artwork is, of course, astounding. The retooling of DRAGON Magazine has definitely renewed my interest in the AD&D® game. Keep up the good work!

Jeff Weinberger
Via e-mail

We loved "Orbs," too, and many of this month's letters let us know that we were by no means alone. So you can bet that we're keeping Roger as busy as we can. Tell us what you think of his "Sorcerous Sixguns" in this issue, and keep an eye on the coming attractions box for more of his work later this year.

Dear DRAGON® Magazine,

I enjoyed reading your 20th anniversary issue from cover to cover. The special focus on dragons is always appreciated, and Roger Moore's article on "The Orbs of Dragonkind" was particularly good. I do however, have a small bone to pick with John Rateliff's article "Dragons of Legend: Dragons in Myth and Literature."

Dr. Rateliff makes several references to the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and describes Smaug as "the standard by which all other fantasy dragons should be judged." I heartily agree! However, it is unfortunate that Tolkien's work was incorrectly cited. There is no work entitled "Fellowship of the Rings"; *The Fellowship of the Ring* is the first book of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. More strikingly in an article about dragons, there was no dragon named "Glorund." Glaurung was the first (and perhaps greatest) of the dragons of Morgoth, and it was he who sacked Nargothrond, enchanted Turin and Nienor, and was killed by Turin at Cabed-en-Aras. That said, I did find the rest of the article quite interesting.

My compliments to you on an excellent issue!

Randall Kintner
Pullman, WA
Via e-mail

John Rateliff replies: Since "Dragons of Legend" appeared in June, several letter writers have queried my use of "Glorund" rather than "Glaurung" as the name of the dragon in The Silmarillion. In fact, these are two different names for the same character. In the early versions of the Turin story (The Book of Lost Tales, "The Lay of the Children of Hurin") the dragon is called Glorund; in later versions, including the published Quenta Silmarillion, he is Glaurung. Working with Tolkien's manuscripts as much as I do, I'm afraid I unconsciously used the earlier version of the name. (By the way, I highly recommend the manuscript series edited by Christopher Tolkien, The History of Middle-earth, for anyone interested in Tolkien's writings.)

As for other points, by "the Fellowship" I was referring to the Nine Walkers, not to the book The Fellowship of the Ring. The Lord of the Rings is not a "trilogy," but simply one book split into three volumes. (Tolkien himself hated the term "trilogy" and refused to use it to describe his work.) One correspondent argues that St. George merely subdued his dragon rather than killing it, thus anticipating Grahame's "The Reluctant Dragon" by several centuries. I don't doubt for a minute that among the hundreds of retellings of his legends there aren't at least a few bowdlerized in this fashion; nevertheless, the fact remains that for centuries St. George has been renowned as a dragon-slayer, not a juvenile probation officer for wayward lizards.

Finally, two addendum: The Zelazny story "The George Business" appears in Margaret Weis's recent anthology of dragon-tales (A Dragon-Lover's Treasury of the Fantastic). Also, I forgot to add one delightful little cameo of a dragon that occurs in C.S. Lewis's Perelandra; his hero, Ransom, attracts a small pet dragon shortly after his arrival on Venus that could serve as a perfect model for a semi-intelligent infant dragon.

[Editor's Note: While John's doctoral dissertation concerned the stories of Lord Dunsany, he is also a recognized authority on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. In his copious spare time, he's editing and annotating the original manuscript of The Hobbit.]

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Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine,

In "The Wyrms' Turn" in issue #230, Brian Thomsen asked how could you (the staff) make a better *DRAGON Magazine*? After reviewing that particular issue, I would say just keep up the quality that you have presented since the format change.

Give us more series like "Hellbound," which reminded me of those great fantasy mags like *Epic*, and more theme-oriented departments. The dragon theme of issue #230 was awesome. So much info for just that one month! It's exactly what we have come to expect from your publication.

One area that could stand improvement is the "Forum" section; I think it should be expanded. I would also like to see reviews of different conventions across the country. I think these things would make a great magazine even better.

Jeffery Martin
Rockwell NC
Via e-mail

Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine,

The tough times are really here, especially for a reader in Europe who has to pay extra for the distributors. That is not only for *DRAGON Magazine* but for other game materials (I have paid about \$45 for the PLANESCAPE™ campaign box in Deutschland).

But back to *DRAGON Magazine*. I am not as excited about the new layout as other

readers, but I must admit that the articles have improved by 100 percent! I also like the "Theme of the Month." Older issues have featured good themes, but the last ones had really great stuff! The only thing I fear is that those little "pearls" that were hidden in even the worst *DRAGON Magazine* will cease to appear.

What about some kits for the PLANESCAPE setting? (Portal mage, planar tout, or fiend slayer?)

Please do not forget the SPELLJAMMER® setting!

Even in tough times, thumbs up!

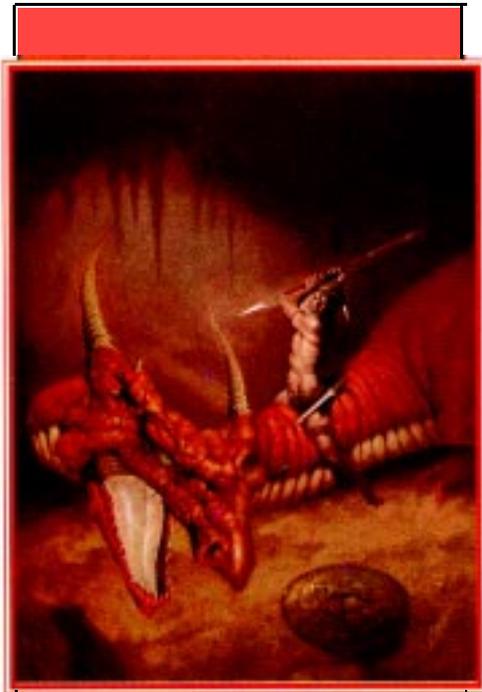
Volker Knuepfig
Wuerzburg, Germany
Via e-mail

Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine,

I recently purchased an Amazon Kicker Pack for the *DRAGON DICE*™ game. The rules update mentioned Dragonlords and Dragonmasters. What are these dice, and where can I purchase them?

Adam Sposato
Gansevoort, NY

The Dragonlord and Dragonmaster dice are promotional give-aways, distributed at last year's GEN CON® Game Fair and other game conventions. You aren't likely to find them unless you go to one of those conventions or trade with someone who has. If you find one, hang onto it! They're becoming increasingly valuable to the collector.



On the Cover

This month we return to our own fertile fields and present the work of one of our resident artists, Robh Ruppel. For a look at Robh's work in collaboration with Tony Diterlizzi (of PLANESCAPE® setting fame), turn to page 60 for the third installment of "The Bargain," from the *Hellbound* boxed set.

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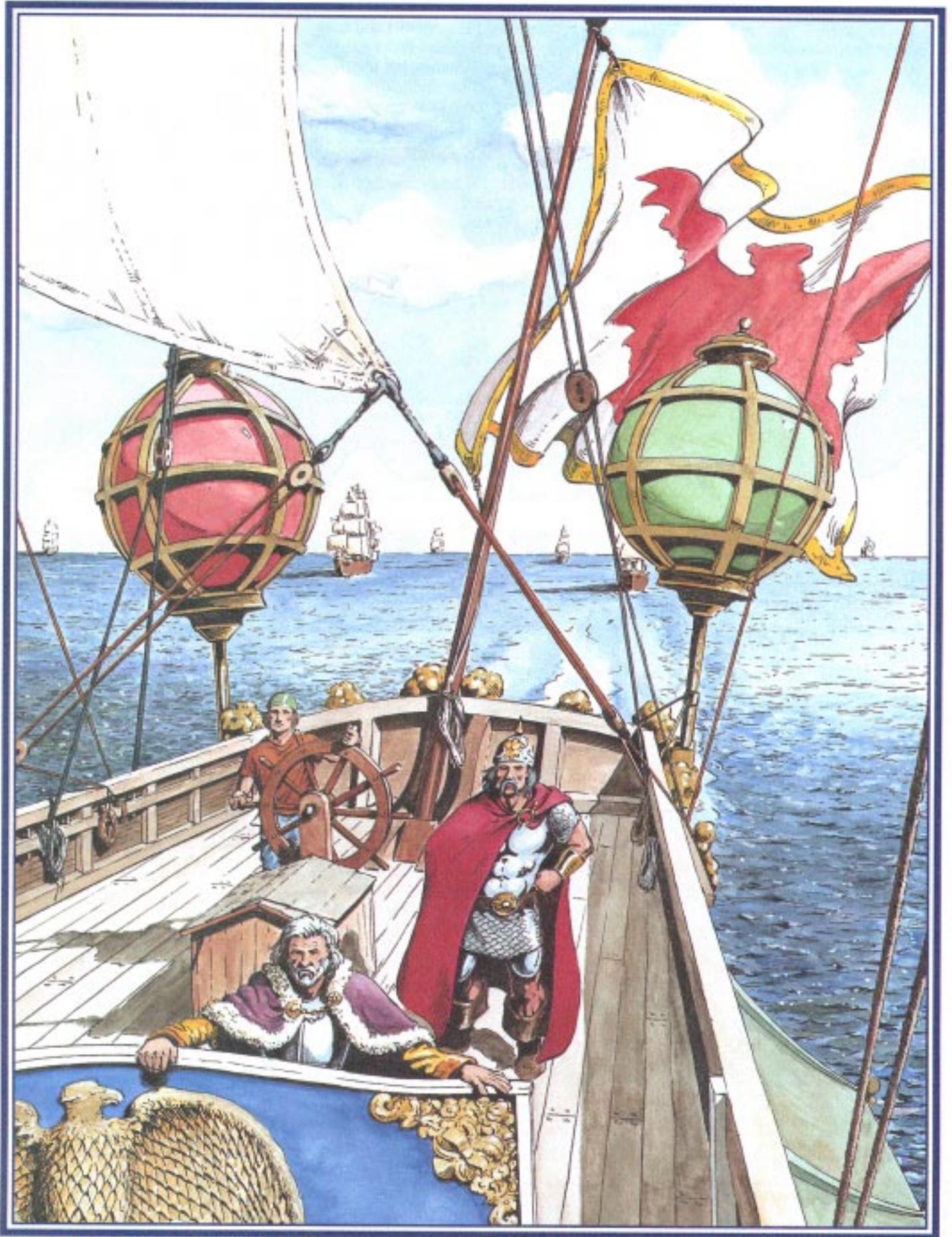
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Weapons of the Waves

Seapower in Cerilia

by Rich Baker

illustrated by David Kooharian

Cerilia is ringed by the sea. From the warm waters of the Bair el-Mehare, the Sea of the Golden Sun, to the ice-choked mouth of the Krakennauricht, dozens of Cerilia's realms sprawl along thousands of miles of coastline. With the growth of the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign setting into the regions of Khinasi and Brechtur in the expansions *Cities of the Sun* and *Havens of the Great Bay*, more and more realms that border the sea and depend on it for survival are coming into play.

For a kingdom with a strong navy, the sea represents many things — a highway to all the other lands of Aubrynis, a source of food and wealth, and a possible route for raids or expansion. On the other hand, coastal powers with weak navies (or, in some cases, an obsession with their landward frontiers) must view their coastline as an undefendable border by which invaders may strike at will into the heart of the nation. Regardless of the question of national character, ambitions, strengths, every coastal domain of Cerilia must deal with the issue of seapower.

The term “seapower” has many implications. Obviously, the military force that a nation can bring to bear on the main is an important part of its seapower. But a nation's seapower is also greatly determined by its geographical constraints. A kingdom that does not possess a year-round ice-free port — like the various maritime powers of Brechtur — is limited in its ability to apply seapower in the months when its ports are closed.

The merchant marine of a kingdom is another part of its seapower; the ability to carry out trade or supply distant forces when the landward borders are hostile or impassable can be crucial in a

prolonged war. Without exception, nations with large merchant fleets are rich nations. In the expanded naval rules introduced in *Cities of the Sun* and the *BIRTHRIGHT Naval Battle System*, roundships and galleons under the royal flag can increase a kingdom's revenues by an extraordinary amount.

National character, leadership, and expertise also play a role in seapower. The Vos kingdoms of eastern Cerilia possess an extensive coastline on the Dragonsea, but they've never been great seapowers; for centuries, their rulers have looked to expand and prosper inland instead of at sea. To become a seapower, a kingdom must develop the technical expertise to build effective warships, a cadre of skilled seafarers to man them, and a handful of great captains to lead them in war—and then, maintain this course for generations.

Finally, a kingdom or union of kingdoms will never become a true world power until it can command the sea. While a nation may become a continental power to be reckoned with, it can't project its power against distant lands unless it has command of the seas. Many kingdoms ignore maritime interests in favor of building up land power — but in the long run, landbound kingdoms must face the threat of a rival with effective seapower dictating the terms by which discourse, trade, or conflict take place.

Today, 500 years after the fall of the Anuirean Empire, there are a dozen or so great powers scattered around Cerilia. Of all these great powers, only Avaniil, Boeruine, Muden, Ariya, Khourane, Suiriene, and the Isle of the Serpent are seapowers of any significance.



A brief history of war at sea

Galleons and roundships are sophisticated vessels, requiring advanced construction techniques. They are not the products of a Dark Ages culture, and appeared in Cerilian navies only in the last two or three centuries. Like many other medieval technologies, the art of the shipwright tends to make great strides in one generation, and then remain at that level for several generations to follow. In our own history, chainmail was the armor of choice from the end of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Hundred Year's War, almost 800 years later; in that same time period, the Mediterranean galley remained virtually unchanged.

So, what was seapower like in the early days of Cerilia? It's easiest to consider four historical periods: Pre-Deismaar, dating from the earliest human emigrations to Cerilia up until the War of Shadow; Early Imperial, dealing with the rise of the Anuirean Empire (the first five centuries after Deismaar); Late Imperial, the next five centuries after Deismaar, and the heyday of the Anuirean Empire; and finally Post-Imperial, dating from the end of the Empire at Michael Roele's death up to the current day.

Pre-Deismaar

While elves, dwarves, and goblins inhabited Cerilia many ages before

humans appeared, none of these races ever displayed much interest in seafaring; however, even in ancient Aduria, humans were a race of mariners. By far the most accomplished of these early voyagers were the Masetians, the most civilized of the old races. From their walled cities on the placid waters of the Suidemiere, Masetian galleys explored the coasts of Cerilia long before the first of the Six Tribes began their Flight from Shadow. The Masetian galley was an elegant vessel, light and swift. They fought by ram, archery, and boarding.

The Andu, Rjuven, and Brecht peoples were tribal barbarians at this time, organized by clan and holding. They built longboats that could be rowed or sailed. Unlike the Masetian galleys, the longboats were open, with no decking or raised structures. Despite their simplicity, they were durable and hardy vessels, better suited to the rough waters of the Sea of Storms than the fragile Masetian vessels. Unlike the Masetians, who viewed their armies and their fleets as property of the state, the more barbaric humans built their ships one-by-one as the work of a family or clan. They had no concept of fighting at sea and used their vessels in war-time for nothing more organized than a raid.

Over the years of the Flight from Shadow, the Brecht and Rjuven relocated one clan at a time to the northern stretches of Cerilia, going by sea. The

Andu marched overland instead, and thus settled much closer to the old land bridge to Aduria. Meanwhile, the Masetian cities fell one-by-one to the advancing evil. As the situation in the south worsened, more and more Masetian outposts and colonies were founded on Cerilia's southern shores.

At Deismaar, the Masetian fleets stood against the navies of the other Adurian powers that had fallen under Azrai's sway. Unknown sea monsters and other horrors rose from the deeps to fight on the side of evil that day, but the Masetians — the most skillful seafarers in the world in that era — defeated the southern fleets in a naval action that paralleled the epic struggle on land. Between the ghastly losses inflicted by Azrai's sea monsters and the violent upheavals that followed the gods' deaths, the ships of the Masetian fleet — and indeed, Masetia itself — were destroyed beyond recovery.

Early Imperial

In the years following Deismaar, the Andu organized themselves into the Anuirean Empire beneath the leadership of the first Roele. For two or three centuries, they were busy taming their own lands and pushing overland to whichever lands were closest. But the growing power of Anuire was hemmed in by two great natural barriers — the Stonecrown Mountains in the north, and the Iron Peaks in the east. In order to circumvent these formidable ramparts, the young Empire began to develop a navy. The cog — a sturdy, clinker-built sailing vessel with raised platforms at bow and stern — was coming into common use, and the Anuirean navy consisted of merchant ships pressed into military service whenever the legions needed to travel by sea.

All in all, cogs (and a variety of similar vessels, such as the nef and the knarr) represented an improvement over the old longships that had been built by humans in simpler times. Although they lacked the rows of oars that gave longships the ability to defy the wind, the cog was a far better sailing vessel and much more seaworthy. It was partially decked, and could carry several times the amount of cargo — or fighting men. Andu and Brecht-built cogs were very similar, but the Rjuven preferred to maintain some small rowing ability and developed the knarr instead.

Meanwhile, in the southern waters, the Masetians were dying out and van-

Battle of the Iron Cape, 479 HC

One of the greatest naval clashes of this period took place on a fine spring day, as an Anuirean armada tried to land an army on the shores of Halskapa. For many years, the Empire had been advancing into the southern regions of Rjurik, and the Anuireans hoped that a heavy blow against the strongest Rjurik state would break the region's resistance altogether.

The Rjurik force consisted of 22 knarrs, 15 of which belonged to the jarl of Halskapa. The remainder belonged to scattered allies from Svinik, Jankaping and Hjolvar. Over 100 longships also answered the Halskapan call to arms, although as battle approached they were beached and their warriors embarked on the knarrs.

The Anuirean armada consisted of 30 cogs and six galleys that had made the tortuous journey up the coast. They hoped that the galleys, with their beaked rams, would wreak havoc

among the Rjurik fleet. When the Rjurik leader—the jarl Anders Leifhund — saw the galleys approach, he sent some of his men back to man the longships and board the galleys if possible.

The Iron Cape proved to be an inconclusive battle. After a full day of vicious hand-to-hand fighting in which thousands of men on both sides perished, the Anuirean admiral withdrew, planning to land what remained of his force further south. A spring storm blew up, sinking his galleys and dispersing his fleet. The invasion of Halskapa was turned back and was never tried again.

War card scenario: The Rjurik have four knarrs (each card represents five ships) and four longships; the Anuireans have six cogs and one galley. The Rjurik start on the north end of the map, which is bordered by land; the Anuireans begin on the open ocean on the south end of the field. The wind is light, from the west.)

ishing into the new race of the Basarji. These people had come to Cerilia in the years before Deismaar on sailing rafts made from reeds. Along Cerilia's calm southern shores, the old Masetian galley was still quite suitable for both trade and war, and the Basarji generally adopted Masetian shipbuilding techniques. Galleys were maneuverable by northern standards, and their ability to ram made them extremely dangerous in battle, even if they were not as sturdy as the cog or knarr.

While the Brecht and Rjurik peoples clearly required sturdy vessels such as cogs to survive their northern seas, the Anuireans had a harder decision to make. Their cogs did not fare well in battle against the southern galleys. For centuries, the Anuireans wavered between the northern tradition of merchant sailing ships and the southern tradition of war galleys.

Late Imperial

Over the course of time, the technology of shipbuilding continued to improve, especially in the northern powers. Once the shipwrights began to view banks of oars as more of a hindrance than a help, ship design progressed rapidly. Gradually, cogs and nefs evolved into vessels with complete decking and two or more masts. In Anuire, this led to the development of the greatship, a floating castle with towering fore- and sterncastles. The greatship required a crew of hundreds and, including soldiers, could carry over a thousand men. Yet, for all the greatship's splendor, it was not an efficient fighting ship. It was ponderous and not very seaworthy; at least once or twice a generation, a greatship would be sunk by nothing more than a bad gust of wind that heeled her over too far.

The greatship had other disadvantages, as well. It was enormously expensive, and only the richest nations could maintain a fleet of them. In Cerilia, this meant that Anuire (and some of her more prosperous colonies) could afford them. Due to their expense, the Rjurik seapowers never built greatships in any number, while the Brecht found the design too unwieldy in the treacherous waters of the Krakennauricht.

In the southern waters of Anuire and Basarji, ship-building remained fairly stagnant. The oared galley was still the warship of choice. Even the mighty greatship had to fear the galley's ram. In the easternmost Basarji lands, a new

ship type called the dromond was coming into use. Oared and sailed like a galley, the dromond raised its ram above the waterline, which improved its maneuverability and seaworthiness.

The most important development in this period was the introduction of missile weapons into the fleets of Cerilia. The Brecht and the Basarji both hit upon this idea at about the same time. Although great numbers of archers and slingers had been carried by ships of all types for many centuries, the Brecht began to mount light catapults on their sturdy roundships. Meanwhile, the Basarji experimented with volatile firethrowers and other incendiary devices. Although few ships could be sunk or even seriously damaged by catapult shot alone, burning pitch-pots or buckets of spikes or blades could set a ship afire or inflict grievous losses to a crew concentrated on deck.

While the Brecht and Basarji warships were maturing into their modern form, the Anuireans continued to develop both sailing ships and galleys. One curious hybrid was the galleas, a full-decked galley with high fighting castles at bow and stern that mounted catapults or firethrowers. It was felt that galleys still posed a mortal threat to vessels that were not oared themselves. In battle, the galleas was no match for the greatships or roundships of northern waters, although it was successful against the galleys of the south.

By the end of this period, naval warfare was no longer strictly a matter of ram-and-board, although many fights were decided this way. More by luck than by design, some captains began to experience success with tactics of standing off and firing at the enemy with a variety of nasty mixtures. At the very least, most captains would try to maneuver for deck-clearing volleys of archery and grapeshot before closing for the final grapple.

The Battle of Kfeira, 1299 MA

In El-Arrasi's finest hour, he mustered a great fleet of the free Basarji states to face an immense Anuirean armada led by the Emperor's nephew, the Prince Caercuillen. The armada was part of a two-pronged invasion of Ariya, an attempt by the Anuireans to crush the Basarji once and for all; while Caercuillen advanced by sea, his uncle, the Emperor Alandalae, led an army overland. El-Arrasi met the Anuirean armada off the shores of Kfeira.

The Anuirean fleet included 11 ungainly galleases, 25 greatships, and over 60 additional caravels, galleys, and other small craft. More than 75,000 men sailed in this fleet, and dozens of sorcerers and priests were scattered among the various flagships. Against this mighty force, El-Arrasi assembled 24 zebecs, 80 galleys, and several dozen smaller ships — a force of perhaps 40,000. As the Anuireans bore down on the Basarji forces, the wind died down to virtually nothing. The towering greatships were immobilized, but almost all the Basarji vessels were oared. Thus, El-Arrasi was able to pick off the Anuirean forces in detail while Caercuillen was unable to maneuver in response.

Despite the Basarji's advantage with the weather, the Anuireans were not easily defeated. Individual captains showed great resourcefulness and

courage in repelling the Basarji attacks. The greatships and galleases, now armed with formidable catapults and firethrowers of their own, wrecked many galleys as the Basarji captains tried to ram and sink them. The battle opened late in the afternoon, and was fought all night by the light of burning ships. It wasn't until the end of the following day that a breeze came up, allowing the beaten Anuireans to break off the fight. By that time, nearly half their ships had been sunk or burned to the waterline, a loss of catastrophic proportions. El-Arrasi personally captured Prince Caercuillen. He landed his forces the next day and marched overland to meet the advance of Alandalae's army, defeating that attack as well. These two victories broke Anuirean power in the Saere Sendiere forever.

War card scenario: The Anuireans have six greatships (each card represents four ships), three galleases, five caravels, and five galleys; the Basarji have six zebecs, two dhours, and 10 galleys. The Basarji start on the east end of the map, the Anuireans on the west; the northern edge is considered to be bordered by land. The Basarji sorcerers and priests slightly outnumber the Anuireans; to reflect this advantage, assume that each zebec carries one 5th-level wizard and one 7th-level priest. There is no wind.

Post-Imperial

As the Anuirean Empire fell in ruins, the extravagantly expensive Anuirean navy withered away. Captains and admirals joined whichever faction they fancied, taking their ships or flotillas with them. Within 50 years, the Imperial navy was a mere shell, and none of the successor states possessed a quarter of its former fighting strength. With the collapse of this mighty Empire, the other races of Cerilia began to flourish.

Naval development continued, at a slower pace than in the previous centuries. The basic ship designs had reached their effective limits; there was no point in building anything as large as a greatship, the experiments combining oars and sail had largely failed, and no great revolutions of weaponry would surface in this time. Accordingly, the shipwrights of this age have devoted themselves to perfecting the designs that work best.

Three major seapowers remain: the Anuireans, the Brechtur, and the Khinasi. The Anuirean greatship has become the smaller and more seaworthy galleon; the Brecht roundship is the best sailer of Cerilia; and the zebec is the only vessel built strictly for war. All of these vessels

feature missile armament or naval artillery of some kind, along with plenty of marines or soldiers for the inevitable hand-to-hand fights that still take place. Until hellpowder cannon come into common use at sea, tactics and ship design are unlikely to change much.

Current naval tactics

At the current time, a Cerilian sea battle features the same general tactics that have been used for the last four or five centuries. A captain has three options at his disposal: boarding, missile fire, or — if he commands a galley or similar vessel — ramming.

Boarding

The earliest sea battles were nothing more than land skirmishes fought over the decks of ships floating next to each other. This is still the surest way to decide a fight; once two ships are grappled alongside each other, one or the other is almost certain to come out on top.

Obviously, for a captain to board his opponent, he must bring his ship alongside that of his enemy. For sailing vessels, this means that he must begin upwind (or at worst, across the wind)

and overtake or run down his prey. The prospective boarder must run the gauntlet of his enemy's archers and artillery. Finally, he must have some way of making his ship fast to the enemy. Dozens of grappling hooks, lines, or planks can be used to snag the enemy before the captain can send his soldiers and sailors across.

When your regent character is leading his navy into battle, he'll want to remember a few things about boarding:

- ❖ Boarding is a good tactic if your ship is larger than your enemy, or carries a crew of unusual quality. Boarding a ship with a larger or better crew is foolhardy.

- ❖ Heroic adventurers can easily carry a ship manned by normal human sailors, so player characters, henchmen, and lieutenants can make or break a boarding action.

- ❖ Never grapple with a burning or sinking ship. A ship alongside another that's afire stands a 50% chance per round of catching fire, too. A ship that's grappled with a sinking enemy may be fouled and unable to move for 1d3 rounds while the grappling lines and wreckage are cleared away.

- ❖ If you have an advantage in missile fire, make several passes alongside the enemy to sweep his decks clean before you board him. Soften up the enemy before the hand-to-hand fight.

- ❖ Boarding offers one advantage over ramming or missile fire — you stand an excellent chance of capturing the enemy vessel for later use in your own fleet.

- ❖ If the boarding party gets wiped out, break the grapple and get away from the enemy. Many ships have been captured after they failed to win the boarding fight.

- ❖ Magic use can be decisive in boarding actions. Most sailors and soldiers are 0-level characters who can be felled in great numbers by even low-level spells.

Ramming

The ram is one of the most ancient naval weapons, but it is still extremely dangerous. Of all the ships that are commonly seen in Cerilia, only the galley is designed for ramming—all other ships may ram if the opportunity presents itself, but it is a risky maneuver that could easily end up sinking both the ramming vessel and her target. Despite the risk, many reckless captains view a ramming attack as the perfect prelude to a boarding action.

Ramming attacks

Since ramming attacks weren't covered in the BIRTHRIGHT Naval Rules, here's a quick way to resolve them in a Naval War Card battle. The ramming ship must move into the same space as the target, and make an attack using the resolution cards. Just like a Grappling Check, the attack value depends on the relative movement allowances of the two ships. If the result is "F" or "—," the target evades the ramming ship. A result of "H" inflicts 1d4-1 points of hull damage to the target, ±1 point per difference in ship size (as measured by hull point total), +2 if the ramming vessel is equipped with a ram, and +1 if the ramming vessel is moving at a Speed of 3 or better when it hits. A "D" result indicates that the rammed vessel suffers a mortal blow, and sinks after 1d4 rounds.

For example, a galley with 2 movement points this turn attempts to ram a galleon with only 1 (it was caught turning into the wind). The galley attacks on the +1 column. If it scores a Hit, the galley inflicts 1d4-1 points of hull damage, +2 because it has a ram, -1 for the relative ship size.

The ramming vessel suffers 1d4-3 points of damage from executing its attack, ±1 point per size difference, -1 point if it possesses a ram, +1 point if it struck at a Speed of 3 or higher. In the example above, the galley would suffer 1d4-3 points of self-inflicted hull damage, +1 for the size, -1 because it was equipped with a ram. So, if this galley gets lucky it could deal out 4 hull points to the galleon with one blow without being harmed itself, but a very bad roll could result in no damage to the galleon and 1 point of damage to the ramming vessel.

There is a 10% chance per point of damage inflicted to the target that the ships are now stuck together and effectively grappled. An oared vessel, like a galley, can back away if it becomes stuck with a successful Seamanship check on the captain's part. A sailing vessel requires much more time and effort to disentangle itself from its victim. If one ship sinks while the other ship is still stuck, the surviving vessel must make a seaworthiness check or be dragged down too.

A special tactic used by some galleys when fighting other oared vessels is the shear. In a shear attack, the galley tries to plow through the other ship's oars, snapping them like matchsticks. The shear works just like a ramming attack. However, neither the ramming vessel or the target suffer hull damage. Instead, the target's oars are wrecked, preventing it from using its rowing movement. The captain of the sheared vessel may attempt a seamanship check with a -6 penalty to pull or raise his oars, negating the attack, but if this check fails he's lost his oars and is now a sitting duck.

While your character may view a naval battle as a demolition derby in the making, most ships are not built to withstand the colossal stresses of running into things on purpose. A wise captain will save this desperate and spectacular maneuver for the most critical moment in a battle.

- ❖ Don't ram anything larger than your own vessel.

- ❖ When battling galleys or other ramships, try to stay downwind or crosswind so that you can turn away and run when they bear down on you. Keep lots of searoom on your disengaged side. If you have to turn into the wind or the shore to avoid a galley's attack, you're as good as sunk.

- ❖ If you are rammed, board your attacker immediately if you outnumber him. Ships have been captured by boarding parties from vessels that they sank by ramming.

- ❖ The best defense against a ram attack is a priest with a *turn wood* or *lower water* spell, or a wizard with *wall of force*.

Missiles

The third tactic used at sea is the concentration of archery, magic, and artillery fire on one's enemies. Cerilia's navies are not equipped with cannon, so the tactics and technology of broadsides, crossing the T, and similar considerations just don't come into play. A stout, well-built ship such as a galleon or roundship has little to fear from most missile attacks... but from time to time, a well-placed stone can hole a large vessel.

While smashing holes in the enemy's hull is next to impossible with Cerilian technology, there are many other ways for missiles to be used to great effect. Catapults can throw burning pitch-pots at the enemy in an attempt to set it afire. Archers can cut down any sailors, sol-



Arcs of fire

The Naval War Cards included in the *Cities of the Sun* boxed set assume that an area of the battlefield is so large that a ship's exact facing doesn't matter for missile fire. This is an abstraction. In reality, a ship's dimensions dictate that more weapons can be brought to bear on the broadside than on the stern or the bow. To reflect this basic fact, subtract 1 from the ship's missile rating if it is firing directly ahead or directly aft.

You may want to use a marker or chit of some kind to indicate which way a ship is heading. Naturally, its bow is pointing in the direction that it last moved, and its stern is pointing in the direction it moved from.

If your DM prefers to use the artillery statistics to handle individual ship combat, your character's ship may be customized to carry catapults, arbalests, or other such weapons. Here's the rule of thumb: no more than 25% of a ship's weapons can be arranged to fire forward or aft. If a ship can only carry one catapult, for instance, that catapult must be limited to firing port or starboard. A ship mounting 12 arbalests could have as many as four firing forward and four firing aft, but the rest must be mounted for firing over the sides. The fire thrower is an exception to this rule; even though any ship can only carry one, it can be mounted to fire to any side.

Table 1: New naval weapons summary

Weapon	Crew	THACO	ROF	Range	Damage
Bombard	8	15	1/5	5/20/40	2d10/3d10
Dragon	3	13	1/3	8/16/24	1d12/1d20
Petard	*	*	*	*	3d6/3d8

* varies with the launching device

diers, or officers who dare to show themselves on the open decks. And many wizardly spells can be every bit as devastating as a broadside of iron cannonballs.

The most terrifying enemy a wooden sailing ship faces at sea is the threat of fire. The fire thrower is a weapon specifically designed to burn ships to cinders. Other large missile weapons — the catapult, the mangonel, and the shot ballista — can be fitted for firing incendiary shot. When one of these weapons fires incendiaries instead of normal shot, it suffers a -2 penalty to its hull damage roll (see the Naval Armament card in *Cities of the Sun*), but it has a chance to set the ship afire. In terms of the War Card missile rating, the ship suffers a -1 penalty when firing incendiaries.

Whenever a ship suffers a hit from a fire thrower, incendiary shot, or certain fiery spells such as *fireball* or *produce fire*, it may be set afire. The chance is 25%, plus 25% for each point of hull damage inflicted by the attack. For example, a ship that suffers no damage from the attack of a shot ballista firing a pitch pot has a 25% chance to be set afire, while another vessel that suffers 2 hull points of damage from a fire thrower has a 75% chance to be set afire. Once a ship is on fire, it loses 1 hull point per round until it sinks. There is a 10% chance per round that the crew can extinguish the flames before the ship suffers more damage, although some spells or magical items may be able to smother the flames automatically.

❖ There are two schools of thought on the topic of the most favorable wind for a battle to be fought with missile weapons. Aggressive admirals prefer to enter battle upwind of their enemy, so that they can close at will. Conservative admirals prefer to be downwind, so that they can turn away and open the range (or escape the battle) if necessary.

❖ Range is crucial in missile engagements. If you find a range at which your

weapons are more effective than your enemy's, try to remain there for the course of the battle.

❖ Most ships are very limited in their ability to fire straight over the bow or directly behind the stern. Position your ship in these blind spots, so that you can rake the enemy with your best concentration of missile fire while escaping any serious retaliation on his part.

❖ If your ship is seriously outgunned in missile power, try to close the range rapidly and turn it into a boarding fight.

❖ By far the deadliest missile weapon at your disposal is the use of magic. If your PC is a wizard or priest, he may command a variety of devastating spells that can seriously damage a ship (or sink it outright) with one blow.

Hellpowder and sorcery

For some reason, players and DMs alike can't think of a medieval sea battle without envisioning *Captain Blood* or *Treasure Island*. In our own history, the innovation of cannons arranged in broadsides didn't appear until the middle of the 16th century, while the most advanced regions of Cerilia are assumed to have a technology equivalent to the early 15th century. However, in the last 30 or 40 years Brecht and Khinasi alchemists have been experimenting with a substance commonly known as "hellpowder" — the Cerilian equivalent for gunpowder.

Hellpowder is not going to lead to effective muskets, pistols, or even seagoing cannon in a single generation. To continue the historical example, the first uses of gunpowder on European battlefields were crude petards, or bombs, and hand cannons that launched iron spears. Although many ships were carrying early cannon by the late 1400s, 50 more years passed before the English and Dutch began to arrange a ship's firepower into broadsides and perfect the tactics for using this innovation in battle. Here are

two ways you can deal with this question in your campaign:

1) Hellpowder is a magical concoction, unsuitable for production in any large amounts. It will remain a wizard's toy, but will never be brought into common use on the battlefield.

2) The use of hellpowder is in its infancy. No one has yet devised an effective, accurate cannon. Ships can fling petards — barrels of hellpowder with burning fuses — with catapults or mangonels, and may mount very primitive bombards. This has the effect of doubling a ship's missile rating for War Card battles. If the DM allows, characters may purchase bombards, dragons, and petards for their ships (see the Weapon Table, at the end of this article).

On the other hand, while hellpowder weapons may or may not be available, wizards and priests are definitely available. A mid-level wizard is one of the most devastating pieces of seagoing artillery to be found. Finding wizards who are willing to sail on your regent's ship anytime he wants to torch something may be hard; wizards are scarce in Cerilia, and many have better things to do than risk life and limb in a fight that doesn't concern them. Therefore, wizards are only available as lieutenants, henchmen, or hirelings.

In order to find lieutenants or henchmen, the player character must make some unusual efforts to contact specific non-player characters. Simply hiring a wizard doesn't require the player to role-play the encounter or befriend a NPC, but it's not easy. At best, there's a 1% chance per point of domain power (the sum of the regent's province and holding levels) that there is a true wizard in his domain who is willing to hire on as an artillery piece at any given time. This character may range from 3rd to 10th level (d8+2), and will demand at least 100 gp per level per month as his fee for serving in the character's military forces.

Priests, on the other hand, are a little easier to find. Any temple holding of level 3 or higher has a 50% chance of having a priest of 2nd to 7th level (d6+1) available. Priests are hierarchical and organized; if ordered to by their superiors, these special characters will make themselves available to the regent. Persuading a priest regent to loan his most capable followers to the monarch's military forces may require diplomacy, adventuring, or even espionage on the player character's part.

Table 2: New ship types summary

Ship	Availability	cost	MC	Hull	Seaworth.
Dromond	Khinasi	10 GB	A(2)	2	14
Galleas	Anuirean, Khinasi	14 GB	C(1)	3	12
Greatship	Anuirean, Rjurik	20 GB	C	4	13

Dromond
 Defense: 2
 Boarding: 3
 Morale: X

DM1
 Missile: 1
 MC: A (2)

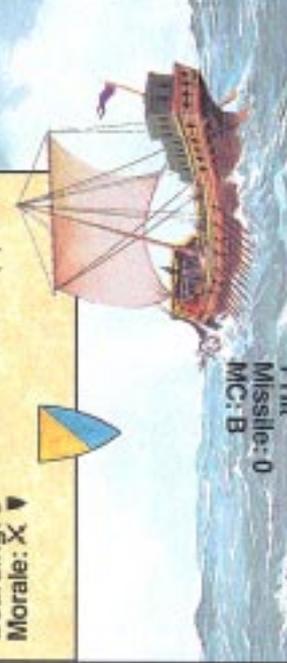
1 Hit
 Missile: 0
 MC: B



Dromond
 Defense: 2
 Boarding: 3
 Morale: X

DM2
 Missile: 1
 MC: A (2)

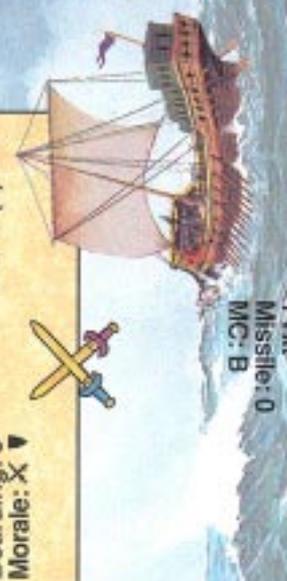
1 Hit
 Missile: 0
 MC: B



Dromond
 Defense: 2
 Boarding: 3
 Morale: X

DM3
 Missile: 1
 MC: A (2)

1 Hit
 Missile: 0
 MC: B



Greatship
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 6
 Morale: X

DM4
 Missile: 2
 MC: C

2 Hits
 Missile: 0
 MC: C

1 Hit
 Missile: 1
 MC: C

3 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D



Greatship
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 6
 Morale: X

DM5
 Missile: 2
 MC: C

2 Hits
 Missile: 0
 MC: C

1 Hit
 Missile: 1
 MC: C

3 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D



Greatship
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 6
 Morale: X

DM6
 Missile: 2
 MC: C

2 Hits
 Missile: 0
 MC: C

1 Hit
 Missile: 1
 MC: C

3 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D



Galleas
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 4
 Morale: X

DM7
 Missile: 4
 MC: C (1)

2 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D (0)

1 Hit
 Missile: 2
 MC: D (1)



Galleas
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 4
 Morale: X

DM8
 Missile: 4
 MC: C (1)

2 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D (0)

1 Hit
 Missile: 2
 MC: D (1)

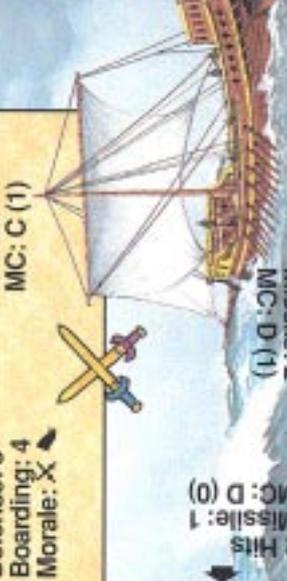


Galleas
 Defense: 3
 Boarding: 4
 Morale: X

DM9
 Missile: 4
 MC: C (1)

2 Hits
 Missile: 1
 MC: D (0)

1 Hit
 Missile: 2
 MC: D (1)



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New naval weapons

Bombard. This is a primitive cannon, firing a stone ball weighing 60 to 90 pounds. Lacking an efficient recoil system or carriage, the bombard must be re-aimed after every shot. It inflicts 1d4-2 points of hull damage, regardless of the ship's defense rating. There is a 25% chance per successful hit that 1d6 random crew members may be injured or killed. A bombard costs 10,000 gp or more, and a ship can mount one per hull point.

A ship fitted with bombards may add 2 points to its missile rating for War Card statistics.

Dragon. This is a small, primitive cannon mounted on the ship's rails or castles. It fires a small lead or stone ball weighing about 2-4 lbs. It inflicts 0 or 1 point of hull damage; compare the result of a d6 roll to the ship's defense rating. If the roll exceeds the target's defense rating, it suffers 1 point of hull damage — otherwise, the damage is insignificant.

A ship mounting dragons adds 1 point to its missile rating for War Card statistics. This is cumulative with the bombard bonus.

Petard. As noted above, a petard is a cask filled with hellpowder that is flung at the enemy. Timing the fuse is everything in a petard-shot. In the artillery statistics, a catapult or mangonel flinging petards instead of stones doubles the dice rolled to determine damage. For example, a catapult normally rolls a d8 and compares the result to the target's defense rating; if the catapult flings a petard, two eight-sided dice are rolled, each of which may inflict one hull point of damage if it beats the ship's defense rating.

When using petard-equipped ships in a War Card battle, simply add 1 point to the missile rating of the firing ship.

New ship types

Dromond. This archaic vessel was formerly used extensively in Khinasi. It is a two-banked galley with a raised ram, a full deck, and usually two masts. The dromond is a fine sailing ship and also very maneuverable by oars. It has a cargo capacity of 2 GB, or one unit of soldiers.

Galleas. An unusual hybrid suitable for calm waters only, the galleas is a very large galley designed to mount the greatest missile firepower possible for an oared vessel. It is a poor sailer and not very maneuverable, but it packs a wallop. The galleas can carry 2 GB of cargo, or up to three units of soldiers.

Greatship. Before seaborne artillery became popular, the greatship was the last word in ship design. It was a floating castle with towering decks, designed to carry the most soldiers possible. A greatship can carry up to four units of soldiers, or a cargo of up to 5 GB.

Rich Baker is one of the principal designers of the BIRTHRIGHT setting and the author of the upcoming novel, The Falcon and the Wolf. His most recent AD&D® game design can be seen in this summer's PLAYER'S OPTION™: Spells & Magic rulebook.

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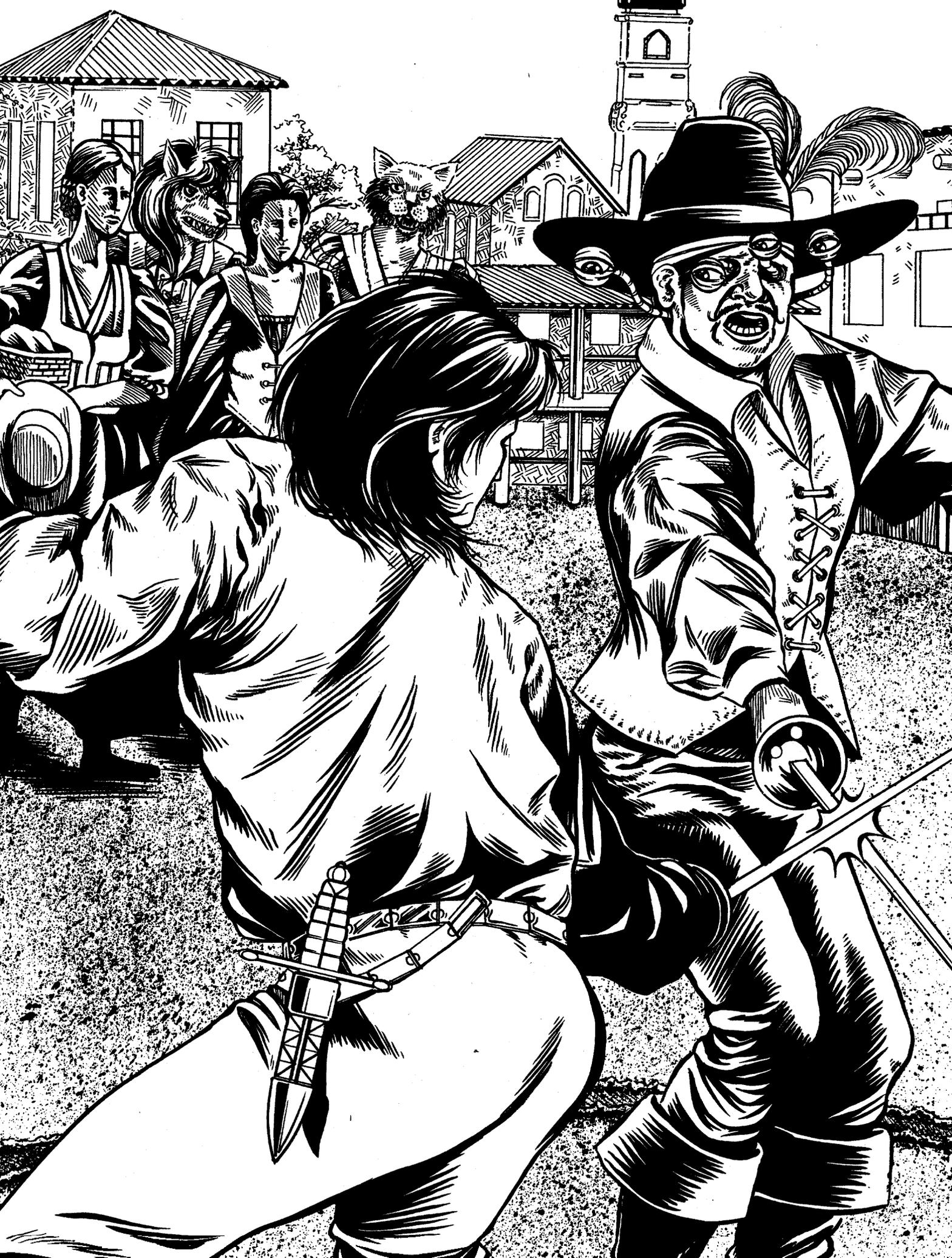
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by Cindi Rice

illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom

En Garde!

"You know the rules?"

Fernando asked his opponent, his four eyestalks studying the other man intently. He paid no attention to the young woman tracing a large circle around them in the sand, nor to the people filling the street around them.

Julian nodded slightly. "Don't leave the circle, and don't use any magic. I know how to duel," he replied, irritation in his voice. He impatiently wiped his large hands on his bright red pants and turned away.

"And no legacies, right?" Fernando said, smiling as he tied a dark gray handkerchief on his head and covered it with his wide-brimmed leather hat.

The younger man wheeled angrily and spat, "I am protected by Bozdogan. Only heathens have legacies — only hideous monsters like you."

Fernando closed his front two eyes as if he'd been slapped. "I would have thought that Bozdogan would have also taught you respect," he said slowly. "Aren't you in enough trouble already, boy?"

"I do not consider a foolish buzzard like yourself any trouble at all. Now, can we get on with this, or do you have more bragging?" Julian said.

Fernando turned and gestured to the young woman, who carried two thin

swords into the circle. Julian inspected each and chose one for himself.

Fernando made a few trial swings with the remaining weapon and turned to face the other man.

The crowd grew quiet as Fernando spoke in a loud voice. "Julian Cortez, you have been charged with the murders of four innocents — people whose only crime was to be afflicted by the Red Curse. For these crimes, you are sentenced to die. As a constabulary for Sir John, I will carry out this sentence. Do you have anything to say?"

"Only that you will be number five, you disgusting fiend," Julian said as he raised his sword.

Welcome to the Savage Coast, a land of power and intrigue, high adventure and ultimate danger. Here, a curse inflicts hideous mutations while simultaneously bestowing magical abilities. Unique races and civilizations struggle for power, and swashbucklers dazzle commoners with their daring feats.

The Red Curse actually comprises several different magical components that result in both Legacies and Afflictions. Those who live on the Savage Coast all eventually acquire Legacies. These spell-like abilities do not come without a price, however, for they are usually accompanied by horrible Afflictions.

The SAVAGE COAST setting also boasts many unusual inhabitants. Though the

Secret weapon passes for the SAVAGE COAST™ online campaign

SAVAGE COAST™ Online

The SAVAGE COAST™ campaign setting is TSR's first online game world. The SAVAGE COAST products listed in the TSR Catalog will appear only on America Online (AOL), Genie, and the Internet — they won't be available in stores. The *SAVAGE COAST Campaign Book*, the *SAVAGE COAST MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix*, and *Orc's Head* (an accessory and adventure) will be available in July, September, and November, respectively. Each is accompanied by separate files containing maps and art, including the covers. *The Black Vessel*, a SAVAGE COAST novel, will be published conventionally.

Finding the files

On **AOL**, just look for the Download of the Month Library in the TSR Online forum (keyword: TSR).

On **Genie**, find the TSR Online RoundTable Software Library (type m125;3) and look for the SAVAGE COAST Topic on the TSR Bulletin Board (Genie, page 125, menu option 1, Category 18/Topic 4). To make things simpler, you can also use the keyword "TSR" and then select the menu options.

On the **internet**, ftp to ftp.mpgn.com. Log in as "anonymous," use your e-mail address as your password, and look in the /Gaming/ADND/Worlds/SavageCoast directory.) E-mail any questions about downloading these files to tsrinc@aol.com.

Table 1: Exceptional Hits

Pass	Attack roll exceeded by:	
	Rapier	Sword
Basic	5	6
Difficult	6	7
Master	7	8
Death	8	9

eastern sections of the coast are inhabited mostly by humans, the western areas are home to several other races. The most prevalent creatures include the feline rakastas, the canine lupins, and the turtlelike turtles.

A few simple mechanics greatly enhance the swashbuckling flavor of the setting. For example, PCs can now accumulate Panache Points and Gauche Points. These mechanics reflect the luck and caprice of the swashbuckling lifestyle. When a PC performs a particularly flashy or daring act, he is rewarded with Panache Points. He can later spend these points to improve his chances of accomplishing other actions. He can even spend more Panache Points than he has accumulated, but then he must accept an equal number of Gauche Points. The DM can then spend these points to foil the PC's plans.

Secret passes

One of the most important elements of swashbuckling is dueling. A new secret pass system heightens the excitement of these types of encounters. With this new system, PCs can join fighting schools to learn secret fencing moves and strategies.

Secret passes are fighting maneuvers that PCs must spend a great deal of time learning and perfecting. In the example above, Fernando is a member of the Cavalcante fighting school. He has mastered nine of their secret passes and has even instructed at least a dozen students in the Cavalcante philosophy and fighting method. As easy as he makes fencing look, learning these techniques requires a great deal of hard work and discipline; it has taken him over 10 years to reach his level of expertise. Still, the hard work pays off grandly in the end. These special maneuvers can mean the difference between a mundane win and a grandiose victory — and sometimes even between life and death.

The secret pass system should be used instead of (not in addition to) the critical hit system. Secret passes each cost one weapon or nonweapon profi-

ciency slot. A PC may begin play with one secret pass only if he is a full member of a fighting school. (See "Fighting Schools" below for more details.) These passes can be performed only against humanoids or other creatures using weapons (DM's call otherwise). The DM should also feel free to expand the list of passes for each school or add new schools, using these as guidelines.

Learning secret passes

Any PC can learn a secret pass if he joins a fighting school. A PC must accumulate one month's training with a master and make a successful Intelligence check to learn the pass. If the check fails, the PC cannot try to learn that pass again until the next level of experience, but the proficiency slot is not lost. A PC learns a pass only on a specific weapon. Once a PC has learned a pass, however, spending one more proficiency slot on it would allow him to perform that pass with any one-handed sword with which he is already proficient.

To learn a Difficult Pass, a PC must have already mastered two Basic Passes. To learn a Master Stroke, he must have already mastered two Difficult Passes. To learn a Death Move, he must have already mastered two Master Strokes. A PC can never have more Difficult Passes than Basic Passes, more Master Strokes than Difficult Passes, or more Death Moves than Master Strokes.

To determine which pass a PC's master chooses to teach him, refer to the list of passes for his school and roll the appropriate die. If it is his first pass, roll for a Basic Pass. If he already knows two Basic Passes, roll for either a Basic Pass or a Difficult Pass (PC's choice). A PC can always go back and learn a lower level pass. Fernando trained with the Cavalcante school for eight years before finally learning the Death Move, Surgeon's Knife. After that, he still went on to learn the Battle Royale even though it is only a Difficult Pass.

These special combat moves are almost always taught by a master swordsman. A PC cannot teach a move until he has known it for at least five levels of experience, and even then he must acquire permission from his school.

Stealing secret passes

Secret passes are just that — secret. One does not want to use them in public for fear that another swordsman might see and copy them. Generally, a swordsman would use such moves only

in combats to the death, or at least duels held in secret.

Allowing someone to steal a move is not only dishonorable, but it can also be grounds for punishment by that school. Stealing passes, while not dishonorable, does anger the members of the school from which it is stolen.

A PC can steal only moves he would be capable of learning. For example, a PC who knows only one Basic Pass could not steal a Master Stroke. In order to steal someone's move, the PC must see the pass used firsthand with no distractions (such as being in battle). A PC fighting nearby could not see the pass well enough to copy it. Even if it was used against him personally, a PC would not be able to duplicate the move. The PC must also be proficient in the weapon that was observed.

If all of these qualifications are met, then the PC can attempt an Intelligence check to see if he understands the move; if this check is successful, the PC must practice the move until he reaches the next level of experience. At that point, the PC must make another Intelligence check at a -4 penalty to actually master the move. If this check is successful, the PC has completely mastered that secret pass. If this check fails, however, the PC must continue the training and attempt another Intelligence check at a -3 penalty upon reaching the next level. The attempt gets easier each time.

A stolen pass still requires spending a proficiency slot. If the PC does not have one available at the time, he must wait until he does to master the move.

Using secret passes

The rapier is the most appropriate weapon for these moves, but any one-handed sword will suffice (subject to DM approval). Rapiers receive no penalty; other swords receive a -1 penalty to all secret pass attacks. DMs must use common sense in deciding which passes can be performed with some swords.

When a player rolls at least five points higher than his target number in an attack, this counts as an exceptional hit. In combat, any time a PC makes an exceptional hit against an opponent, he has the option to use a secret pass. The degree of success necessary for each type of move is given in Table 1.

A player doesn't declare before rolling that he intends to use a secret pass. By rolling well in combat, the PC creates an opening for one of these maneuvers, and he may then choose

whether to take it. If too many people are around or he doesn't have an appropriate move available, he may choose to score a normal hit on the opponent.

The effect of a secret pass is always in addition to normal damage unless otherwise specified in the description. Some of the passes require a special condition, such as the use of a shield or second weapon or the presence of a certain object.

For example, Fernando (an 11th-level fighter) has a THACO of 10 with his rapier. Julian has an Armor Class of 3 due to his Dexterity and *ring of protection +3*, so Fernando needs a roll of 7 to strike him successfully. An attack roll of 15 succeeds by 8 points, so Fernando can then choose to land a normal hit on Julian or use any Basic or Difficult Pass, Master Stroke, or Death Move that he has learned. Fernando, having already been severely wounded, decides to perform the Surgeon's Knife, killing Julian and ending the duel.

Fighting schools

Secret passes differ according to school. The four most famous fighting schools on the Savage Coast are the Dominguez, Cavalcante, Moncorvo, and Verdegeld schools. No one is ever allowed to join more than one school. These schools distinguish themselves by their differing philosophies. Each school has its own set of secret passes, though some of the basic ones are similar. The schools each employ a few masters, who learn all the passes, and some instructors, who learn most of them.

Very selective in choosing their students, these schools often require applicants to pass a test (or series of tests) before joining. Most schools also charge dues to their members, usually around 100 gp per year. This amount does not include any fee or demand made by the specific instructor before revealing a secret pass. The price of learning an individual pass can be as high as 200 gp per level of the pass.

The schools each have a secret phrase or signal that lets members identify one another. Someone who performs a secret pass and cannot identify himself as a member of that school could be in a bit of trouble!

Dominguez school

The Dominguez fighting school originated in Torreon, but it has also become the most popular school in Renardy. It focuses on the two-weapon fighting

style, so to be a member of this school, a PC must spend an additional proficiency slot in that style. Dominguez members do not receive the typical -2 penalty to their secondary weapon attacks.

Dominguez secret passes

Basic passes

1d4

1 **Torreoner two-step:** This attack can be used only on the swordsman's first attack (in any given round). With it, the swordsman sets up his next attack, which he will use to throw his secondary weapon at a +2 bonus to hit.

2 **Swift sting:** This attack inflicts a wound to the opponents sword arm. Foe fights at an attack penalty of -2 until damage is healed. (Effect is cumulative with each secret pass until -10; then, the foe loses all use of that arm).

3 **Slow counter-step:** This attack automatically puts the opponent off balance until the end of the following round; he has a +2 AC penalty (AC 5 becomes AC 7). This attack inflicts no damage.

4 **Dominguez double-dive:** This pass can be used only on the swordsman's first attack in any given round. This move is actually two successful attacks, so it also takes the place of the second attack. Damage for both attacks is rolled at a +1 bonus.

Difficult pass

1d6

1-2 **Kiss of steel:** The swordsman hits opponent with weapon hilt; opponent must make a successful Constitution check at a -6 penalty or be stunned, losing all attacks for one round.

3-4 **Morales ironsnap:** The swordsman pins foe's weapon. If used against an opponent fighting with one weapon, the next attack automatically hits for maximum damage unless the opponent uses his initiative (if he hasn't already used it) to make a successful Strength check, freeing his weapon. If the Strength check fails, his weapon must successfully save vs. crushing blow or break. This attack inflicts no damage.

5-6 **Two-handed farewell:** No matter which attack it is performed with, this pass inflicts maximum damage for both weapons. This does not negate any other attacks.

Master strokes

1d4

1-2 **Torreoner block and strike:** This attack must be on the first attack in any given round. The first weapon inflicts no damage, but the second weapon does maximum damage if it hits. The swordsman also automatically gains initiative in the next round. If the opponent has not attacked this round, his next hit is effectively parried.

3-4 **Manzanas blurring tower:** The swordsman whirls blades so quickly that the opponent is confused, missing all attacks until the end of the next round and suffering a +2 AC penalty.

Death move

Dominguez necktie: The swordsman strikes with both weapons, opening the arteries in the foe's neck. Opponent can no longer fight and dies in 2d4 rounds if a healing spell (*cure serious wounds* or better) is not used within that time.

Cavalcante school

The Cavalcante school originated in Texeiras but is becoming popular throughout the Savage Baronies. This school focuses on force. Practitioners prefer moves that display strength and power. To be a member of this school, a PC must have a Strength of at least 13.

Cavalcante Secret Passes

Basic passes

1d4

1 **Agueira's salute:** This attack is a crushing blow to the opponents head. It gives a +2 bonus to damage; the opponent must make a successful Constitution check at a -4 penalty or be stunned, automatically missing his next attack.

2 **Cavalcante's charge:** The swordsman implements a forceful forward attack. The opponent must make a Strength check at a -4 penalty or be forced backward 1d4+2 steps. This is especially useful when fighting on a ledge or cliff.

- 3 **Baronial masquerade:** The swordsman distracts the opponent and rushes in, knocking foe's weapon to the ground. The swordsman automatically gains initiative next round and a +2 bonus on his next attack. This attack inflicts no damage.
- 4 **Texeiran trounce:** The swordsman attacks forcefully enough to knock foe off balance. The opponent must make a successful Strength check at a -4 penalty or be thrown to the ground. His next initiative must be spent picking himself up.

Difficult pass

1d6

- 1-2 **Iron lunge:** The swordsman doubles the damage rolled for this attack and adds +2.
- 3-4 **Battle royale:** The swordsman runs his sword through the opponent, doing maximum damage. The opponent must make a successful save vs. paralysis at a -2 penalty or flee.
- 5-6 **Shattering ram:** The swordsman strikes foe's weapon with his own sword, using massive force. The opponent's weapon must successfully save vs. crushing blow or be shattered. This attack inflicts no damage.

Master stroke

1d4

- 1-2 **Scarlet veil:** The swordsman gouges out one of the foe's eyes. Opponent receives a -2 penalty to all attacks and initiative rolls and a +2 AC rating penalty until the eye is magically regenerated. If both eyes are gouged out, the foe suffers a 4-point penalty to all the above.

- 3-4 **Sudden squall:** The swordsman successfully hits for maximum damage and grabs a nearby object, hitting the opponent for an additional 1d8 hp damage plus any Strength bonus.

Death move

Surgeon's knife: The swordsman disembowels foe. Opponent can no longer fight and will die in 2d4 rounds. Only healing spells (*cure serious wounds* or better) can be used to repair this damage.

Moncorvo school

The Moncorvo fighting school is a favorite of swashbucklers all over the Savage Coast. This school originated in Vilaverde and still has its headquarters there. To be a member of this school, a PC must either have the tumbling proficiency or a Dexterity of 13. This school also favors the use of a buckler.

Moncorvo Secret Passes

Basic passes

1d4

- 1 **Hidalgo death wish:** This attack inflicts a wound to the opponent's side. Foe suffers an AC penalty of +2 until the wound is healed. (Effect is cumulative with each pass until the opponent's AC is 10; then, the attack inflicts double damage.)
- 2 **Rapier's harvest:** The swordsman can cut any single nonliving object within reach, such as a pouch, rope, candle, belt, or any object that can normally be cut by a rapier. This attack inflicts no damage.
- 3 **Baronial panache:** The swordsman's spectacular skill requires foe to make a successful save vs. paralysis or flee.
- 4 **Silk and steel:** This attack lets the swordsman swirl a cloak to confuse his foe and entangle opponent's weapon, causing him to automatically miss the next attack.

Difficult passes

1d6

- 1-2 **Master seal:** The swordsman carves a personal mark into the foe's forehead or clothing. Scar requires regeneration to erase.
- 3-4 **Swordsman's gambit:** The swordsman tumbles under the foe's weapon and adds an extra 1d6 damage on this attack.

- 5-6 **Vilaverdan slip:** The swordsman skillfully steps around a foe blocking the way (including through a doorway), automatically gaining initiative in the next round and a +2 bonus on his next attack roll.

Master strokes

1d6

- 1-2 **Inigo's rebuke:** Swordsman creates an opening for 1d3 extra attacks, which he must apply immediately.
- 3-4 **Swashbuckler's eyebrow:** The swordsman slashes the opponent on the forehead, inflicting maximum damage and temporarily blinding foe, who attacks with a -2 penalty for the next two rounds.

Death move

Moncorvo's Heartbreak: The swordsman pierces foe through the chest. Opponent can no longer fight and dies within 2d4 rounds if not healed magically (*cure serious wounds* or better).

Verdegild school

The Verdegild fighting school originated in Eusdria. Popular with both paladins and honorbound, this school teaches that superior skill is shown through control. Anyone can kill an opponent, but a superior swordsman can prove his skill without causing death. A duel ends when an opponent is disarmed or, occasionally, at first blood. Though practitioners of this style do not like to kill, they will defend themselves to the death if no other alternative presents itself.

Verdegild secret passes

Basic pass

1d4

- 1 **Corsair's handshake:** This disarm attack works even against an opponent using the two-weapon fighting style. Opponent must make a successful Strength check at a -4 penalty or drop all weapons he is currently holding. This attack inflicts no damage.
- 2 **Paladin's reverence:** This attack inflicts a wound to the opponent's leg. Foe suffers a -2 penalty to initiative rolls until the leg is healed. (Effect is cumulative with each pass up to a -10 penalty; then, the opponent loses use of the leg.)



- 3 **Swordsman's slice:** The swordsman can cut any single nonliving object within reach, such as a pouch, rope, candle, belt, or other object which can normally be cut with a rapier. This attack inflicts no damage.
- 4 **Show of force:** The swordsman unbalances foe and forces him backward. Opponent must make a successful Dexterity check at a -4 penalty or be knocked to the ground. His next action must be used to pick himself up. The swordsman can choose to execute this attack for no damage.

Difficult pass

1d6

- 1-2 **Royal display:** The swordsman makes a flourish with his blade, demonstrating such superior ability that his opponent must make a successful save vs. paralysis at a -2 penalty or surrender.

- 3-4 **Knight's accolade:** This attack inflicts damage to the opponents sword arm. Foe fights at a -4 penalty to all attack rolls until arm is healed. (Effects are cumu-

lative the first two times this is used; after that, the opponent can no longer use that arm.)

5-6

Eusdrian standoff: The swordsman locks swords with the opponent, closing in until they are face to face. This effectively prevents any sword attacks by either of them until someone steps away. If the opponent steps away first, the swordsman automatically gains the next initiative with a +2 bonus on his attack roll. However, the opponent can attempt a Strength check at a -6 penalty to push the swordsman away; if he succeeds, neither receive any subsequent bonuses.

Master stroke

1d4

- 1-2 **Musketeer sundown:** This attack inflicts a hard blow to the side of the opponents head. Foe must make a successful Constitution check at a -8 penalty or fall unconscious. This attack inflicts half damage.

- 3-4 **Honorbound's courtesy:** The swordsman disarms the opponent and shreds his garments over a vital area. The opponent must make a successful save vs. paralysis at a -4 penalty or flee (if there is room) or surrender. The swordsman can choose to execute this attack for no damage.

Death move

Verdegild's sentence: The swordsman severs (or at least completely disables) opponents sword arm at the elbow; opponents hit points are automatically halved, and he must make a successful system shock roll or fall unconscious. He will bleed to death in 1d4 hours if not healed, magically or otherwise.



Cindi grew up in New Mexico but moved to the United States at the tender age of 21. After eluding federal immigration authorities for months, she finally married U.S. citizen Wayne Rice and was safe at last. This article marks her first appearance in DRAGON® Magazine.

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Fantastic battering rams

by Steve Berman

illustrated by Michael Scott

The simplest form of siege weaponry, the battering ram, may perhaps be also the most glorified throughout fantasy literature and historical myth. Some scholars have suggested that the Trojan Horse may have been a metaphor for such an engine. The ram's horns that collapsed the walls of Jericho in the Old Testament may well be a reference to a decorated headpiece of an ancient battering ram. If such colorful allusions are accepted, why not create more magical versions of such a time-tested weapon?

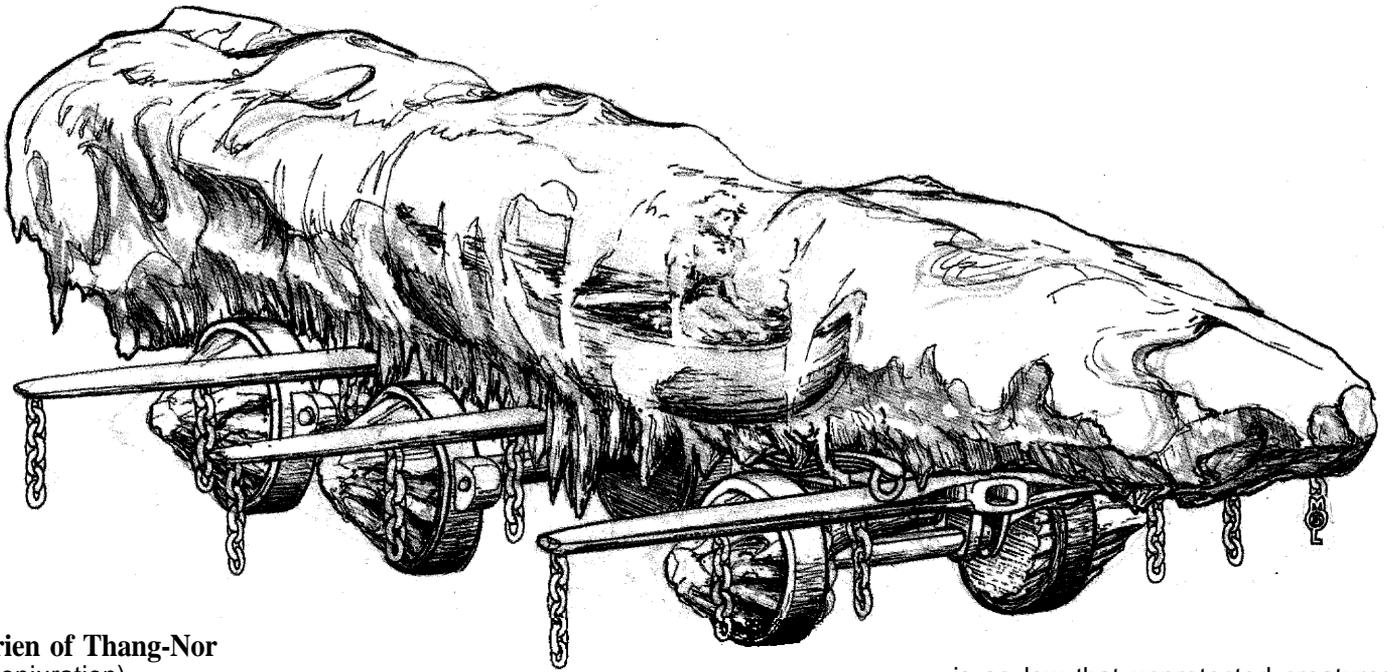
Below are four different enchanted battering rams, from a wizard spell to an orcish seige engine.

The Arien of Thang-Nor

One of the benefits of magic is that ordinary events can be made unpredictable. And while some tacticians would say that siege warfare is anything but ordinary or predictable, certainly the advent of magic to the battlefield would make a general in a fantasy campaign worry and bite his nails while awaiting some arcane offensive that he was certainly not planning for.

Thang-Nor was infamous for such assaults when besieging a fortress. The wizard was a crafty survivor of the harsh Western Steppes and would brook no outposts from other nations in what he considered his land. Perhaps his most infamous spell was not one of utter destruction but one of unforeseen attack.





Arien of Thang-Nor (Conjuration)

Level: 5

Range: 30 yds.

Components: V, M

Duration: 1 turn per level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: See below

This spell conjures forth from the material components a 20'-long battering ram. The *Arien*, as the spell developer was wont to call the weapon, seems to be crafted from ordinary wood with an iron tip shaped like the head of an angry horned beast. But such wood cannot be set afire or warped by magic, nor the metal head rusted or dented. The whole conjuration can suffer 30 hp damage before breaking apart, has a relevant AC of 3, and makes all saving throws at +3. The *Arien* radiates potent magic, of course. Ten men are needed to carry and use it.

This siege weapon is more powerful than the ordinary battering ram. Very large creatures could conceivably be attacked with the *Arien*, but the men at its sides would have to be proficient in its use if such a strike was to be effective. The material components are 10 horned animals that must be slaughtered as the words to the spell are invoked. The sort of animal is important to the spell, the preference being rams or bulls. Other animals may be chosen, but the use of any passive creature (such as cows) cuts the duration in half.

Thang-Nor used this spell in many wily assaults. Disguised as shepherds, the wizard and the nomads under his sway would approach an unsuspecting

keep, leading a flock of rams. Before the enemy could react, the animals would be killed, allowing for the summoning of an *Arien* to pound away the doors to the keep. Thang-Nor also used the weapon when attacking an old blue dragon that had recently awakened in the area. The creature believed that cattle were being offered to appease its appetite by the locals. Instead it found its doom behind the crushing blows of the magical battering ram.

Frost-Rent

Legends suggest that this siege weapon was taken from the ever-cold realm of the Para-Elemental Plane of Ice to win a long-forgotten war. Its appearance is that of a immense, somewhat irregular cylinder of ice, nearly 10' wide and 30' long. Supposedly due to its unique nature, the battering ram never melts away, but whoever has possessed *Frost-Rent* has always protected the weapon with the thick skins and pale furs that were brought with it from that realm of eternal ice. Made from creatures native to that plane, the skins and furs carry a natural *dweomer* that acts much like a *chill metal* spell and keep *Frost-Rent* freezing cold.

Frost-Rent causes any structure it strikes to suffer both structural damage and freezing cold. The weapon is most effective against metal, causing it to become extremely brittle. Thus, wooden doors bound in iron usually fall before this ram. The weapon is dangerous to be around. In a 10' radius the temperature

is so low that unprotected creatures (heavy fur clothing or some magical protection are required) suffer 1 hp damage per round with no saving throw allowed. Anyone not protected against extreme cold (*resist cold* spell, *ring of warmth*, etc.) suffers 1-6 hp damage upon touching it, also without the benefit of a saving throw.

However, those who can survive near it benefit from one aspect of the cold: they should be considered protected as per *endure heat*. Because the weapon's cold is so detrimental to the touch, undead skeletons have usually been its wielders — as they are from the grave, the cold has no ill effect upon them — though there is one recorded instance in which several frost giants manned the ram.

Perhaps strangest of all, inside the ice of *Frost-Rent*, near its center, appears to be a rowboat of rare, streamlined design. A woman sits at the prow, dressed in a long green gown. Her face is hard to see through the ice, but many have said no lovelier visage can be found in all the lands. Who she is, is a matter of mystery. Some sages have said that she is one of the original inhabitants of the Para-Elemental Plane before it totally froze over. Others say that she is a princess, the heir to a crown, and cruelly imprisoned centuries ago by an evil wizard who coveted the throne. Whoever she may be, none of the owners of *Frost-Rent* value rescuing her when the cost is the loss of a magnificent weapon.

Due to its bitter cold, fire spells of 4th level or below have no effect on the

ram, and those of 7th or below when it is wrapped up in the chill skins. The ice is so thick (treat as AC 0) that only magical weapons can really have a physical effect on its nature, and delivering over 50 hp damage would still not likely reach the trapped woman inside.

Khalmick-Graz

Whispers hint at the existence of this weapon, though it has not been sighted in nearly six decades. Nonetheless, old-timers who fought in those wars against the orcs will always curse the evil mind that created Khalmick-Graz (orcish for "Torn Throat").

The weapon is a weird construction, reported to be nearly 30' long, borne on a large-wheeled cart. Interspersed along its wooden length are large brass-rimmed holes, pipes of horn, and metal gongs. At one end is the brass-tipped spike used to batter at the walls, while on the other is a massive bellows. It takes nearly 20 orcs to bear Khalmick-Graz, five on each side to push and heave the weapon along seven to run along its length and open and shut the valves along the holes, and three alone to work the bellows. But the results of all the toil are well worth the effort involved, for in every campaign the weapon was used, the orcs have won.

Not that the battering ram is superior to others; in fact, generals say that the weapon is no better in that regard than any other faced. The power of the ram is the music that Khalmick-Graz plays as it trudges along to the battle. With the bellows pumped and the holes opened and covered, it plays like some twisted wind instrument, boosting the morale of any orc (+3) while shivering the spines of the enemy (-3 on their morale). But once the siege begins, and the weapon attacks the walls or doors, then the ram plays the terrible song of "Torn Throat."

Any non-orcish humanoid within hearing distance (100 yds.) must make a saving throw vs. rod, staff, or wand to avoid the following effects. Because of the chanting of weapon's handlers, any individual that can understand the orcish tongue and thus translate their dire song suffers a -2 penalty on their roll. Still, those individuals with above average Wisdom receive a magical defense adjustment to their saving throws. (Weak-willed persons suffer a penalty, as normal.) Also *remove fear* spell still grants the +4 on saving throws vs. the weapon's song effects. The first failed save results in anxiety and ner-

vousness that increases the chance of mishap. All rolls are made at a penalty of -1 while the battle rages. Another saving throw must be made. The second roll, if failed, means that the affected individuals hesitate in their actions as they fear their cause to be lost. All initiative rolls — whether melee combat, spells, or any other actions — suffer a penalty of +2, and another saving throw must be made. The third roll, if failed, causes the person to flee the area in panic until they are outside the hearing range (100 yds. of the weapon). At the DM's discretion, they may drop items they were holding. Note that all the above effects are cumulative. While the third effect lasts until the affected individual can no longer clearly hear Khalmick-Graz, the first two last the duration of the battle!

The only way to prematurely disrupt the effects is to destroy the weapon. Unfortunately, this has never been accomplished, and those who have once faced Khalmick-Graz are doomed to suffer a cumulative -1 penalty on their saving throws against it on the next battle they are so unfortunate to encounter it again. The *silence, 15' radius* spell seems the downfall of this weapon, but only if the caster uses the spell on potential victims, thus preventing them from hearing the music. The reason for this is simple. Orcish shamans realized the risk posed by such a common spell and over many, many years imbued the wood of Khalmick-Graz with powerful abjuration magic. Any attempt to cast the *silence, 15' radius* on the ram results in one of the rude gongs sounding and no cessation of the music or chanting. The gong alerts the handlers that a cleric is among the defenders. Perhaps if all the gongs were destroyed, the spell might have some effect.

The shamans of whatever orcish tribe created the weapon imbued it with some measure of defense (AC 5; +3 on all saves; 100 hp). One disheartening campaign looked like the end of the weapon, when boiling pitch set the wood afire. To the defender's horror, the curative magic of the orcish shamans and priests was actually able to heal the battering ram before their very eyes.

Thunderstrike rod

This is a rare, but coveted magical item. Rather than polished wood or rare metals, such rods are fashioned from the horns of an adult blue dragon. The problem is that the command words for

these rods are traditionally the name of the battle for which they were made, and since many of these were crafted long ago for cultures and causes now lost to the past and without written records, only through such divinatory magics as *legend lore* can such information be obtained.

By holding the *rod* aloft, the wielder is protected from electricity (mundane or magical). Complete invulnerability is bestowed against such attacks as natural lightning, dragon breath, the touch of a will o'wisp, etc. There is no cost to the *rod's* charges for this effect, but neither does it recharge the wand (to do so, some mages have revealed, requires immersion in a vat of giant slug acid while striking the *rod* with lightning bolts). No knowledge of spellcraft is necessary to utilize this "power," and any profession would benefit from such protection. But to wizards and whatever army hires them, it is the next two aspects of the *rod* are what make it so desirable: At the cost of one charge the *rod* is covered with crackling blue electrical energy. By touching an opponent with the *rod* at this time, the wielder delivers potent charge, much like the *shocking grasp* spell. The jolt inflicts 20 hp damage, half this amount if a successful saving throw is made. In addition (no matter what the saving throw's result) the opponent is stunned for 1d4 rounds. The jolt may be held for up to one turn before the magic will expire if a creature is not touched. An electrical conductor, such as metal or water, can be used by the rod wielder to attack a creature not within close range.

By expending three charges, the rod will release a massive bolt of lightning, appearing as a shaft of wicked, crackling blue light as thick as an ancient tree trunk. This "thunderstrike," as it has been named, is not only an effective weapon against creatures, but also against the walls of a fortress. It can reach up to 200' away from the *rod* wielder. Any opponent struck by a thunderstrike suffers 50 hp damage, with a saving throw vs. rod, staff, or wand permitted and resulting in half damage if successful. The creature is also stunned for a number of rounds equal to 20 — Constitution (for characters) or Hit Dice (for monsters). Against structures, the bolt released is adjudicated on the battering ram table. Also, because the thunderstrike meets the target with a near-deafening fulmination,

Continued on page 46



In the Hollows of the Abyss, the great Lords make war. Vast armies clash endlessly over the tortured landscape battling for power and that most precious commodity, souls. Striding like giants among the Hordes, mighty Archfiends and their terrible Lieutenants reap great ruin, slaughtering their foes over and over again, in bloody practice to storm the Heights from which they had Fallen so long ago...

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The basic game comes as a boxed set, and contains 2 map boards (each 17x23"), rule book, 2 dice, plastic bases, full colour counters and stand-ups, as well as full colour terrain features and templates. As an additional bonus, the Tome of the Abyss is also included (featuring additional artwork and background). MSRP: \$29.95

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A Flurry of Swords

Exotic new blades

by Gregory W. Detwiler

illustrated by James Holloway

The AD&D® game, and fantasy games in general, have a variety of swords listed in the equipment tables. Almost invariably, however, these are the commonest swords used in medieval Europe, possibly with the addition of a few of the more famous Oriental swords (the *katana* and *wakizashi*) if any adventuring takes place in the Far East. This article seeks to remedy this situation by giving a variety of swords of all cultures and all times, ranging from Celtiberian Spain to the Philippines. Some swords would be quite suitable for particular campaign settings, such as Kara-Tur or Zakhara, or historical settings as presented in the the *Age of Heroes* (ancient Greece) or *Glory of Rome* (Roman Empire) sourcebooks.

In the following descriptions, *Cost* is the price of the weapon in gold pieces, while *Weight* and *Size* are the same as on the weapon tables of the equipment lists in the *Player's Handbook*. *Type* is the type of weapon it is, whether piercing (P), slashing (S), or a combination of both (P/S). *Speed Factor*, again, is the same as in the weapons tables in the *PHB*, and the same goes for *Damage S-M/L*. Finally, *Culture* indicates what peoples really used these weapons. In some cases, characters with proficiency or specialization in a particular weapon gain benefits in addition to the usual ones.

Abbasi

Cost: 20 gp

Weight: 5

Size: M

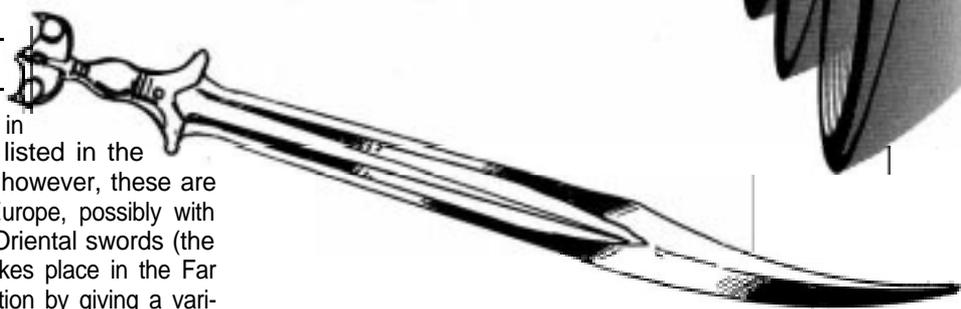
Type: P/S

Speed factor: 5

Damage S-M/L: 1d8+2/1d12+2

Culture: Rajput (Indian)

The abbasi is one of several Indian versions of the long sword. The blade is reinforced by extra strips of perforated metal on one side, both increasing the damage it causes and lessening the chances that it will itself break during battle. Because of the reinforcement, the blade has a +2 bonus to any saves vs. crushing blow.



Cost: 15 gp (ornate) or 11 (plain)

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 5

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d4

Culture: Greek/Lankhmarian

This sword is a light, basically straight blade with a slight curve at the tip, with antenna-like projections at the hilt as decoration. Fans of the late Fritz Leiber will recognize it as the sword used by the Gray Mouser, sans antennae.

Proficient use: The user has a +2 bonus to all parries.

Specialized use: The speed factor is lowered to 4.

Chinese bastard sword

Cost: 15

Weight: 7

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 7 (one-handed) or 5 (two-handed)

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d12 (one-handed) or 2d4/2d8 (two-handed)

Culture: Chinese

This weapon is one of several swords used as arms in the Chinese martial arts. Made of finer metal and with a keener edge than its western counterparts, it is both lighter and handier without sacrificing any power.

Proficient use: Proficiency gives a +1 bonus to all parries.

Specialized use: Specialists operate under a speed factor of 6 (one-handed) or 4 (two-handed).



Chinese war sword

Cost: 15 gp

Weight: 6

Size: M

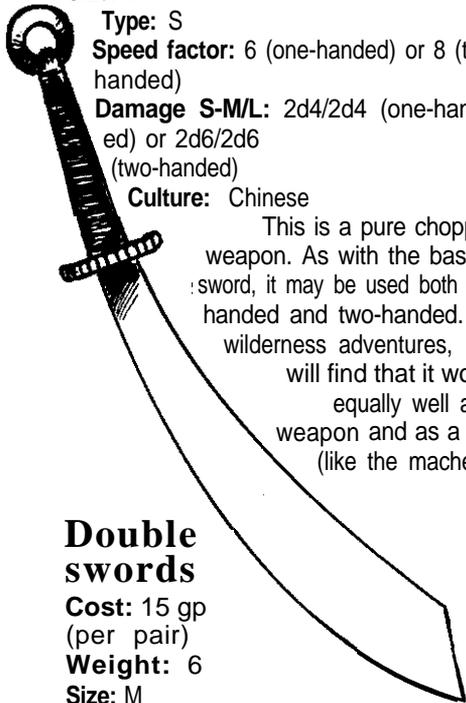
Type: S

Speed factor: 6 (one-handed) or 8 (two-handed)

Damage S-M/L: 2d4/2d4 (one-handed) or 2d6/2d6 (two-handed)

Culture: Chinese

This is a pure chopping weapon. As with the bastard sword, it may be used both one-handed and two-handed. On wilderness adventures, PCs will find that it works equally well as a weapon and as a tool (like the machete).



Double swords

Cost: 15 gp (per pair)

Weight: 6

Size: M

Type: P/S

Speed factor: 3

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d8

Culture: Chinese

These Chinese short swords are sold in pairs. Each one has a handle that is flat on one side, enabling the two blades to be stored in a single scabbard. This makes for a nasty surprise if an enemy simply counts scabbards to determine how many swords are present.

Proficient use: The user may attack with both swords at no penalty, no matter which hand is being used.

Specialized use: Users operate under a speed factor of 2.

Dusack

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d8

Culture: Hungarian/Eastern European

The dusack consists of the blade and nothing else, with a hole in the blade's base substituting for the grip. It was a favored weapon for dueling and is more likely to be used against the PCs in an urban or court adventure than on a battlefield or in a dungeon.

Proficient use: Add +1 to all parrying attempts.

Specialized use: Add another +1 to all parrying attempts, for a total of +2. The speed factor is also reduced to 3.

Epee

Cost: 10 gp

Weight: 2

Size: M

Type: P

Speed factor: 3

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d4

Culture: Western European

The epee looks more like an enlarged needle with a sword handle on one end than anything else, making it useful only for thrusting attacks. It is, however, one of the few swords that is regarded as much as an item of courtly dress as a weapon, and it may well be the only weapon a PC can take with him when admitted to the throne room for an audience with the king. The epee is mainly a dueling weapon.

Proficient use: Users gain a +1 bonus on all parries.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 2.

Falchion, Persian

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

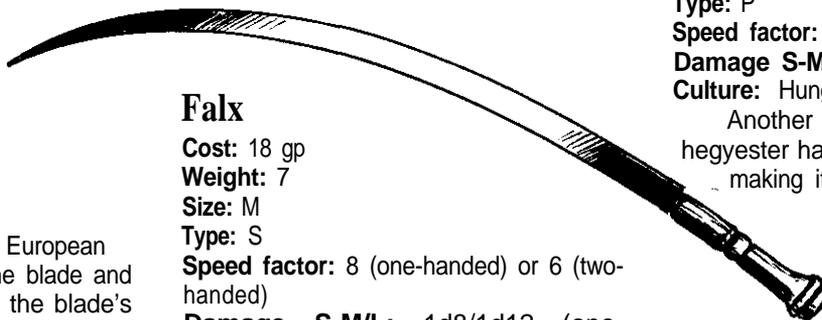
Type: S

Speed factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d6

Culture: Persian

This weapon has a longer blade than its medieval European counterpart, making it better suited as a military blade (which it is) than as a hunting weapon.



Falx

Cost: 18 gp

Weight: 7

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 8 (one-handed) or 6 (two-handed)

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d12 (one-handed) or 2d6/2d8 (two-handed)

Culture: Dacian/German

The falx was a scythe-bladed sword used by the Dacians, who attacked Rome in Trajan's time. So deadly was it that the Romans were forced to put old models of armor back into production to

protect their soldiers from its blows, to say nothing of reinforcing their shields.

Proficient use: When swung two-handed, the falx is +1 to hit.

Franc-taupin

Cost: 15 gp

Weight: 3

Size: M

Type: P

Speed factor: 5

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d12

Culture: French

This odd medieval weapon resembles a long sword, but the front half of the blade narrows sharply to half the width of the blade's base, producing a spikelike shape suited only for thrusting attacks.

Glavelot

Cost: 35 gp

Weight: 12

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 9

Damage S-M/L: 2d4/3d6

Culture: Western European

Basically, this is a falchion with the blade length of a bastard sword, immortalized in Howard Pyle's novel *Men of Iron* as the weapon the chief villain used in the final tournament. It may be used only two-handed. Some authorities also refer to it as the hand-guisarme.

Hegyester

Cost: 20 gp

Weight: 10

Size: M

Type: P

Speed factor: 6

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d8

Culture: Hungarian

Another bastard sword hybrid, the hegyester has a blade like an awl pike, making it suitable only for thrusting.

It is almost always used in mounted combat, being held out like a lance as the rider charges his foe.

Proficient use: The user causes an extra +4 hp damage, regardless of the enemy's size, when charging the foe in a jousting-style attack.

Specialized use: The user does double damage at the end of a charging attack, no matter what size the enemy.

Khyber knife

Cost: 7 gp
Weight: 2
Size: M
Type: P/S
Speed factor: 3
Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d6
Culture: Afghan

This is actually a short sword, with a 24" long blade and an 8" blade. Its blade has an extra-thick T-rib (half an inch thick) that gives it greater strength than looks would indicate.

Proficient use: The Khyber knife causes an extra 2 hp damage against human or humanoid foes wearing armor during a stabbing attack, due to the reinforced blade.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 2.

Kukri, regimental

Cost: 12 gp
Weight: 4
Size: M
Type: S
Speed factor: 5
Damage S-M/L: 1d10/1d10
Culture: Nepalese

The regimental kukri is an enlarged version of the famous (and deadly) curved knife of the Gurkhas. In the real world, it is a ceremonial weapon, used to bless the regiment by slaying a water buffalo. The actual sacrifice consists of beheading said water buffalo with a single stroke. Only one is issued per Gurkha regiment, for the specific purpose of the good luck ceremony, or *dushera*. This weapon is over 2½' in length.

Manchu broadsword

Cost: 18 gp
Weight: 4
Size: M
Type: S
Speed factor: 4
Damage S-M/L: 2d4/1d12
Culture: Chinese/Manchurian

Like the Chinese bastard sword (see above), this is another Chinese sword that is used by martial artists. The blade has a slight curve to it, giving extra force to the downward slashing stroke that makes it so deadly.

Proficient use: Users may do an extra 3 hp damage per blow to a foe of Size S-M.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 3.

Mel puttah bemoh

Cost: 30 gp
Weight: 12
Size: L
Type: P/S
Speed factor: 8
Damage S-M/L: 1d10/2d8
Culture: Indian

This weapon of southern India is literally a two-handed, double-edged rapier. As with the kora (see above), it has hand guards above and below the grip.

Proficient use: Users may inflict an extra 2 hp damage per attack, with no regard for the target's size.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 7.

Rapier

Cost: 12 gp
Weight: 3
Size: M
Type: P or P/S
Speed factor: 4
Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d6
Culture: Western European

This is the dueling sword of choice. As with the smaller epee (see above), it is more of a decorative court sword than a weapon to be used in serious adventuring or battle. Early versions were double-edged, while later models were merely enlarged epees, suitable only for thrusting. The damage is the same whether a slash or a thrust is used.

Proficient use: The wielder gains a +2 bonus on all parrying attempts.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 3.

Klewang

Cost: 12 gp
Weight: 5
Size: M
Type: S
Speed factor: 5
Damage S-M/L: 1d10/2d4
Culture: Malay

The klewang is a Malaysian machete/sabre hybrid. It is best recognized by its odd handle, which extends almost at right angles from the blade. In *Oriental Adventures*, it would be a suitable sword for jungle barbarians.

Machaira

Cost: 10 gp
Weight: 7
Size: M
Type: S
Speed factor: 6
Damage S-M/L: 2d4/2d6
Culture: Celtic/Greek

This sword was invented by the ancient Celts and subsequently adopted by the Greeks. It was also known among the Greeks as the *khopis*, while the Romans who faced it in Greek and barbarian hands—particularly in Celtiberian Spain—called it the *falcata*. This broad-bladed slashing sword has an inverse curve the opposite of that of a scimitar. According to battle accounts, it had terrific armor-penetrating ability.

Proficient use: The machaira is +1 "to hit" when fighting an armored opponent.

Kora

Cost: 18 gp
Weight: 8
Size: M
Type: S
Speed factor: 9
Damage S-M/L: 2d6/2d8

Culture: Nepalese

The kora is the national sword of Nepal, home of the legendary Gurkhas. It is a pure chopping weapon, and has hand guards both above and below the grip.

Saddle sword

Cost: 60 gp

Weight: 15

Size: L

Type: P/S

Speed factor: 10

Damage S-M/L: 1d10/2d10

Culture: Western European

The saddle sword is a two-handed sword which is used as much for thrusting as for slashing, if not more so. Its name comes from its special scabbard, which enables it to be slung from a saddle for easy transport. The last quarter to third of the blade is wider than most of it, forming into an elongated spear head. Just behind this elongated head is a socket that can be plugged by a crossbar. This serves the same purpose as the baffles on a lance or boar spear: it keeps the weapon from penetrating the target so deeply that it is difficult or impossible to withdraw it again.

Proficient use: The saddle sword inflicts an extra 6 hp damage if the wielder uses it in a thrusting attack.

Specialized use: A specialist who makes a charging attack causes double damage at the end of his charge.

Seax, long

Cost: 18 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: P/S

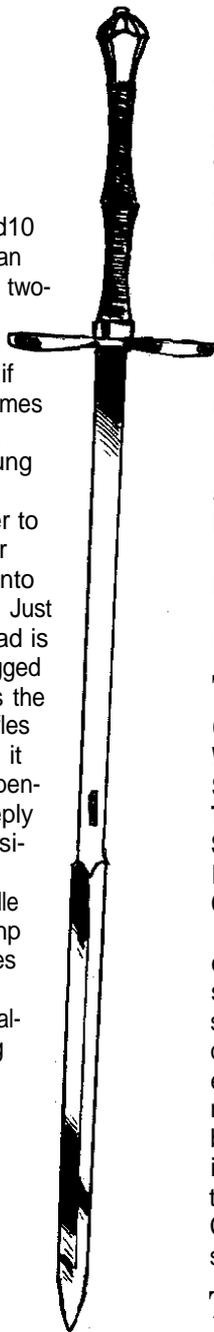
Speed factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d12

Culture: Frankish/Saxon/Viking

The seax is a long sword variant used by many Germanic tribes.

The last third of the blade tapers gradually toward the point. Aside from shaving a bit of weight off the blade, making it easier to wield, this also makes the sword handier than most long swords in a thrusting attack.



Sica

Cost: 10 gp

Weight: 3

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d4

Culture: Thracian

This is a short sword-sized scimitar.

It was used by the Thracians of ancient Greece, and was the main weapon of the "Thracian" class of Roman gladiators. In Robert E. Howard's stories of Kull the Atlantean, it also appears to be the sword used by the Picts of that period.

Proficient use: Proficiency earns a +1 parrying bonus.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 3.

Tachi

Cost: 35 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d10/1d10

Culture: Japanese

While later tachi are virtually identical to the katana, the earliest tachi were straight swords, but they still shared the single, razor-sharp edge and chisel point of later cousins. *Oriental Adventures* players who covet magical weapons should note that, this being the case, there will be far more magical tachi lying around in dungeons and other old ruins than there will be katana or wakizashi. Choose your weapon proficiencies (and specializations) accordingly!

Tai chi sword

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 3

Size: M

Type: P/S

Speed factor: 3

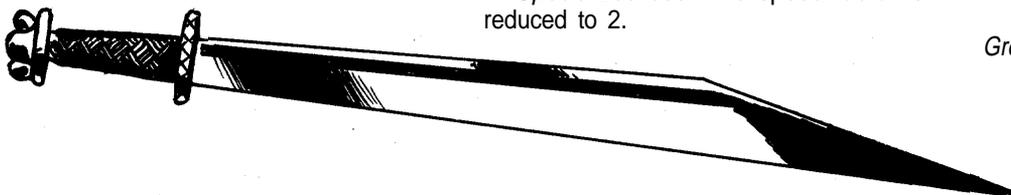
Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d8

Culture: Chinese

The tai chi sword is the last of the Chinese swords listed here to be used by martial artists.

Proficient use: Wielder gains a +1 bonus on parrying attempts.

Specialized use: The speed factor is reduced to 2.



Talibon

Cost: 17 gp

Weight: 5

Size: M

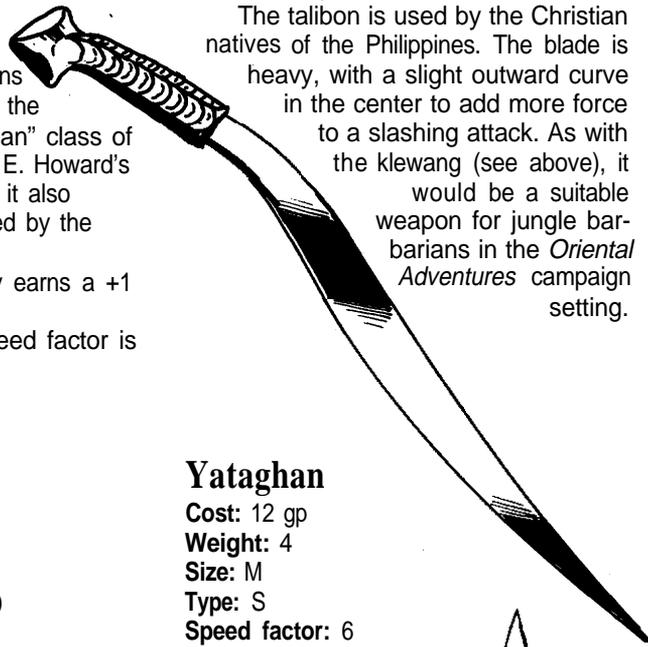
Type: P/S

Speed factor: 6

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d12

Culture: Filipino

The talibon is used by the Christian natives of the Philippines. The blade is heavy, with a slight outward curve in the center to add more force to a slashing attack. As with the klawang (see above), it would be a suitable weapon for jungle barbarians in the *Oriental Adventures* campaign setting.



Yataghan

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: S

Speed factor: 6

Damage S-M/L: 2d4/2d4

Culture: Turkish

The broad-bladed yataghan is one of the primary weapons of Turkish warriors. A type of sabre, the most noticeable thing is its incurved blade, which was designed to go precisely in line with the motion the wielder's wrist makes when delivering a slashing attack, allowing all his strength to go into the blow. Much of the blade's weight is forward as well, adding still more force to a downward cut. Suitable for campaigns from the AL-QADIM® setting to *Oriental Adventures*, including India and eastern Europe.

Proficient use: The user causes an extra 2 hp damage.

Over the past decade, Gregory W. Detwiler has been a frequent contributor to DRAGON® Magazine and POLYHEDRON® Newszine.



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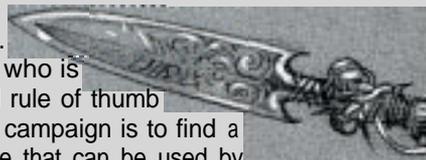
Sorcerous SIX-SHOOTERS

by Roger E. Moore

illustrated by Mark Nelson

Magical firearms in the AD&D® game? A Dungeon Master who cringes at the thought of a simple arquebus in the campaign will probably have a fit at the thought of putting a *flintlock musket of sharpshooting +3* in a treasure pile. Nonetheless, there are several official AD&D campaigns in which firearms are found, and magical guns are a logical outgrowth there.

This article, then, is for the daring DM who is willing to give the concept a try. A good rule of thumb for allowing magical firearms into a campaign is to find a comparable magical wand or device that can be used by any class of character, such as a *wand of magic missiles*, and determining which is more powerful, the wand or the gun. If magic is to be the most powerful element in the campaign, keep magical firearms at a low level of power.



Or...

**How to totally screw
up your fantasy
campaign**



M.A. NELSON '82

Firearms are described in many places in the AD&D rules. For the purposes of this article, all game information on firearms is taken from the AD&D rulebook, *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Combat & Tactics*, in Chapter Seven, "Weapons & Armor"; for weapon details, see the table on pages 130-133 and notes on pages 136-137. However, this article may be used with any campaign's description of local firearms, which vary considerably from realm to realm.

In any event, the DM must be aware of both the extraordinary power of firearms in the game system — and their failings, too. It is strongly recommended that the DM pick up the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics* book and read the following sections: "The Renaissance," pages 123-126; "Firearms," pages 126-127; and, most importantly, "Weapon Descriptions: Firearms," pages 136-137. The latter section emphasizes the characteristics of misfiring, armor negation, and causing open-ended damage.

Firearms in TSR Worlds

Any original, unofficial AD&D campaign using the basic rule books can be granted the use of firearms. Only the hand match arquebus and possibly the hand match handgunne would be available in fantasy campaigns using the most primitive firearms.¹ Some of these weapons could be enchanted, if the DM so wishes.

Among official campaign worlds, a FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign set in Faerun in the years following the Time of Troubles (1358 DR) can easily incorporate firearms, as Lantanna priests of Gond the Wondermaker are making and spreading them throughout the Realms. The Lantanna have mastered hand match and matchlock weapons-making, and can regularly produce high-quality hand match handguns, hand match arquebuses, matchlock arquebuses, matchlock calivers, and matchlock muskets (with gun rests). They can also produce hand match rib-

alds for armies, and hand match or matchlock blunderbusses. (Normally, blunderbusses are flintlocks or snaplocks, but we'll assume these are primitive blunderbusses.) Very large, crude bombards are made and used by the Red Wizards of Thay, and some of these siege guns are in the Pirate Isles.² The presence of magical firearms is almost a certainty here, but ribalds, blunderbusses, and bombards are very unlikely to be magical, given their extreme size or crudeness.

Firearms do not appear in the GREYHAWK® campaign, as local laws of physics and magic (and possibly a lack of necessary materials) prohibit the manufacture of either gunpowder or smoke powder there; the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign initially lacks smokepowder and gunpowder, though recent developments in that world may change that.³ The MYSTARA® campaign's Known World region, including Karameikos and Glantri, generally has no firearms within it, but the Savage

1. See the *Player's Handbook (PHB)*, pages 68-69 and 73 (1989 printing) or pages 94-96 (1995 printing), and also *DMGR3 Arms and Equipment Guide* (pages 53-54 and 108-109), for more arquebus details. Magical smoke powder is described in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide (DMG)*, pages 138 and 179-180 (1989 printing) or pages 187 and 238 (1995 printing). Original campaigns mixing advanced firearms and magic are described in *DMGR5 Creative Campaigning*, on pages 4, 8-11, 17, 33, and 35-36. *DMGRZ The Castle Guide*, on pages 98-102, gives bombard and cannon statistics for generic AD&D campaigns.

2. See *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures (FRA)*, pages 11-13 and 20, and the new edition of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign boxed set, *A Grand Tour of the Realms*, pages 11 and 108-109, for details on these weapons and events surrounding their spread through Faerun. (It is implied that Lantanna gnomes, possibly as priests of Gond, are aiding the spread of firearms — not surprising if Gond did appear to the Lantanna in a gnome's form during the Time of Troubles.) Also, the 1995 anthology, *Realms of Magic*, includes two short stories about firearms in the Realms: "Smoke Powder and Mirrors" and "Gunne Runner." The latter story notes that the Realms word "gunne" might be a corruption of Gond's name.

3. The *SPELLJAMMER®* boxed set's *Lorebook of the Void*, page 89, bans the use of smoke powder and firearms on the world of Oerth, though such devices work elsewhere in Greyspace. The *BIRTHRIGHT* boxed set's *Rulebook*, page 17, notes that arquebuses are unavailable in Cerilia (but see "Weapons of the Waves" in this issue, as well as the forthcoming novel, *The Falcon and the Hawk*, by Rich Baker). See also *Chronomancer*, page 79, for notes on guns in the GREYHAWK and BIRTHRIGHT campaigns.

In *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #30, page 12 ("From the Sorcerer's Scroll: New Setting for the Adventure"), Gary Gygax stated, "Gunpowder and explosives will not function on the World of Greyhawk." He also disallowed firearms in AD&D game worlds in general in the AD&D original edition *DMG*, page 113 ("Transferral Of Fire Arms To The AD&D Campaign") and in a letter to *DRAGON Magazine*, in issue #66, page 4 ("Out on a Limb: Gary on gunpowder"). The latter was in response to an article by Ed Greenwood in issue #60, page 24: "Firearms: First guns were not much fun." Here, the historical development of gunpowder firearms is described, with information on converting primitive hand match firearms to AD&D game statistics. Much of this material on adding gunpowder weapons to AD&D campaigns reappeared later in *FRA*, pages 11-13.

Ed Greenwood wrote an expansion of his earlier article that appeared in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #70, page 31: "A Second Volley: Taking another shot at firearms, AD&D style." This included notes on matchlocks and flintlocks, with detailed illustrations. Ed points out (correctly) that Gygax himself seemed to have allowed firearms into his own GREYHAWK campaign, despite Gygax's protestations to the contrary. Firearms in the GREYHAWK campaign are mentioned by Gygax in articles in *DRAGON Magazine* issues #17, page 6: "Faceless Men & Clockwork Monsters: A DUNGEONS & DRAGON® [sic] Adventure Aboard the Starship Warden" (see page 8) and issue #71, page 19: "Greyhawk's World" (see page 73). It is possible that the City of Greyhawk wizard who was seen with a pistol, as noted in issue #17, was Murlynd from issue #71 (see editorial comment in Ed Greenwood's "A Second Volley" in *Best of DRAGON Magazine*, Vol. V, page 22, 1986 printing). No one but Murlynd is likely to have a true firearm on Oerth — if you don't count

the artifacts from the Barrier Peaks region, of course.

Both Gary Gygax and Ed Greenwood, among many other AD&D game designers, have allowed for AD&D game characters to travel to other worlds where firearms work very well — particularly our own Earth. For examples, see the AD&D original edition *DMG*, pages 112-114 (BOOT HILL® and GAMMA WORLD® game mixing with the AD&D game); *DRAGON Magazine* issue #30, page 12: "From the Sorcerer's Scroll: New Setting for the Adventure"; and issue #57, page 5: "Modern Monsters: The Perils of 20th-Century Adventuring." A more complete listing of fantasy-world crossovers to our modern world appears in *POLYHEDRON® Newszine* issue #117, page 23: "A World of Your Own," sidebar ("AD&D Voyages to Earth & Back").

4. An article outlining means for adding firearms to the D&D® game's Known World campaign, later the AD&D game's MYSTARA® campaign, appeared in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #199, page 96: "Ready, Aim, Fire!" (Bruce A. Heard). However, this was an unofficial option, and only the Savage Coast region of the RED STEEL® campaign has smoke powder and firearms at present. For details, see the RED STEEL boxed set's *Campaign Book* (pages 51-52, 56, 81-86, 93-95, 97, and 112-113) and *Lands of the Savage Coast* (pages 10-11); see also the *Savage Baronies* boxed set's *Book 1: The Savage Baronies*, pages 8-10, 13, 20-21, and 51-60. Note that only in Cimarron County are firearms and smoke powder actually manufactured, and these are heavily used there, though they are known to other Savage Baronies, particularly Guadalante, and to distant Renardy.

5. Two examples of tinker-gnome projectile weapons are found in the *Tales of the Lance* boxed set's *World Book of Ansalon*, on pages 68-69. The belcher is a match-lit can-

Coast region to the far west (i.e., the RED STEEL® campaign) manufactures its own firearms and smoke powder, and some of these items might find their way across the sea to the Known World lands.⁴ Firearms seem to be unknown in the HOLLOW WORLD® setting within Mystara.

Though primitive firearms were manufactured at the end of the DRAGONLANCE® campaign's Fourth Age by the minoi, the tinker gnomes of Mount Nevermind, the gnomes were not interested in having them enchanted. ("Magic? Rubbish!") Additionally, no wizard or priest of Krynn ever dared to enchant one for fear of the extreme danger involved in getting near any explosive device created by gnomes. (Spellcasters of Krynn might also regard the addition of magic to any tinker-gnome device as a criminal act endangering all civilization.) No firearms are known to have been made by the gnomoi, the gnomes of Taladas, but if they were none would be enchanted.⁵

Firearms can be imported into the outer planes of the PLANESCAPE™ and RAVENLOFT® campaigns, but materials for making gunpowder, smoke powder, or other explosive substances are not normally found here.

One other place where firearms are reasonably common and magical firearms are likely to be found is the SPELLJAMMER® campaign.⁶ Smoke powder weapons ranging from sophisticated wheel-lock pistols to huge (even magical!) bombardards are found in many crystal spheres, thanks primarily to two races: Krynnish tinker gnomes, who have migrated en masse to wildspace

over many centuries, and the huge, hippo-headed giff, who have an extreme and sometimes fatal love for guns and explosives. As one would imagine, tinker gnomes and giff get along famously. Spacefaring humans have also greatly aided the spread and use of firearms by constantly improving weapons design and using guns in many combat situations.

More recently, however, two other forces have begun to spread firearms and smoke powder through the spheres. During the Second Unhuman War, humanoid armies and spelljammer navies led by the scro (powerful spacefaring orcs) sometimes carried smoke powder explosives and firearms, though usually only elite or command units had them. The war recently concluded with a marginal victory for the elven Imperial Fleet, the scro's primary enemy, scattering the battered humanoid forces — and their weapons — across wildspace.⁷

Additionally, the Smiths' Coster, a weapons-and-armor merchant company largely controlled by dwarves, has long been responsible for spreading smoke powder weapons throughout many spheres. It is highly likely that the Second Unhuman War has redoubled the efforts of the Smiths' Coster to get firearms into the hands of dwarves, gnomes, humans, and other good-aligned folk across the spheres as defensive weapons. The Smiths' Coster is based in the gigantic asteroid belt known as the Grinder, in Greyspace, a sphere which was the scene of a huge battle during the Second Unhuman War.⁸

Unusual sorts of smoke powder weapons from wildspace include magical bombardards, disposable "Giff guns," and whole ships built around gigantic cannons, called Great Bombards. (The mere existence of Great Bombards inspired the creation of the first known "gun cult.")⁹ Any firearm up to the level of wheel-locks can be found in wildspace; snaplocks might be found but are extremely rare, the product of intense and prolonged development.

One important development is that firearms are entering numerous worlds from sources in wildspace. Wheel-lock pistols known as "starwheels" are sometimes sold or traded across Toril (of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign) by spelljammer crews, or they are stolen from crews by local thieves.¹⁰ At least one spelljammer landed on Krynn bearing firearms, and this event has likely been repeated many times on this and other worlds.¹¹

The most advanced firearms known in any official AD&D campaign are found in Earthly settings where non-magical gunpowder is cheap and plentiful. A magical version of Europe, detailed in HR4 *A Mighty Fortress*, includes everything up to snaplock firearms, with a wide variety of large field guns.¹² Because provision is made for magic to work during this period, magical firearms are well within reason, though they would be very rare as the process for enchanting them is likely to be longer and more difficult here than on high-magic worlds. It is likely that this Earth can be reached by other-world adventurers only through the most diffi-

non, and the blunderbuss is a hand match weapon. Both use smoke powder, as normal gunpowder is not found on Krynn. It may be that smoke powder is actually imported to Mount Nevermind by extremely lucky gnomish spelljammers. The gnomes of Taladas do not like adding magic to their inventions, as they regard it as "cheating." See the *Time of the Dragons* boxed set's *Guide Book to Taladas*, page 109, for details.

6. There are many references to smoke powder firearms and bombardards in the SPELLJAMMER campaign. Some important ones include: SPELLJAMMER boxed set's *Concordance*, pages 42, 45, and 47; SJR1 *Lost Ships*, pages 4 and 74; *The Legend of Spelljammer* boxed set's *Captains and Ships*, pages 13-15 and the Great Bombard card; CGR1 *The Complete Spacefarer's Handbook*, pages 57, 62-63, and 88-89; *The Maelstrom's Eye* (SPELLJAMMER *Cloakmaster Cycle*, Volume 3); and the *War Captain's Companion* boxed set: Book 1, pages 67, 72, and 78; and Book 2, page 25.

7. Scro are noted to use firearms and explosives in *The Maelstrom's Eye*, mentioned above.

They were involved in sending advanced firearms into the Realms through Waterdeep in the short story, "Gunne Runner," from *Realms of Magic*.

8. Information on the Smiths' Coster appears in CGR1 *The Complete Spacefarer's Handbook*, pages 88-89. The battle known as the Borka Maneuver is detailed in the *War Captain's Companion*, Book 1: *War Captain's Guide*, page 20. It is likely that the Smiths' Coster and other groups are currently battling remnants of the scro and Borka fleet throughout the Grinder, if not across all the Known Spheres.

9. Magical bombardards appear in the *War Captain's Companion* boxed set's Book 1: *War Captain's Guide*, page 78; "giff guns" appear in SJR1 *Lost Ships*, page 74; Great Bombards are detailed in the *War Captain's Companion* boxed set's Book 2: *Ship Recognition Manual*, page 25, and *The Legend of SPELLJAMMER* boxed set's *Captains and Ships*, pages 13-15 and Great Bombard information card.

10. Page 13 of *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures*, the story "Gunne Runner" from *Realms of Magic*, and page 93 of the SPELLJAMMER boxed

set's Lorebook of the Void all point out the influx of firearms from wildspace into the Realms. Doubtless, the Smiths' Coster has contact with the humans and gnomes of Lantan, and may have contacts in Waterdeep and elsewhere.

11. The event noted here was the arrival of Herphan Gomja the giff aboard a crashed spelljammer, about 30 miles south of Kalamian; see the SPELLJAMMER novel, *Beyond the Moons*, for details.

It is worth a thought that in the RED STEEL campaign, smoke powder is said to have been discovered in AC 948 by a dwarven family called the Smithy clan. This clan, made up primarily of smiths, invented the arquebus in 957; the wheel lock pistol was developed by a Smithy and a halfling jeweler named Westron in 975. (The current year is about AC 1010.) Such rapid technological advancement seems stunning even by our Earth's standards — unless the Smithy clan was merely a front for the Smiths' Coster, which lent technical know-how to local dwarves!

12. For details, see HR4 *A Mighty Fortress*, pages 36, 38, 54, 56-61, and 69-70.

Nomenclature for Table 1

SC: Standard AD&D campaign, allowing only primitive hand-match firearms.

FR: FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, after the Time of Troubles in 1358 DR. These are almost always made in Lantan and have the symbol of Gond stamped on the butt.

SJ: SPELLJAMMER campaign, before, during, and after the Second Unhuman War. Many (40%) of these weapons are made and sold by dwarves from the Smiths' Coster, though weapons from many worlds can be found.

RS: RED STEEL campaign, after AC 1010 (possibly spilling into the MYSTARA campaign at this time). These are usually (95%) made by dwarves and humans from Cimarron County, often from the firm of Smithy & Westron.

HR4: Magical Europe during the Elizabethan Period and Thirty Years War, AD 1550-1650.

AR: Magical world with weapons technology equal to Earth at the time of the American Revolution, up to AD 1800.

cult planar travel. Gothic Earth, detailed in the RAVENLOFT® *Masque of the Red Death* boxed set, has many sorts of advanced firearms common to the 1890s, but there is (thankfully) no provision for making them magical. An enchanted Gatling gun would be a frightening piece of work, indeed! Gothic Earth's weaponry lies outside the field of this

article; HR4's Elizabethan Earth represents the most advanced state of magic and weaponry that will be dealt with here, though a hypothetical world with technology at the level of A.D. 1800 is allowed for in the weapons tables.

Magical firearms as treasure

In any campaign in which magical firearms are present, several things must be considered when depositing such weapons in treasure hoards.

1. How long have firearms and magical firearms been present? If they have been around for several hundred years, they are probably regarded as being no different from any other sort of weapon, and they will turn up in treasure piles just like magical swords or wands. If they are a fairly recent development, very few if any of them will be found in monster-held treasure hoards. Remember that even if magical firearms are rare in a campaign, normal firearms are likely to turn up in treasure piles with some frequency, especially if common citizens, hunters, and soldiers have access to them. In HR4's Elizabethan Earth, a dragon's treasure might contain many dozens of pistols, muskets, gunpowder pouches, and bullet bags (most nonmagical) gathered from soldiers and would-be dragon-slayers. Along the Savage Coast, the dragon's hoard might contain only one nonmagical wheel-lock horse pistol, without smoke powder or bullets.

2. Can the owner of the treasure hoard use the firearm? If so, it is very likely that the owner will keep the weapon near for his own use against

marauding adventurers. The owner must, of course, have a supply of gunpowder or smoke powder available, with bullets.

A good short rule follows: With every magical or nonmagical firearm found in a treasure hoard, a 33% chance exists (roll 1-2 on 1d6) that a pouch or container of smoke powder (or gunpowder, if allowed) containing 3d6 charges is found with it. Another 33% chance exists (another roll 1-2 on 1d6) that a pouch with 2d10 lead bullets is found as well. If both powder and bullets come with a weapon, and the treasure hoard owner can manipulate the firearm, he will use it himself.

3. Should the discovery of firearms in treasures be a chance affair? If firearms are otherwise common, plentiful, and relatively cheap, random rolls placing them in treasures (with some common sense applied) can be used. A base chance of 5% (roll 1 on 1d20) can be given for any treasure hoard to contain 1-4 firearms, including magical ones, if the possibility is reasonable. Pacifist pixies might ignore huge, bulky, stinky, dangerous firearms, but a dragon might have many of them lying around her cave with the bones of their former users. If firearms are rare, then DM should simply place a normal or magical firearm in a logical treasure pile without rolling for the possibility.

Random-roll tables

If the DM wishes to use random-roll tables for magical firearms, Table 1 should be consulted first for each

Table 1: Magical Firearm Types by Campaign

SC	FR	SJ	RS	HR4	AR	Weapon allowed
1-10	1-4	1	-	1	-	Hand match handgunne
11-20	5-8	2	-	2	-	Hand match arquebus
-	9-12	3-4	-	3-4	-	Matchlock arquebus
-	13-16	5-6	-	5	-	Matchlock caliver
-	17-20	7-8	-	6	-	Matchlock musket
-	-	9-11	1-4	7-8	1	Wheel lock arquebus
-	-	12-16	5-12	9-10	2	Wheel lock belt pistol
-	-	17-20	13-20	11-12	3	Wheel lock horse pistol
-	-	-	-	13-14	4-5	Snaplock belt pistol
-	-	-	-	15-17	6-7	Snaplock horse pistol
-	-	-	-	18-20	8-9	Snaplock musket
-	-	-	-	-	10-11	Flintlock belt pistol
-	-	-	-	-	12	Flintlock blunderbuss
-	-	-	-	-	13	Flintlock blunderbuss pistol
-	-	-	-	-	14-15	Flintlock carbine
-	-	-	-	-	16-17	Flintlock horse pistol
-	-	-	-	-	18-20	

weapon. The table is structured to allow for differences between campaign worlds in the types of weapons they have locally available. More or less advanced weapons would, of course, be available if the item came from another world, brought here by its owner after traveling by magical gate, teleportation spell or device, planar travel, spelljammer, etc. A 1d20 roll determines the type of weapon found. (This table may be used for determining nonmagical weapon types as well.)

A quick note: There are a few types of firearms not given on the table, like the crude blunderbusses from the Realms. If you want a magical Lantanna blunderbuss, go ahead and make one up, but I'm assuming they are extremely rare for reasons given earlier.

Once Table 1 has been used, the DM can make the previously suggested rolls to determine if powder and bullets are present. A 5% chance (1 on 1d20) may also be allowed for a pistol to have either a storage box or leather belt holster with it (50% chance for each). Muskets requiring stands or braces are 50% likely to have them present if found randomly.

After this, Table 2 is used to determine the magical powers that each firearm possesses. Notice that the magical powers given do not exactly match those given for other types of missile weapons, even if the name is similar. For instance, a pistol of accuracy does not have the same powers as a crossbow of accuracy. A firearm may have more than one enchantment, as allowed for by the table; if a die-roll selects the same power twice, the duplicating roll is ignored and no further rolls are made.

Explanation of Table 2 powers

Accuracy: A firearm of accuracy has a permanent attack bonus of +1 (roll 1-6 on 1d10), +2 (roll 7-9 on 1d10), or +3 (roll 10 on 1d10). This bonus applies to any sort of normal projectile used in the weapon, but this bonus does not apply to damage rolls. This bonus is cumulative with magical bullet bonuses.

Combined weapon: A firearm with this power is constructed so that it also serves as a secondary melee weapon, usually either a dagger, axe, short sword, club, hammer, or mace. The DM should carefully consider the possibilities and choose which secondary weapon applies. Historical examples are many, but the DM is encouraged to be creative.

A dagger blade may pop out from a concealed spot beneath the barrel, or a sort of bayonet may come with the weapon, able to be attached or detached at the user's whim. In any event, because the weapon is magical, the firearm cannot be damaged when used in normal combat unless subjected to damage requiring the use of Table 29: Item Saving Throws, from the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*.

Distance: A firearm of distance has double the range of a normal firearm. This doubling applies to the weapon's given short, medium, and long ranges. The weapon magically allows the user to see better at longer ranges only if the weapon is being held and aimed, not if fired blind or from the hip.

Double-firing: This power allows a weapon to fire two bullets at the same time. Both bullets must attack the same target, but they each make a separate attack roll. This power cannot be combined with multiple-firing. Two nonmagical bullets and powder sufficient for two shots must be loaded before each use. A misfire occurs on a roll of 1 on the attack roll. Use of any magical bullet with this weapon damages the bullet and removes its magical powers upon firing; a misfire also results on a roll of 1 or 2.

Enchanting: The enchanting power causes nonmagical bullets to be able to strike any creature that can be hit only by magical weapons. The bullets do no extra damage and there are no bonuses to attack rolls, but the bullets can effectively harm creatures like gargoyles, lycanthropes, fiends, and the like. Magical bullets are not affected by this gun's powers and are treated normally; thus, a bullet +1 would not harm a monster affected only by weapons of +2 power or better.

Enemy detection: If held in the hands, this weapon allows the user to see all hostile beings within a 60-yard range, even if the beings are invisible, disguised, or hidden. Ethereal, astral, and out-of-phase enemies cannot be detected using this weapon.

Impact: This power causes bullets fired from the weapon to do greater than usual amounts of damage. This damage bonus is either +1 (roll 1-6 on 1d10), +2 (roll 7-9 on 1d10), or +3 (roll 10 on 1d10); the bonus does not apply to attack rolls. This bonus can be added to knockdown rolls, but it does not increase the chances of open-ended damage. Damage rolls are checked for open-ended damage before the damage bonus is added; however, the damage bonus is then added to each die of dam-

Table 2: Magical Firearm Powers (roll 1d100)

1d100	Power
01-15	Accuracy
16-18	Combined weapon
19-30	Distance
31-35	Double-firing
36-38	Enchanting
39-45	Enemy detection
46-60	Impact
61-65	Infravision
66-74	Missile shield
75-76	Multiple-firing
77-80	Night attacks
81-90	Perfect action
91-95	Silence
96	Special purpose
97-99	Speed
00	Roll for extra, different power (maximum of two extra rolls).

age done. The damage bonus is cumulative with bonuses from magical bullets.

Infravision: This power grants the user infravision out to 60' in darkness. This is especially useful in indoor or underground environments, as the night attacks power do not work here.

Missile shield: A missile shield firearm grants its user the use of a defensive spell three times per day on command, at the 12th level of magical power. The user may thus fire at enemies with some protection from returning missile or bullet attacks. Magical missiles or bullets are not necessarily guarded against, however. The following table is checked when this weapon is found, and only the type of spell indicated can be used.

1d10	Power
1-2	<i>Blur</i>
4-6	<i>Mirror image</i>
7-8	<i>Shield</i>
9-10	<i>Protection from normal missiles</i>

Multiple-firing: This weapon has been designed to allow for the rapid firing of up to six bullets within a single round, firing one shot with each squeeze of the trigger. Each bullet has normal chance to hit and damage a foe; the bullets may be aimed at one or more targets. The weapon must be loaded with sufficient bullets and powder beforehand. The maximum number of rounds the weapon can fire is determined by a roll of 1d4+2: this limit cannot be altered

for any one weapon, so a "four-shooter" cannot be made into a "six-shooter." This power cannot be combined with double-firing. Magical bullets are so damaged by being fired from this weapon that they immediately lose all magical powers and become normal bullets. The chances of misfiring are reduced to a roll of 1 on each attack roll, unless a magical bullet is used, in which case all misfires are increased to a roll of 1 or 2.

Night attacks: A firearm of night attacks grants its user the ability to see as well at night outdoors as during full daylight. This is not the same as having infravision, but it is far better for firing purposes and range (unless the user is indoors or in a cave, in which case this power does not work). This power comes into effect the moment the user grasps this weapon by its grip, as if keeping it ready for firing.

Perfect action: This power automatically cleans out the barrel after every shot and eliminates all chances of disastrous misfires. This is one of the most popular magical powers found with firearms.

Silence: This weapon makes absolutely no sound when fired, though the bullet will make a sound if it passes a bystander or strikes a target. This power is regarded as the mark of an assassin, spy, or other criminal, though it still has some quiet popularity.

Special purpose: The firearm has a special purpose. It has been designed to do extra damage to a particular type of being or creature; the DM must determine what sort of being must be targeted (e.g., reptiles, undead, wizards, lycanthropes, avians, great cats, dragons). The firearm has a normal bonus of +1 to attack and damage rolls, but against its

special target it gains a +5 bonus to attack and damage. This power cannot be combined with accuracy or impact. This type of firearm is sometimes called a firearm of slaying, though it doesn't automatically kill its targets. This weapon's bonuses are cumulative with those of magical bullets.

Speed: This power reduces the Speed factor of the weapon by half, dropping all fractions. It also allows the user to fire in the same round and segment as an attacker who has gained surprise over the user, and to gain the initiative in each non-surprise round in which the weapon can be used. It essentially speeds up the user's reaction time and hand movements, though it doesn't allow the user to run faster, make multiple attacks in a round, etc.

Other magical firearms powers

Weapons developed for use in the SPELLJAMMER campaign are the most likely ones to have unusual powers. The DM can pick and choose unique powers as appropriate to the campaign, borrowing from spell lists and existing magical items. Defensive powers (e.g., protection from evil) allow the firearm's user to fire openly or confront certain opponents for brief periods without harm, and detection powers (e.g., detect undead) allow the user to find appropriate targets. The DM should carefully consider powers and drop those that are better placed on rings or amulets (e.g., protection +1 or regeneration, which are best used on a continual basis, not just when the firearm is held) or have wide areas of effect that would be irrelevant to a gunner who might operate alone or among enemies (e.g., protection +2, 10 foot radius).

Magical bullets

Several types of magical bullets are known to exist, but these are quite rare. Most normal bullets are small lead, steel, or iron balls, very cheap and easy to make in almost any culture; magical alterations are usually made to weapons, not ammunition. Batches of 3-30 bullets +1 are the most common magical projectile, though some wizards have created explosive bullets (doing up to 6d6 hp damage on impact, without open-ended damage rolls), poisonous bullets (saving throw vs. poison required on impact, with varying bonuses or penalties), and illumination bullets that burst into light when they strike a target or reach a certain altitude. The DM should add magical bullets

Nomenclature: Because magical firearms are fairly new in most regions and quite rare everywhere, and because there are no set types of magical firearms (they are invariably made to fit the needs of specific customers), magical weapons of this sort are not given "generic" names, such as the hypothetical *flintlock musket of sharpshooting* +3 mentioned early on here. Instead, the owners of magical firearms tend to give their weapons specific names, a habit especially common among the spacefaring giff. Names like Joykiller, Annabelle Lee, Righteous Fire, Cavemaker, and the Stupendous Flaming Blunderbuss of Colonel Khathmor the Red, Retired (a giff-given name if there ever was one) are the rule. These names rarely indicate the true magical powers a firearm possesses, and gun owners generally aren't foolish enough to reveal their weapons' secrets to anyone who asks. Magical firearms are not mass-produced, so no standard procedures exist for their creation, and each new-found weapon must be carefully tested to find its true value and potential.

to the campaign as desired, but keep them rare and of reasonable power. Note that some magical firearms destroy magical bullets on firing. No magical bullet can be used more than once, as the bullet is destroyed on impact. There are rumors, however, of cursed magical bullets that return to the firer and strike him in the back (let the finder beware).

Magical powder

Noiseless smoke powder has been developed, but is rare since weapons can themselves be made silent by magic. A cursed form of smoke powder is also known that immediately causes an explosive misfire when used. The explosion does 6d6 hp damage to the user and 2d6 hp damage to anyone within 10'; a saving throw vs. death magic is allowed for bystanders for half damage, but not for the weapon user, who takes the full rolled damage.

Roger E. Moore is currently hard at work on another article for DRAGON® Magazine. At least, he had better be, if he knows what's good for him.



AD&D® Game Brain Buster

After his torch was extinguished by a sudden rush of air, Lord Jupe followed several bobbing lights into a mass of spider webs. Ranger Jasmine, running for help, suddenly collapsed, choking. What deadly creature or creatures is the party most likely to encounter next?

Answer: A wizard of at least 12 level.
The description matches the gargoyle (and words spell "Player's Handbook").



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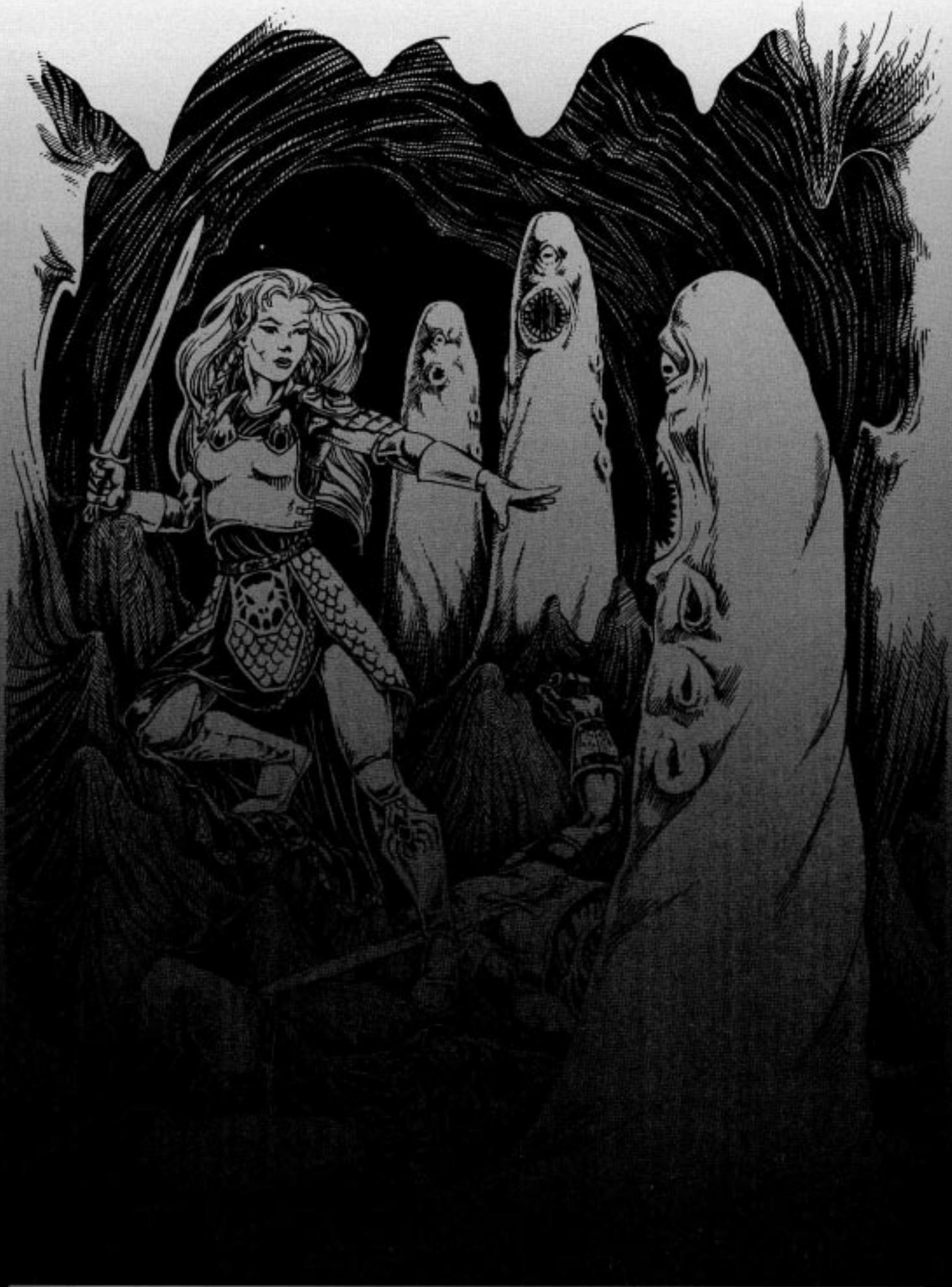
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Terror in the dark

IMy name is Anna. I am alone in my bedroom, once again. I spend much of my time here, lying in bed, thinking, and wishing. I wish I could be up and about, like other children, but Father says I must stay in bed. My fever is high again. He worries so.

I wish I could go visiting again, but I'm not sure exactly how to go about it. It just happens. I can't really control how, or when, it happens, but I wish it would happen now. Sometimes it gets so lonely.

Father doesn't believe that I go visiting at all. Neither does the doctor who comes to see me. I heard them talking about it once, when they thought I was sleeping, and they said things like "fever dream" and "delirium." Besides, Father doesn't know it, but I visited him once, so I know what he really thinks.

He worries about me. An awful lot. He's afraid that I'll die, like Mama, and then he'll be all alone.

I feel sorry for Father. He spends so much of his time being very sad, and he puts so much effort into being brave in front of me. I wish I could tell him that I know exactly what he's feeling. I mean tell him and have him really believe me, because it's true. I *do* know, I've been right there in his head, and I know how terribly sad he feels. But he'd think I was only trying to comfort him, and he thinks that's his job, to comfort me. And I can't tell him about my visiting him, because he doesn't believe in that.

But it's true.

I've visited many different people. Some of them, like Mrs. Chandler in the village, I know. I visited her when she was helping a calf be born. Some of them are people I don't even know, like

1. Contrary to popular belief (and many an artist's depiction), the standard roper does not have tentacles waving around in all directions. Rather, it has a series of six sticky strands, three on each side, that it normally keeps within its body cavity. However, these strands can be extended at great speeds to capture prey. Once "fired," the strands cannot be manipulated by the roper, other than by being drawn back into the roper's body, dragging prey to the creature. On the other hand, the storoper, or "stone roper," does have 20'-long tentacles which it keeps extended from its body at all times, and this no doubt adds to the confusion.

THE ECOLOGY OF

the Roper

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom

the time I visited a little boy who lived far away in the cold. He had a house that was made out of ice! And even though he was littler than me, his father had made him a spear of his very own, and he was learning how to hunt!

Once, I even visited a monster.

I still get goosebumps thinking about it, even though it was months ago. I've never visited it again since. But I think about it, and sometimes it gives me nightmares.

It started out the way it always does. I was in bed, with a fever, and I was kind of asleep and kind of not. It's sort of like having a dream but being awake at the same time and knowing that it *isn't* a dream. It's hard to explain. I was in bed, and I was floating in my room, looking down at my own body in the bed, and I knew I was going to go visiting.

I didn't know who I was going to visit, because I never do. I never know where I am going, either. Even when I'm done

visiting, I never know exactly where it is I've just been. Like the little boy who lives in the cold place. I can still remember him and what it looks like where he lives, but I have no idea where that is, what direction, or anything. The same thing was true when I visited the monster. I don't know where I went to go visit him or how far away he was from me, because it's almost like it doesn't take any time at all to get to where I'm visiting. Just *whoosh* and I'm there.

Usually, when I get to where I'm visiting, I see right away out of the person's eyes and can "hear" what they're thinking. It wasn't that way when I visited the monster.

First of all, it was very confusing. It wasn't at all like visiting a person, or even anything *like* a person (I visited an elf once, and he was pretty much like a regular person). My body felt strange. I didn't have any arms or legs, just lots of little wiggly toes under my body.¹ My

Underneath the roper's body are its many cilia-like appendages. These provide the roper with its limited movement rate and are able to excrete the same sticky substance found on the ropers web-like strands. This anchors the roper when it drags large prey toward itself and also allows it to climb walls and hang from ceilings.

2. Ropers have a rough surface exterior, similar to rock in both appearance and texture. They are able to alter the color of their skin (which is normally a yellowish-tinted grey) in order to blend in with the rock surrounding them. Their tough outer skin not only gives

ropers AC0, but it also prevents the roper's body heat from being detected by infravision. Furthermore, it is a good insulator, causing the roper to suffer only half-damage from cold-based attacks. On the other hand, ropers are unusually vulnerable to fire, saving at -4 against fire-based attacks.

To further their camouflage abilities, ropers are also extremely malleable beings, able to squeeze their bodies into a variety of shapes that help them to blend in with their environment. They can easily be mistaken for a stalagmite or a stalactite. By compressing its body down, a roper can assume a boulder-like

skin was hard on the outside, but kind of squishy on the inside, like it could be squashed into all kinds of different shapes, like clay.² And I had only one eye, in the middle of my forehead, but I didn't have a forehead. I didn't have a head, either. My "face" was at the top of my body, but all I had on it was one eye and a huge mouth with sharp teeth. There were ears, too, but they were tiny, and you probably wouldn't be able to see them.³

Once I had gotten settled into the monster's body, I started to take a look around and tried to figure out where I was. It was underground, that was for sure, because I was in this big cave, with all kinds of tunnels coming into it and going out of it. It was dark in the cave, I'm sure, because there weren't any lamps or fires or anything. That was the weird thing: I could see just fine, like it was only twilight.⁴

I think the monster was sleeping or something, because even though it had its eye open, it wasn't really paying attention to anything or thinking of any-

thing. When I visit somebody, I always see what they see and hear what they hear, and I even know what they think. That's how I know how frightened Father is for me. But the monster was just sitting there.⁵

So far, I wasn't scared. The monster was weird to visit, but it hadn't done anything scary. In fact, it hadn't done much at all except just sit. I started to get bored, being in a sleeping monster. I started poking around in its head, looking at its memories.

The monster was really strange! When it was born, it looked just like a little rock. Well, not a really little one, but little compared to the full-grown monster. For the first six weeks of its life, all the monster did was sit there, absorbing some kind of energy from the ground below it.⁶ It grew a little bit each day, but it never moved. Then, one day, it just kind of popped up, fully grown.

I was just starting to go through the monster's early memories and hadn't really found anything that exciting when the monster "woke up." It felt movement

up ahead, and turned its body (I can't really say it turned its head, but it did kind of twist just the top part of its body) to concentrate on what was coming.

To my surprise, it was an elf! I'm not sure what an elf was doing down there in a monster cave, but it was a strange elf anyway. His skin was black, like no elf I've ever seen. He ran like something was chasing him, because he kept looking back over his shoulder. He wasn't paying attention to where he was going. Which was too bad, because the monster got him.

That was the beginning of the scary part. The monster let out a really loud scream, which I could hear just fine, but the elf didn't even seem to notice it. Then, the monster shot a big gooey rope from its body at the elf, and it hit him right on his chest.⁷

That got the elf's attention, because almost as soon as the rope hit the elf, the monster started reeling him in like a fisherman reels in a fish. It was a weird sensation for me, because I could feel movement inside the monster's body

shape or fully flatten itself out so that it looks like a mere lump on the cavern floor. Due to this camouflage ability, a roper encountered in an underground setting causes its opponents to have a penalty of -2 on their surprise rolls.

3. A roper has no sense of smell. A very limited sense of touch is confined mostly to its cilia, to aid it in moving around. The roper's thick skin does not permit much feeling to penetrate. In fact, it is theoretically possible to sneak up on a roper from behind and knock it lightly on the back of its "head" without the roper being aware of the transgression. To date, however, no one has been found willing to put this theory to the test.

4. The roper has infravision capabilities to a range of 60'.

5. Ropers don't so much sleep as go into a light trance. While in such a state, they are aware of their surroundings and can readily return to a fully-alert state if necessary (if potential prey or a threat to it approaches). The trance is a way of preserving energy, much like hibernation, although the trance seldom lasts longer than a day or two. Since the roper can see only what is directly in front of it during its trance, it usually positions itself in a corner or flattens itself on the wall or ceiling of a cavern, where it is less likely to be approached undetected.

6. Ropers reproduce asexually. A roper "seed" is dropped off from the parent's body, and this "seed" looks exactly like a large rock (probably for protection, since an immature roper has no means of attack, and its main source of sensory input, its single eye, is buried in the creature's interior, until it "hatches" as a fully-grown roper). Over the next 2d4 weeks (depending on the size of the "seed" and the

depth of the Underdark), the immature roper absorbs the magical emanations of the Underdark, which allow it to grow and are also responsible for some of its magical abilities — primarily, its Strength-draining strands and its high (80%) magic resistance.

As the roper's magic resistance is derived from the energy it absorbs from the Underdark, DMs might wish to rule that roper seeds that develop close to the surface (where the magical emanations are weaker) end up with a lower magic resistance — anywhere from 10-60%. In any case, once a roper "hatches," its magic resistance is fixed and does not fluctuate if it moves deeper into the Underdark or closer to the surface world.

7. Like the bat, the roper uses echolocation to find its prey. Since the roper has only one eye, it has a lack of depth perception. This would ordinarily cause it to be a poor shot when trying to "rope" prey. However, by sending out an ultrasonic pulse and hearing the echo, it is able to sense its surroundings with great accuracy. In fact, a roper can use its echolocation ability to target prey even in conditions of absolute darkness. It can likewise sense invisible creatures without penalty; however, the roper uses its echolocation only when actively hunting prey. While it would still be able to "see" a wizard it was fighting after the wizard cast an *invisibility* spell on himself, it would not be able to detect an invisible character walking past it down a dungeon corridor unless it was actively hunting at the time. The range of a roper's echolocation is 60.

Since echolocation is a hearing-based sense, it can effectively be negated by the successful casting of a *silence 15' radius* spell. Note that with the roper's 80% magic resistance, the use of any spell on a roper is usually doomed to failure, but a *silence 15' radius* spell cast on a

potential roper victim masks it from the roper's echolocation sense. In this case, the roper is aware of an area of silence, but since its ultrasonic screech cannot penetrate the radius of the spell, it must rely only on its monocular vision in order to target any creatures in the spell's area of effect. In this case, the roper is at -2 to hit due to its lack of depth perception. A *deafness* spell has the same effect, but this spell must be cast directly on the roper — and make it past the creature's magic resistance.

8. The roper can fire only one strand per round, at a range of 20'-50', but once it hits, the captured prey is drawn 10' closer to the roper each round thereafter, as the strand is pulled back into the roper's body cavity. The drawing in of prey is automatic; thus a roper need not concentrate on reeling in a strand, and is free to fire additional strands in subsequent rounds. Each strand can pull up to 750 lbs. and, due to the roper's magical nature, temporarily (for 2d4 turns) drains one-half of the victim's Strength unless a saving throw vs. poison is made. The Strength loss begins 1d3 rounds after the strand's adhesion to the victim. Multiple strand attacks are possible against a single victim, and in such cases the effects of the Strength drain are cumulative. For the purposes of roper attacks, treat warriors with exceptional Strength (18/01 to 18/00) as having a Strength of 18, and round all fractions down.

To escape a roper's strand, the victim must either make a successful Open Doors roll or cause at least 6 hp damage in a single stroke with an edged weapon. The strand is AC0, and damage to the strand causes no hit point loss to the roper. Severed strands grow back in the course of a week.

Ropers have been known to use their strands in an unusual fashion: by firing several

where the gooey rope came from, almost like a snake squirming around.⁸

The elf grabbed a knife from his belt, and started hacking at the rope, but he wasn't strong enough, because he was getting closer and closer, until he was close enough for the monster to open up really wide and bite the elf. It was horrible, because the monster's mouth was so big that he fit the elf's whole head, neck, and shoulders into it before he bit down. The elf wiggled a little bit, then was still. I knew he was dead.

I was very scared, and I wanted nothing more than to return to my own room, to my own body, but I couldn't. I was trapped in the monster's body, and I couldn't get out. I couldn't even close my eyes or look away. So I sat there and watched the elf get eaten, body, clothes, and all.⁹

Once the elf was in the monster's stomach, it went back to its nap, or whatever it was. It didn't get to stay that way very long, because there was more noise coming down from the passageway. It was three more elves, dressed the same as the first one, and with the same dark skin. Two of them had swords in their hands and funny little bows and arrows strapped to their arms. The other was a lady elf with long, white hair. They came running into the cavern, and it seemed like they were chasing the first elf. That made me feel a little better, because maybe the first elf was bad or something and these three were trying to put him in jail. Anyway, at the time, I hoped that was the case, because I felt so bad about the monster killing him.

The three new elves came along the same way, toward the monster, and I wished that I could call out a warning. Then I got a shock, because right as I was yelling in my head, the monster gave a loud shriek. I thought I might have made it make that noise, but then

strands on the cavern ceiling overhead, then releasing the adhesive cilia keeping them in place and "reeling in" their strands, they can pull themselves up to the ceiling at a remarkable speed, much quicker than if they had walked up the surface of the cavern wall with their cilia. Such maneuvers are rare and are usually performed when speed is of the essence (such as to avoid a lava flow or a black pudding).

9. As a fully-grown roper can stand 9' tall, it can swallow creatures of up to medium size. Lacking hands or arms (the strands are good only at dragging objects closer, like a winch), the roper swallows creatures whole if possible. The process of swallowing any creature larger than size S, however, takes some manipulation on the roper's part; as a result, there is no

I remembered it had made the same noise right before it attacked the first elf.

Another sticky rope shot out from the monster, and hit one of the new elves in the arm. He dropped his sword when the monster tugged him closer, and the other one jumped forward to try to cut the rope. The lady elf backed up and started doing some magic, which I was glad to see, because maybe they could kill the monster. Then I got scared, because I didn't know what would happen to me if I was still visiting the monster when it died.

The monster only had one eye, and it was concentrating on the two elves, but out of the corner of its vision I could see the lady elf vanish from sight. I never had gotten to see anyone turn invisible before.

By the time I turned my attention back at what the monster was doing, it was too late for the elves. The first one had shot a little arrow at the monster, but it bounced right off of its skin without hurting it at all. The second elf, while trying to cut the rope from his friend, got tangled up in two ropes of his own and was dragged closer too. The first elf got close enough for the monster to bite him, and it did. It felt like the elf's whole head came off in the monster's mouth, but then he let go, and let the elf's body fall to the ground.¹⁰ The second elf was screaming out as he struggled to free himself with his sword. I think he was probably calling for help from the lady elf, but I guess he didn't know she was invisible and maybe thought she had run away. In any case, it didn't do any good, because even though he finally cut one rope off of him, the other one dragged him in until he was close enough for the monster to bite him to death too.

Once both of the elves were dead, the monster sucked its sticky ropes back into its body and started making those

chance of it swallowing creatures whole in combat. Instead, it uses its bite to kill the victim, and then goes through the process of getting the meal into its mouth. Some ropers have been known to clamp down on an opponent and then shake it back and forth while clenched its jaws, causing an additional 5d4 hp damage each round until the victim is dead.

10. A roper can digest only one creature of size M at a time, but this won't stop it from attacking additional prey if opportunity presents itself. In such an instance, the roper attacks and kills its prey, then lets it sit in a heap while it digests its current meal. The digestion of a medium-sized creature can take up to a full day, after which time the roper swallows its next kill. A roper with a grisly



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high-pitched shrieks again. I'm sure the lady elf couldn't hear them, but I bet she was surprised when the monster turned its "head" to look straight at her. The monster kept shrieking, over and over, and then it started moving toward her on its little crawly-feet.

I couldn't see her, but I "knew" she was there. The monster knew where she was from the noises it made. I wish it was more like sight, though, because I would have liked to have seen her face when she saw the monster coming after her. She must have been scared to know it could kind of see her, even though she was invisible.

She was pretty smart, turning invisible and all, and I think she must have seen one of these kinds of monsters before, because she was careful to stay far enough away that the monster couldn't hit her with one of its sticky ropes. At the same time, chasing the elf lady didn't seem like such a smart idea to me. The monster moved much slower than she did, so there wasn't much of a chance to catch her. Why did it need to catch her when there were still two dead elves it left behind that it could eat? Then, when I started peeking into the monster's thoughts, I saw what it was up to.

I tried calling out a warning, but that was no good, since I was just visiting. The monster wasn't trying to eat her at

all! But by chasing her, it was making her back up away from it, to stay out of range of its sticky ropes. Unfortunately for the elf, it was also making her back up into the range of another of the monsters, and she didn't realize it until a sticky rope hit her square in the back. She screamed and fell to the ground and kept on screaming.¹¹ The monster I was visiting turned away and moved back to where it was before, by the two dead elves, so I didn't have to see the elf lady get eaten. It didn't take very long before her screaming stopped.¹²

Once the monster got back into position, it went back into its trance, seemingly just happy to sit there. Every once in a while its stomach would make a funny noise, and there would be a bubbly sensation from deep within.¹³ The monster stayed like that for the rest of my visit, which fortunately didn't last much longer. Then it was *whoosh*, and I was back in my own bedroom, in my own body, and I cried and cried because of what I had seen. Father came in to comfort me, telling me that it was just a bad dream, but I knew that it wasn't. He felt my head and said I was burning up, and he got me some more of my medicine. I tried to sleep afterward, but I was too frightened. I kept thinking of the monster and scared myself thinking about what it would be like if it came out

of its cave and started eating people.¹⁴

That was the scariest visit I ever went on. I was afraid of visiting for a long time after that, afraid that I'd end up in another monster and see other people get killed. As usual I didn't have any choice in the matter. Two weeks after the monster visit, I ended up visiting an old lady who lived in a big castle, and she was nice. A few days after that I visited the boy who lives in the ice house again. I haven't visited any monsters since. Just that one.

For that matter, I haven't visited anyone for a long time now. My fever's higher than its been in a long time, and it seems even harder to sit up in bed and look out of my window. The medicine from the doctor doesn't seem to be helping. Father is very worried.

It's been so long, but I think, very soon, I'll be going on another visit. Only this time, I don't think I'll be coming back. Father will be sad, and I will miss him. But I think, before too long . . .

. . . I'll be going to visit Mama.



Johnathan M. Richards is an Air Force officer currently stationed in California. His work has appeared in both DRAGON® Magazine and DUNGEON® Adventures.

"future meal" waiting at the base of its body is less likely to cause surprise to opponents; DMs might wish to limit the surprise penalty to -1, or do away with it altogether.

11. Drow elves have a healthy respect for the roper, recognizing it as a power to be feared in the Underdark. No doubt it is for this reason that the yochlol, or "handmaiden of Lolth," adopts a form similar to that of a roper when appearing before the drow on the Prime Material Plane.

12. As solitary creatures, ropers rarely cooperate with each other and are usually found together only in areas where the hunting is good, but their high intelligence and evil cunning can make them extremely dangerous adversaries when they work together.

13. The roper's digestive processes are nothing short of incredible. Its powerful stomach acids are able to digest almost anything, from the softest flesh to the hardest metal. Two notable exceptions to this are platinum and gemstones, which the roper is unable to digest. For this reason, these substances are often found undigested inside a roper's stomach (3d6 platinum pieces, and a 35% chance of holding 5d4 gems). However, they are put to good use, grinding up the roper's meal much like the stones swallowed by some birds for the same reason.

The stomach acid from a slain roper is worth about 4 gp per ounce to an alchemist. A full-grown roper can supply 80-120 ounces of the acid, but it must be carefully harvested and stored only in platinum vials. Other roper by-products include the glands that produce the

sticky glue coating its cilia and strands (the glue itself sells for about 8 gp per ounce, or 25 gp per gland, of which the roper has a total of four) and the eye, which is considered a delicacy among certain humanoid races (prices vary). Roper glue is a valuable component used in the preparation of sovereign glue.

14. Fortunately for surface-dwelling people, ropers prefer an underground existence. They leave the Underdark for the surface world only if prey becomes too scarce, and then only at night, for they find bright light uncomfortable; however, lest any spellcasters get any smart ideas, a *continual light* spell cast on a roper's eye makes for a poor weapon, as the creature can rely on its echolocation to target prey without using sight at all.

Walls

Continued from page 27

anyone within 50' of where it finally strikes must make a saving throw vs. breath weapon or be deafened and stunned for 1-2 rounds.

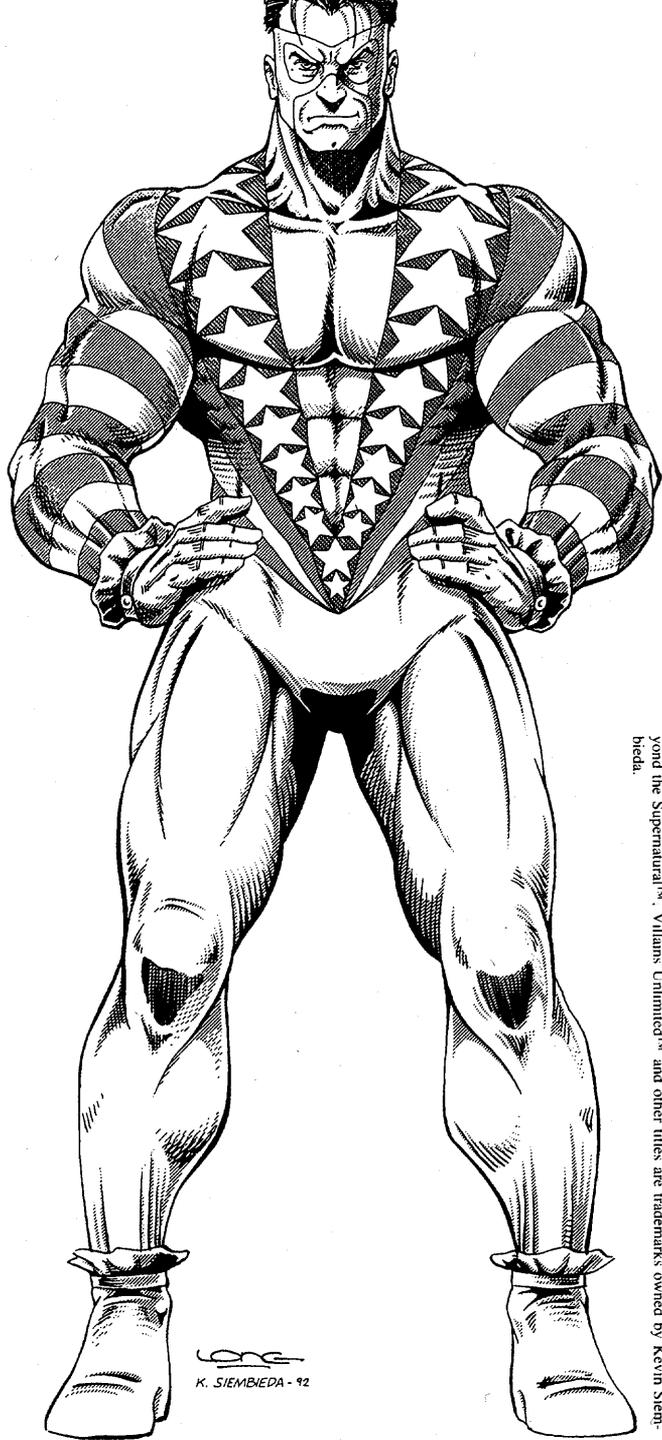
Table 1 in this article is based on Table 52, Structural Saving Throws, found in the *DMG*. The structure must

match the number below or better to remain undamaged by the battering ram. A failed saving throw indicates that a number of cubic feet of the material is broken apart/destroyed/breached equal to the amount the roll was missed by. For example, a mage uses a *thunderstrike rod* on an earthen embankment. The defenders make an abysmal saving

throw roll of 2, and thus an amount of packed earth flies apart in all directions equal to $(5 - 2 = 3)$ cubic feet.



Steve Berman spends most of the year in New Jersey waiting for the autumn season when he can attend the local Renaissance faires. He has yet to lay siege to any castles.



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FLOYD

Written and illustrated by Aaron Williams







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THE ROLE OF BOOKS

spring to your defense. But suppose you're halfway between, caught on the twilight border of life and un-death? If that's the case, then best look out, because neither the powers of the living nor the dead will rest until you're permanently out of their way.

It's good to see Wm. Mark Simmons writing again, and *One Foot in the Grave* is as energetic an adventure as his earlier works. Being half-alive and half-vampire is just the beginning of Chris Csjethe's problems. At least two different sets of vampires are out for his blood, he's in demand both as scientific anomaly and sex object, and it's beginning to look as if the deaths a year ago of his wife and child are somehow tied to his current predicament. In order to find out for sure, though, Chris must first survive the machinations of two of the deadliest supernatural foes in all history.

As usual, Simmons rarely lets the pace drop below a brisk gallop. There are chase scenes and firefights in ample supply, into which Simmons drops an ingenious working-out of vampiric powers and vulnerabilities that pays homage to all manner of classic monster lore, including no few grand old B-movies (and not necessarily the ones you'd expect). The plot unfolds like an origami sculpture designed by M. C. Escher, but the cast is a mix of seemingly normal folks crossed with every movie-genre subculture you can think of.

A definite air of the mischievous runs through much of the logic, supernatural and otherwise, and the sheer variety of beings and creatures encountered suggests an amiable tip of the satirist's hat to White Wolf's *World of Darkness** game milieu. But though Simmons maintains a hint of wryness to the tale throughout, he never lets the humor get out of control and take over the story, *Bureau 13*-fashion. Chris and his sometimes unlikely, often reluctant allies aren't caricatures; they are, for the most part, complex characters whose motives and goals Simmons develops with startling insight and compassion. Chris in particular is a memorable, unusual protagonist, neither

bent on saving the world nor so self-centered as merely to ignore the chaos flowing in his wake.

One result of the expert juggling is that the novel's multi-twist ending should genuinely surprise many if not most readers. *One Foot in the Grave* owes debts to a variety of formula fiction, but its climax and resolution follow no logic but their own. For a further wonder, it looks to be entirely self-contained—while there's theoretically room for a sequel, there's a sense of finality to the conclusion that is all too often missing from this sort of book. Readers have good reason to thank Baen Books for luring Wm. Mark Simmons out of the literary woodwork, and they should hope that his next novel doesn't take as long to appear as this one has.

Shade and Shadow

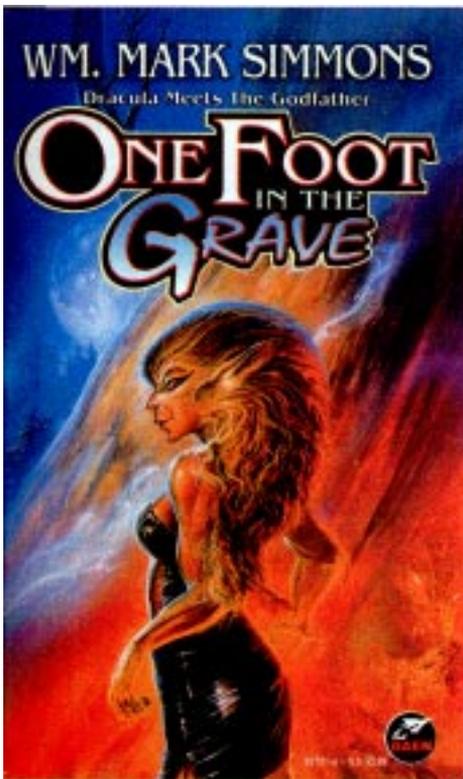
Francine G. Woodbury
Del Rey

\$4.99

When I first noticed *Shade and Shadow* in a local bookstore, I nearly asked the clerk, "Hey, doesn't this belong in mystery? It says these two Oxford professors are arguing over computer research — one's murdered, one's a suspect. Office politics, jealousy and betrayal, magic... Magic?" Then I read the back cover copy again. And while Francine G. Woodbury's first novel really is a traditional English murder mystery, it also proves to be a tale of sophisticated spellcraft and sorcerous theory.

Woodbury's version of reality is in most respects quite like our own, complete with Mickey Mouse wristwatches and Microsoft software. The difference is that in the world of *Shade and Shadow*, magic is a science like any other, whose building blocks are mathematics and alchemical lore and lost Etruscan runes of power. Raoul Smythe is a young assistant professor in Oxford University's College of Magic, generally acknowledged to be tremendously gifted and equally eccentric. In our world he'd be a computer nerd — he's never discovered girls, wears jeans under the academically

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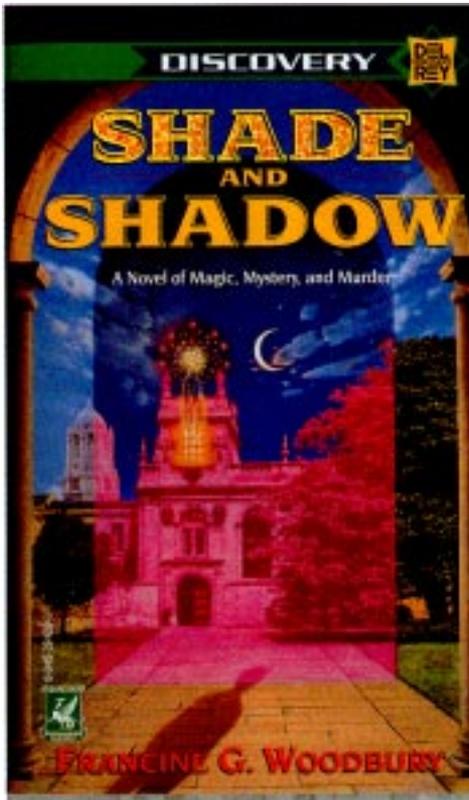


One Foot in the Grave

Wm. Mark Simmons
Baen

\$5.99

You're a vampire down on your luck? Not to worry; a clan or an enclave somewhere is bound to take you in. You're a human with the hosts of the undead on your tail? No problem; vampire hunters are sure to turn up and



required scholar's robes, and lives by himself in a huge county mansion. His future, however, is uncertain; department head and fellow magician Arthur Mowatt utterly disapproves of Raoul's choice of research subjects, a theoretical area that could revolutionize spellcasting processes. So when Mowatt unexpectedly turns up dead after a departmental party where the two had a loud disagreement, Raoul finds himself in the proverbial hot water.

What ensues is, in fact, more mystery than fantasy; while Raoul's amateur hunt for the true killer does involve a certain amount of magical effort, the spellcraft here is largely window-dressing, not integral to the working-out of the puzzle or to the commission of the crime. Thus Woodbury isn't, for example, following in the footsteps of Randall Garrett's classic "Lord Darcy" fantasy whodunits. Instead, the magic serves mostly to give color to the story, much as a Tony Hillerman novel gains texture from its Southwestern setting and Native American lore, or a Tom Clancy thriller builds drama by incorporating authentic-sounding military and political data.

This ought not, or at least not necessarily, to be considered a flaw. While it means that those looking for a more typical adventure yarn are liable to find the book slow going, Woodbury does a skillful job of sketching in details both of

her magical system and of the English setting. But if the book isn't an adventure tale, neither is it a travelogue; where the novel really stands out is in its characterization. Raoul emerges as an engaging if occasionally inept protagonist, comfortable with his nonconformist status yet not quite willing to fully retreat into a hermit's role. And those around him are likewise intriguing, non-cardboard characters who wander in and out of Raoul's life while leading lives of their own.

Woodbury does provide enough of the underlying logic that one can get a fair handle on what her magic can and can't do. It's an intriguing, potentially interesting system, and the one major trouble with it is that its existence has changed the novel's modern civilization remarkably little as compared to the one we know. You'd think that as reliable, ancient, and well-codified a discipline as Raoul studies would have radically changed the march of history, but not so here. Practical sorcery seems confined to setting wards on one's luggage and guarding one's car against getting into accidents. (Then again, there's a sequence where Raoul dramatically discovers the trouble with trying to cast spells under combat conditions — perfectly illustrating a point AD&D® game referees have been trying to drive home for decades.)

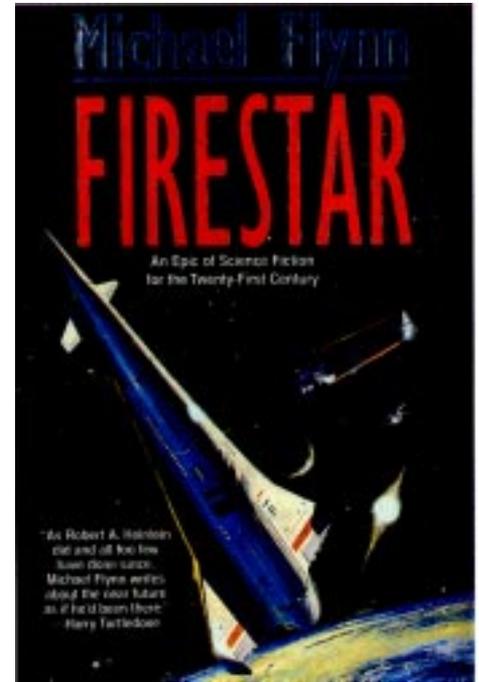
If one overlooks that one logical implausibility, though, *Shade and Shadow* is a well-written if rather odd and quiet tale. It's clearly not for everyone, but those with a taste for its slightly scholarly, understated atmosphere should find Woodbury's debut a pleasant and rewarding one.

Firestar
Michael Flynn
Tor

\$27.95

At a time when hard-nosed military SF is dominating the sales charts, full of tactical insight and flying shrapnel, *Firestar* is a welcome step in quite a different yet utterly traditional direction. Michael Flynn takes science fiction back to its roots in a sweeping epic that combines high drama, cutting-edge technology, and visionary leadership, and does it with a vigorous enthusiasm whose like hasn't been seen in a long time.

The time is, almost literally, tomorrow — after a page or two of prologue, the story opens in 1999, when a private firm is taking over the operation of a good-



sized East Coast high school. But there's more going on than that; in Brazil, another company is setting up an aerospace operation. What's the connection? Both firms are tendrils of a multi-national business empire controlled by solitary heiress Mariesa Van Huyten, and Mariesa has a dream that will take years to realize and involve a host of separate and mostly secret efforts by various units of the Van Huyten conglomerate.

What precisely is the dream? Humanity, Mariesa believes, needs to return to space and establish a strong presence there. But though *Firestar* spans eight years of time and follows a sharply varied cast of characters — a bitter young poet, a once-retired astronaut, a teacher pulled into Mariesa's orbit, and more — it only chronicles the first phase of the dream's fulfillment. There are, the jacket promises, more books to come, although the present novel is reasonably complete in itself.

Flynn stage-manages his epic with the same crisp assurance he ascribes to Mariesa's oversight of her far-flung corporate realm, and he makes everything sound utterly logical and convincing, from the teaching strategies to the spacecraft designs. Nor is he so starry-eyed an optimist as to assume that everything will fall neatly into place given a protagonist with sufficient vision; there's government resistance, opposition from a conservative environmental group, and an uncertain and difficult romance. More, not everyone takes kindly to Mariesa's well-intended

manipulations; in particular, the poet Styx (whose verse Flynn aptly casts as a sort of punk-Kipling) proves more of a wild card than anyone expects.

"Starry-eyed," though, isn't a bad description of the novel's vision, and Flynn makes that vision seem utterly right — right enough that many readers are likely to buy into it lock, stock, and starship without noticing which parts of the plan don't necessarily mesh with their personal views of real-world politics. The school-privatizing scheme, for instance, works far more effectively in the book than most such proposals have so far promised to do in reality. But politics aside, what Flynn has managed is to re-create the old-fashioned "sense of wonder" that defined the original wave of space-exploration SF of a generation or two earlier.

That's a rare and impressive achievement, and one that makes *Firestar* an important and powerful novel. One of science fiction's defining characteristics used to be the idea that SF itself ought to be part of humanity's roadmap toward the stars. That proposition has been less and less true in recent years, but *Firestar* goes a long way toward putting SF back on track toward that goal.

The Magic Touch

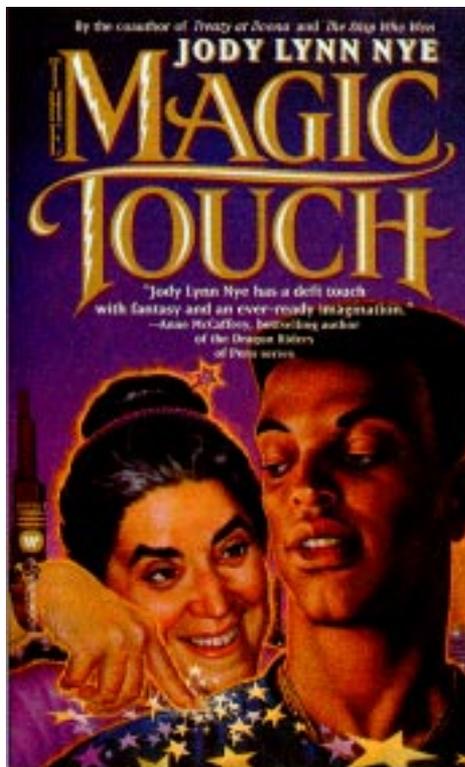
Jody Lynn Nye
Warner Aspect

\$5.99

The trouble with *The Magic Touch* isn't that it's badly written; on the contrary, Jody Lynn Nye delivers readable prose and mellow, pleasant characters in her latest novel. The trouble is that its basic premises are too familiar, and Nye's execution simply doesn't compare to that of the works and writers whose territory she's sharing.

We've seen the "fairy godmothers are real" idea done quite recently by Elizabeth Scarborough, in *The Godmother* and *The Godmother's Apprentice*. That's the cornerstone of Nye's novel as well, with Nye setting her tale in Chicago rather than Scarborough's Seattle or Ireland. Like Scarborough, Nye postulates an old, established organization that oversees godmotherly activity. And as in the Scarborough novels, the basic story involves a full godmotherly mentor (in this case, Jewish matron Rose Feinstein) and a young apprentice in need of training (Ray Crandall, fresh out of high school).

But where Scarborough's portrayals of poverty-line culture are sharp and



realistic, providing a crisp contrast to the fairy magic, Nye's evocation of street gangs and marginal families is curiously subdued, as if executed in pastel cartoon tones as opposed to bright, vivid colors. Nor does it help that protagonist Ray takes all of about twenty pages to buy completely into the fairy-godmother philosophy, rapidly becoming much too good to be true. It's easy to tell that Nye is in trouble when the most complex character in the book is one of Ray's gang-member friends who's at best the fourth or fifth banana, and a pawn of the real villains of the piece.

The combination of rose-colored realism and cartoon tone might still have worked — if only Nye's humor weren't just as bland as her street-wisdom. But where the novel's plot borrows from Elizabeth Scarborough, the comedy elements come across as weak photocopies of the much sharper, more over-the-top humor of some of Esther Friesner's work. Where Friesner's *Wishing Season* gives the reader ingeniously clever genies and bright, dramatic magic, the evil genies (or djinn; Nye is oddly inconsistent about the spelling) of *The Magic Touch* are about as smart and exciting as the Three Stooges on a bad day. And where Friesner's *Gnome Man's Land* and its sequels give a thorough, colorful portrayal of the complications of many different sorts of magical beings wrestling



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over turf wars in the shadow of modern metro-culture, Nye again mutes her tale into a minor union squabble that only escalates very late in the game, and then briefly.

Again, its not that Nye is inherently a poor writer. There are good moments in the book, and it's entertaining enough while one is reading it. It's simply that *The Magic Touch* relies far too much on the sheer novelty of its premise for its dramatic impact, and when that novelty disappears, most of the books vigor vanishes with it. The moral for readers? That it isn't enough to come up with a clever idea for a story or a game campaign — it's how the idea is used that counts.

Wind from a Foreign Sky

Katya Reimann
Tor

\$23.95

Fantasy's vast and increasing popularity has caused it to subdivide into a multitude of sub-genres — humorous swashbucklers and urbane mannerist tales, stories of urban faerie and elaborate family sagas. Oddly enough, that's meant that the traditional heroic fantasy, featuring kingdom-spanning quests, mysterious prophecies, and so forth has been harder to find of late outside the small but hugely successful handful of bestselling writers led by Robert Jordan and David Eddings. Now comes a new heroic fantasy from first novelist Katya Reimann that's both squarely traditional and unexpectedly refreshing.

The traditional elements are all present in good measure. We have a shadowy sisterhood of witches, whose talents in generations past helped to free the kingdom of Tielmark from repressive rule by the Bissanty Empire to the north. We have an active pantheon of powerful gods, who must be placated at the proper time with the proper rituals to assure their followers' continued prosperity. And we have a prophecy which indicates that the next set of rituals is of critical importance — that with the right twisting of tradition, Bissanty forces can reach out and snatch Tielmark back into their grasp.

Into the midst of this Reimann drops Gaultry Blas, a young woman who knows only that her twin sister is in great danger, and that the intimidating stranger Martin Stalker has been magically geased to protect both Blas twins. But Gaultry has witch-talent of her own — more, it develops, than she realizes —

and if she can gather the proper magical and temporal support, only she may be able to set events back on a course that will allow Tielmark to survive.

Reimann has created a convincing detailed landscape for her tale, with well-developed roles for priest and deity, witch and prince alike. Her characters are both satisfyingly human yet larger than life when appropriate; one particular standout is the smoothly dangerous Bissanty sorcerer Issachar Dan, master among other things of a small flock of giant metallic eagles. And she has a sure hand for wilderness journeys; one can feel the tangle of underbrush or the roughness of a sheer cliff face right along with Gaultry as she hurries back and forth across Tielmark in search of aid. The one awkward slip is a throwaway reference to the month of January, as the ordinary Roman calendar seems wildly out of place in this wholly invented landscape.

But while *Wind from a Foreign Sky* is a thoroughly straightforward and well-executed heroic fantasy that definitely follows in the footsteps of Robert Jordan and Terry Brooks, its narrative voice is very much its own. Though there are plenty of women writing fantasy novels these days, almost none are working in as classic a mold as is Reimann, and her evocations of a spirited female protagonist and a triad of powerful goddesses has a resonance none of her male colleagues can match. With a sequel already in the works to this excellent (and self-contained) debut, Katya Reimann could very well join the exalted handful of writers at the very top of the genre's bestseller lists.

Recurring Roles

L. J. Smith is back after a brief silence with the first novel in a new young adult series, and *Secret Vampire* (Archway, \$3.99) finds her in good form. Although relatively brief and somewhat narrowly plotted, Smith's story is a clear and practical-minded chronicle of just how one goes about becoming a vampire, with as much time given to the costs and sacrifices as to the benefits. There are few of Smith's usual pyrotechnics here, but her characterization is as strong as ever.

Bruce Coville's *Book of Magic* (Scholastic, \$3.99) is the sixth in this series of anthologies aimed at younger readers, and likewise continues to fulfill the sequence's reputation for telling good stories suitable for any age. With

contributors the likes of Jane Yolen, Lawrence Watt-Evans, and Janni Lee Simner, these collections are drawing on some of the brightest talent in fantasy, and this time the series shifts its emphasis slightly, focusing less on dark-and-scary tales and more on the purely wondrous.

The Forgotten Realms have also been lively in recent months. Elaine Cunningham's second chronicle of Liriel Baenre is *Tangled Webs* (TSR, \$19.99), and it's a startling adventure that takes the young drow mage on a pirate voyage and a visit to a cold, remote underwater empire. Cunningham remains one of TSR's best and most polished storytellers, and weaves skillfully in and out of familiar Realms history while adding her own contributions. Another of these is a thoughtful tale of Liriel's youth, one of five in *Realms of the Underdark* (TSR, \$5.99), which collects several smoothly executed adventures set in the deep caverns under Faerun. Ed Greenwood's entry in the volume, "A Slow Day in Skullport" is a wryly amusing yarn that is chock-full of lurking wizards and layers within layers, though its portrayal of Halaster is at some variance with the account given by Mark Anthony in *Escape from Undermountain*. And Brian Thomsen's "Volo Does Menzo" finds the irrepressible tourguide in unusually good form.

Crossover (Pocket, \$23.00) is one of the more ambitious of the hardcover *Star Trek* novels, as it attempts to follow up the "Next Generation" story of Spock's efforts to reform Romulan society from within as well as rounding up Montgomery Scott and "Bones" McCoy for return appearances. The author, Michael Jan Friedman generally manages to bring it off, although his McCoy is a little less wise than one might expect. This is definitely one of the long novel series' livelier entries, and worth the price of admission.



John C. Bunnell's book collection has outgrown three apartments to date and shows no signs of stopping. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" may be addressed to him at 6663 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy. #236, Portland, OR 97225-1403.

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TURN + THE PAGE FOR PART + III ⊕ F "THE BARGAIN"

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Let me see . . . interesting. A **NOVEL** scheme, even by baatezu standards. It has a fatal **FLAW**, but that is easily corrected.

There, **THAT** fixed it. It will **WORK** now. And you, half-breed — your tanar'ri **COMPATRIOTS** will now see you as a **HERO**.

Your services are **ADEQUATE**. You are to be **COMMENDED**.

You have these plans **WITH** you?

I have them here.

the
BAATEZU
Plan of
Attack
for
the fortress

Go now. The portal opens back into the Abyss, but this end does not lead **DIRECTLY** to the tanar'ri citadel.

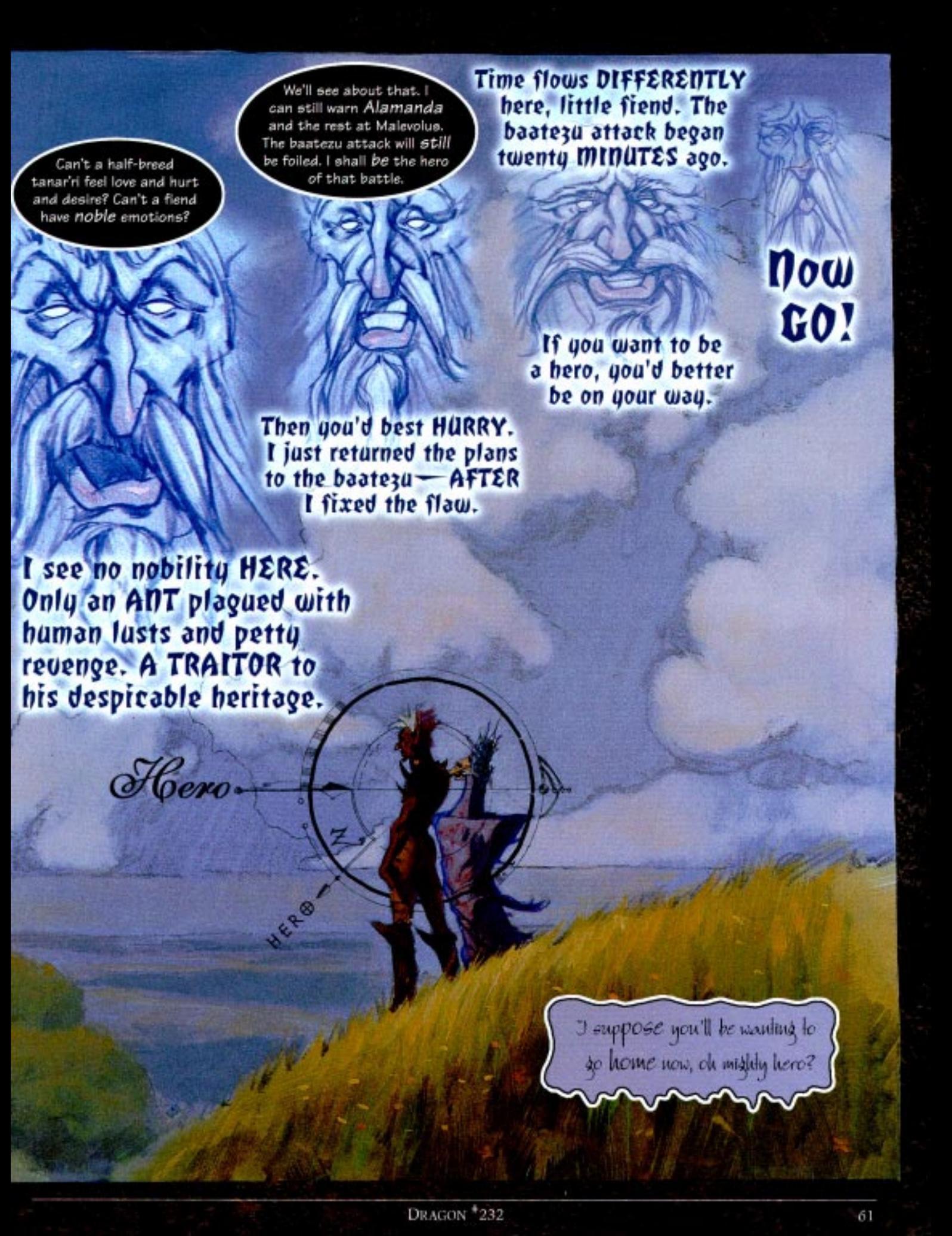
I merely seek **MY** due payment. Is there anything else?

Why did the half-breed **AGREE** to this dealing? Does he not **REALIZE** he seeks to impress one without a **SHRED** of humanity, without the barest conception of **LOVE**?

ORIENT

Understood.

Monsieur Amillanum



We'll see about that. I can still warn *Alamanda* and the rest at *Malevolus*. The *baatezu* attack will *still* be foiled. I shall *be* the hero of that battle.

Can't a half-breed *tanar'i* feel love and hurt and *desires*? Can't a fiend have *noble* emotions?

Time flows **DIFFERENTLY** here, little fiend. The *baatezu* attack began twenty **MINUTES** ago.

**Now
GO!**

If you want to be a hero, you'd better be on your way.

Then you'd best **HURRY**. I just returned the plans to the *baatezu* — **AFTER** I fixed the flaw.

I see no nobility **HERE**. Only an **ANT** plagued with human lusts and petty revenge. A **TRAITOR** to his despicable heritage.

Hero →



I suppose you'll be wanting to go home now, oh mighty hero?



Tales of the Fifth Age



The Gift of Fire

by
William W. Connors and Sue Weinlein Cook

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

29 SC

Deep beneath the Kharolis Mountains, the stern dwarves sought to defend themselves against the advances of the Green Dragon, Beryllinthranox – all the while hoping that the divisions within their own nation would not do the wyrm's work for her.

— from the *Chronicles of Nathal*, compiled in 31 SC.

The draconian was dead before its scaled body hit the stone floor.

"The Swordsheath Scroll is no more," whispered Glade Hornfel, Hylar elder and High Thane of the great underground nation of Thorbardin, home to the Hylar, Daewar, Theiwar, and Daergar mountain dwarf clans. His brittle voice carried with it only a hint of the despair that gripped him. History would judge him coldly for the things he now said — and didn't say.

Drawing a great breath, the High Thane turned to face the Council. Nearly every thane and many citizens had gathered in the Great Hall of Audience to hear the message of the envoy from the Green Dragon's realm. The white-bearded ruler pointed a wrinkled hand at the draconian's body, just as the stony corpse crumbled to dust before the astonished onlookers. "The peace which has protected dwarf and elf and man since the Kinslayer War has been destroyed by the hand of Gilthas, Qualinesti prince!" he roared. "Let his name be forever cursed by dwarf and elf alike!"

In the wake of Hornfel's thunderous decree, a cacophony of dwarven voices filled the hall. The High Thane silently asked forgiveness from whatever powers might be left to Krynn for profaning the name of the young elf ruler. Gilthas worked in secret to preserve his nation the only way he could — by undermining Beryllintranox the Green from within. Hornfel was one of only a handful of souls who knew of Gil's resistance operations; if word of them should reach the Green's minions, Gil was as good as dead, and Qualinesti truly lost.

Hornfel looked down at the pile of dust that had been the envoy of Beryl. He bent to retrieve the sword of dwarven steel, the blade that had been his gift to Gilthas upon his ascension to the position of Speaker nearly three decades ago. Even though he knew the message was not Gil's, his heart was heavy that the gift had found its way back into his kingdom in the claws of a would-be assassin.

The draconian, admitted to the dwawen halls by virtue of the elven Speaker's seal it bore, had announced to the hastily gathered thanes that the Qualinesti and the green wyrm who ruled them no longer considered themselves bound by the Swordsheath Scroll. Hornfel had accepted the news calmly and had even reached out to take the proffered ancient parchment from the dragon-man. However, decades on the throne hadn't softened the old dwarf as much as the dragon might have thought. Even before his bodyguards could cry out in warning, Hornfel had seen the glint of light on the silvery edge of the descending sword. Falling

back on his warrior's reflexes, Hornfel had caught the lizard's wrist in his powerful hands and neatly turned the weapon back upon its surprised wielder.

Now Hornfel looked around the assembly once more and realized there was nothing else to say. His gaze met the deep black eyes of Lustre Feldspar, his seneschal, who motioned silently toward the High Thane's private chambers. In the company of his oldest companion, the thane strode silently out of the Great Hall. He dismissed the Ten, the elite warriors charged with protecting him, and dropped into a great oaken chair. When the stout stone door had closed behind his bodyguards, he motioned to Feldspar to be seated as well.

"You have something to say, old friend?" prompted Hornfel, reading the concern in Feldspar's face.

The wizened Feldspar, even older than Hornfel himself, nodded slowly and leaned forward to lay his hand on the thane's shoulder. "Severus will make much of this."

Hornfel tensed at the mention of the wild-eyed Daewar priest. His was the only voice on the Council of Thanes that Hornfel dreaded.

Feldspar continued slowly. "He has long wanted us to end the treaty, saying the elves could not be trusted. His supporters will see what happened today as proof that their master sees the future — that he is what he claims."

"The 'Prophet of Reorx,'" choked Hornfel. "It sickens me to see the hill dwarf refugees embrace such nonsense."

"You must not blame the Neidar, my Thane," counseled Feldspar. "Each day, the Green Dragon drives more of them from their homes. They come to us in need. You have tended to their physical demands by granting them shelter within Thorbardin. Severus mends their broken spirits with the hope that Great Reorx has not truly withdrawn from us. And who knows?" The elder dwarf leaned back in his chair. "Perhaps he is a prophet."

Hornfel bit back a curse. "I hope not," he said, "for he predicts things more terrible than the breaking of this treaty." He shook the folded parchment for emphasis.

Feldspar nodded. He too had heard Severus telling of the Gift of Fire: a great weapon the absent Reorx would send to the dwarves — in the prophets words, "to use against all our enemies, even those who have of late feigned friendship." Many on the Council believed that Severus would be happy only when he had reduced the lands of elf and man to cinders.

☉

Bedrock.

As hard as iron to cut, yet as likely to crack as crystal. It was the stuff from which Thorbardin was carved, from the deepest levels of Hybardin to the shallow farming warrens.

Far below the mountain, where the clans had built their cities, the rock was much more stable. Countless millennia of bearing the weight of the great Cloudseeker Peak had fused it solid and swept away the imperfections that resulted in collapse, a miner's greatest nightmare.

Higher up, this was not the case. Beneath the pinnacle of the great mountain, the stone was laced with faults. As wave after wave of Neidar refugees filled the eight cities of Thorbardin to overflowing, however, these regions closer to the surface remained the only sites available for new hill dwarf arrivals to make their homes. Hardly a warren was excavated without a major collapse.

It was just such an event that brought the ruddy-cheeked Severus Stonehand to the new warrens on the edges of Daebardin. The red-bearded dwarf strode back and forth, watching but not commenting as weary workers cleared away the rubble. When yet another body was pulled from the crushing embrace of the mountain, he lowered his head and closed his suddenly moist eyes.

"How many this time?" he whispered after his brief prayer for the spirits of the dead.

"Only three," was the immediate response from a slender gnome who suddenly appeared at the dwarfs side. Severus winced at the news from Arameekos, his aide. He supposed he should feel grateful, for the last collapse had killed seven. "We need more materials for bracing, Prophet, and another team of engineers would be invaluable."

"Don't you think I know that?" hissed the Daewar thane. He instantly regretted his bitter tone. Arameekos was just as frustrated with the delays and hazards as he was.

In way of apology, Severus changed the subject. "You have heard the news?"

"About the Swordsheath Scroll?" inquired the short, willowy thinker gnome. The brilliant thinkers — those fortunate tinker gnomes from whom Reorx had lifted his ages-old curse before withdrawing from the world — had been one of the few blessings upon Ansalon during the dark days following the Chaos War. At the Daewar's nod, Arameekos continued. "It is as you anticipated, Prophet. Indeed, you have the Sight of Reorx."

"You don't believe that," said Severus, glaring sternly at his trusted aide. "Sometimes I even think you call me 'Prophet' just to laugh at me."

"You know that I have nothing but the greatest

respect for you," assured Arameekos quickly, "even if we do not share a common theology."

"That means as much to me as the faith of my followers," acceded stern-faced Severus. His gaze drifted back to the collapsed warren. "I just hope you don't discover that I am cut from flawed stone."

Arameekos smiled and was about to speak when a cry of alarm filled the dim cavern. Severus bit off a curse and ran forward, finding himself already two strides behind the agile thinker gnome.

"It must be another collapse!" shouted Arameekos.

The pair reached the entrance to the small chamber that appeared to be the source of the consternation. Pushing through the knot of miners who had likewise responded, Arameekos and Severus found themselves staring at something neither had ever seen before. Both gasped with surprise.

"Hood those lanterns," whispered an awed Arameekos. As the dwarf workers smothered the amber light of the oil lamps, the alcove should have been plunged into darkness. Instead, the ochre glow was replaced by a scintillating red-and-gold radiance.

The source of the glow terrified almost everyone in the chamber, even rational Arameekos. But the discovery intrigued Severus. A grin lit his face, as he realized that Reorx had indeed heard his prayers.

"What is it?" asked a miner, reverently.

"What I have foretold," whispered the red-bearded prophet, his fierce grin and fiery eyes making him as fearsome as the source of the blood-red light. "The Gift of Fire!"

✻

Severus stood before the Council of Thanes in dirty, tattered garments that ill-befitted the Great Hall of Audience. Upon reflection, he supposed that he ought to have taken time to make himself presentable for the assembly. Still, there was much to be said for reminding his fellow thanes of the work in the new warrens. Most were quick to forget the Neidar refugees.

"My good Thanes," he began. "I come before you with news that will bring happiness even to the heart of our High Thane." A murmur of amusement rippled through the Council. The thought that one of the prophets rants might prove anything but a pebble in the shoe seemed absurd.

"Pray tell us," shouted long-armed Pounce Quickspring, Theiwar thane, "are the warrens completed? Are there at last enough homes for those hill dwarf wretches you have adopted?"

"No, they are not completed," hissed Severus. "The Council appears to desire me to build them

without timber or tools....” The prophet caught himself. His passions had almost drawn him into a debate he knew he should avoid, if he wanted to win over the Council.

After a breath, Severus nodded to Quickspring. “That, however, is a matter for another day.” The Theiwar grimaced. “Today, however, I present the Council of Thaners with a new weapon in the war against the Green Dragon!”

At that news, disinterested eyes around the grand chamber all locked onto the red-bearded priest of Reorx. Since the death of Beryl’s assassin, the dwarves had lived under the knowledge that an attack must come soon. Even as the Council met, teams of engineers labored in great bays cut out of the stone near the top of Cloudseeker Peak. It was hoped that the huge bombardments they toiled to build would prove the solution. The dwarves had taken this gnomish device and improved its reliability, replacing the primitive iron projectiles with deadlier lead ones. However, no one actually believed the bombardments would repel a dragon attack.

“While laboring to expand the warrens,” Severus said in a measured tone, “a team of miners came upon an artifact of tremendous power. With this Gift of Fire, we can turn away the armies of the Qualinesti and their dragon allies.”

At the mention of the Gift of Fire, any trace of dismissal vanished from the Great Hall. There was not a thane there who had not heard this prophecy.

For the first time, Glade Hornfel spoke. “What is the nature of this gift?”

“Near the upper reaches of Daebardin, we have come upon...” Severus paused for emphasis, a gleam in his eye, “. . . the egg of a fire dragon.”

Every Council member gasped. Severus smiled to himself. This was exactly the reaction he had hoped for. During the Chaos War, the dwarves had fought desperately to save their underground kingdom from these creatures of Chaos and their foul riders, the daemon warriors. They knew the awesome power of the Rift-spawned fire dragons — more dangerous than any wyrm of flesh and blood — and they all too well recalled the destruction the beasts had wrought. Such an ally would make Thorbardin unconquerable, Severus reasoned.

When the High Thane spoke, however, it was not with the praise the prophet had predicted.

“Are you insane?” came the astonished voice of Glade Hornfel from his throne. The same question clearly was on the lips of everyone in the room.

Severus’s eyes widened. How could anyone doubt him? He had foreseen the coming of this weapon. Did not its arrival prove he was the true Prophet of Reorx? Couldn’t they see that the god

himself wished them to use this weapon against their enemies? Yet it was obvious that the entire Council was against him.

For the first time in his life, Severus was speechless. He could make no answer to the High Thane. But Hornfel did not wait for one before launching another inquiry.

“Even if what you say is true,” conceded Hornfel, “what makes you believe the young dragon within this egg can defend us? Will it not be swept aside as a goblin before the Hammer of Kharas?”

Severus recovered his thoughts. He had been ready for this question, at least. “The dragons of Beryl’s realm are great and terrible, true. Still, they are mortal beasts, born of this world and fated to die as dictated by the River of Time. But the child that sleeps within our egg is a spawn of Chaos. What power of this world could destroy Chaos?”

Pounce sprang to his feet with a predator’s gleam in his eye. “What is to keep so terrible a beast from turning its attention toward Thorbardin? The fire dragon could side with our enemies!”

The fiery gaze of Severus fastened upon the Theiwar. “Reorx has delivered this gift to us. He would not turn it upon us.”

As satisfying as that answer might have been for Severus, however, it fell short for the other thanes. The Council’s expressions of doubt changed to outrage or, worse, pity.

“But Reorx has left us!”

“Stonehand really is insane.”

Visions counted for nothing, Severus realized with a heavy heart. He looked from one thane to another, hoping to find one that had not judged him mad. But not one of his peers seemed willing to side with him. At last, his eyes met those of the High Thane, and he knew his fate.

“You will go from this hall, Severus,” Hornfel ordered, “and see to it that this egg is destroyed. As you should well remember, so terrible a creature of Chaos obeys no master. None of us can predict or control its entropic powers. If we do not destroy it, it shall surely destroy us.”

By this point, Severus had regained his composure. “Would you cast aside our salvation and lead us into slavery as did the fool Gilthas? If we incubate the dragon’s egg, we make this amazing creature our ally.” He now shouted to the entire assembly. “It is as almighty Reorx told me in a vision! How can you doubt something so obviously brought before your eyes by his divine hand?” Fueled by the fire of his own belief, he turned on Hornfel once more. “Perhaps it is your own sanity you should question, my Thane, not mine.”

With that, Severus turned to leave the Great Hall,

spitting upon the floor before allowing the massive doors to slam shut behind him.

✻

Glade Hornfel strode across his throne room in the city of Hybardin and into his private chambers. The Ten matched his every step until he vanished behind the stone door, where they stood ready to defend their master's privacy.

Beyond that great door, a grim Hornfel slid the bolt into place. Three long steps carried him across the thick carpet, and he fell into a plush chair.

"Things appear dark, my Thane," said the slowly advancing Feldspar. "You know Severus will never relinquish the egg."

"You should not be here," grumbled Hornfel. "Anyone found in these quarters without my permission is subject to death. Even you."

"I suppose I must rely on your mercy, my Thane," Feldspar stated, straight-faced.

"You do that with great regularity," chuckled the distraught ruler, "but there are more important matters to consider. What have you learned?"

"We have confirmed the story of the Daewar courier," reported the seneschal. Hornfel nodded. An unarmed messenger had arrived from Daebardin to report that a refugee family had spotted a wing of green dragons moving toward Thorbardin. The High Thane had been impressed that Severus would put aside their differences to share this information.

"The dragons approach from the west, destroying everything dwarven they come upon," Feldspar continued. "Work on the bombard proceeds. Six are completed. The rest will be in firing condition within the next day."

"You have great faith in the bombard, Feldspar."

"And you do not, my lord?" asked the elderly seneschal as he reached for a mushroom from the bowl on the table beside his friend.

"Against ground troops, the bombard would be devastating. No army of elves or men could threaten Thorbardin while they stand ready to fire. Against dragons, I do not know. The War Chieftain says the guns may serve only to enrage the beasts, if we can hit them at all."

"That may be the case," acknowledged the seneschal, "though I prefer to believe otherwise."

"In any event," muttered Hornfel, "we have no choice but to trust in these defenses."

Feldspar stood silent, not sure how to react. Despair hung heavily upon his king. "Tell me, my Thane," he said quietly. "How may I free you of this burden? This threat from Beryl, combined with the

strife in Daebardin, has taxed you as nothing has since the days of the Chaos War."

The silence of the room felt crushing. As he waited for Hornfel to speak, Feldspar started to take a bite of the mushroom in his hand, only to discover it held no more appeal for him. With an inaudible sigh, he tossed it into the glowing hearth and watched it shrivel in the flames, looking not unlike Cloudseeker Peak. Deciding this was just an old man's imagination, he turned his attention back to the High Thane.

"Go to the bombards," said the dwarf king at last. "Tell them to double their pace, but say nothing of what we have heard from the west. They will learn of it soon enough."

"Very good, my Thane," nodded Feldspar. He turned to go, then paused and faced Hornfel again. "May I inquire as to your own intentions?"

"I shall march to the gates of Daebardin." The Hylar brought his hands to his forehead and rubbed his temples. "Reorx help me if I cannot talk some sense into that so-called 'Prophet.' I only hope that history will not record the name of Glade Hornfel as the 'Last Thane of Thorbardin.'"

"It must not," offered the older dwarf, "for if it does, my name shall be forgotten altogether."

Hornfel looked up and smiled. "Now that, my friend, would be a tragedy."

✻

A scattered line of quickly constructed barricades, three hundred hastily assembled and crudely armed militia, a slight thinker gnome, and a dwarven priest with the fire of a departed god in his eyes stood between the city of Daebardin and an army. At the head of those grim-faced soldiers stood the proud figure of Glade Hornfel.

They had faced each other across a barren atrium for half an hour before Hornfel decided the time had come for action. Handing his great mace to the first of the Ten, he strode calmly forward.

At the High Thane's overture, Severus placed his hand on Arameekos's shoulder. "I will lead the militia — into battle, if I must," he said. "Meanwhile, continue incubating the egg. Our time grows short."

"As you wish, Prophet," nodded the gnome. He eyed the army warily, then turned and vanished down a side tunnel.

The priest of Reorx, unarmed, met his king in the center of the atrium.

"Severus Stonehand," pronounced Hornfel in a commanding tone, "I call upon you to allow the Ten to take possession of the fire dragon's egg."

The Daewar did not hesitate. "I cannot."

Hornfel nodded, then lowered his voice so only he and the Daewar could hear it. "Do not do this, Severus. You gave me information about the advancing dragons. We can work together. This is no time for dwarf to war upon dwarf!"

"I have heard the words of Reorx, my Thane," Severus said quietly. "He has sent me a weapon to use against our enemies, both new and old. To refuse it would mean turning our backs on our god, a greater blasphemy than I can comprehend."

"Think of your followers!" hissed Hornfel between clenched teeth. "They cannot stand against an army! You lead them to their deaths!" His cheeks were flushed and his brows knitted with fury.

"I lead them only where the hand of Reorx leads me," replied the prophet. He slowly began walking back to the ranks of his militia, then turned and called to the ruler of Thorbardin. "I know well my peril, High Thane." The red-bearded dwarf's eyes blazed wildly beneath his bone helm. "Order your troops to attack."

Glade Hornfel stood silently at the center of the atrium. His lips drawn together in a tight line, he began to pace off the steps back to where the Ten waited with the army. As he did so, he cursed the stubbornness of the Daewar and called to the ranks to ready their weapons. They instantly obeyed. Behind him, he heard the scrapings of similar weapons being readied by Severus's militia.

☯

High in a bombard bay, Feldspar raised his eyes to the sky, sheltering them with a wrinkled hand. The beauty of the Kharolis Mountains always threatened to take his breath away. Behind him, the sound of hammers and picks reminded him that work continued on the ring of bombards that would defend Thorbardin.

It seemed impossible that any force could threaten this stronghold, the seneschal thought. Still, could a fortress built to stand against man stand against dragon?

Suddenly, a flash of movement near the horizon caught his attention. He knew, even before the lookout beside him raised the alarm, that these were the green dragons. He saw a dozen wyrms, like emerald hawks diving toward their prey.

Dragons could lay waste to an army, Feldspar knew. Between the choking miasma of their caustic breath and the impenetrable scales that covered their bodies, a flight of these beasts normally would spell the doom of Thorbardin. But today, the dwarves had readied their massive bombards. No path would take the dragons to the top of

Cloudseeker Peak without bringing them under the gaze of these dwarven cannons.

Feldspar bowed his head. As in the dark days of the Chaos War, Thorbardin was under attack.

☯

Just beneath Cloudseeker Peak, Arameekos heard the warning drums of Thorbardin. Although the rolling beat made him look up from his work, he did not bother trying to decipher the exact message. He understood the gist of it. Quickly, he checked the chamber beneath him one last time.

At its center, braced in a metal framework, rested the great egg. Enormous pipes ran to it from a series of forges. The incredible heat from these furnaces caused the mottled surface of the egg to ripple red and orange. To the untrained eye, the fire dragon egg might appear an elongated sphere of purest magma from the heart of Krynn.

"How much longer?" demanded Arameekos of the dwarf overseeing the forges heating the relic of the Chaos War. The roar of the bellows and clanging of metal forced the gnome to shout his question to draw the foreman's attention.

"We can begin any time!" called the stout dwarf.

"Excellent!" Arameekos smiled. His heart beat faster as he took in the intricacies of the device. "We now await only the word from the Prophet." With that, the thinker gnome twisted his spindly body around and quickly strode from the room.

☯

The High Thane was almost thankful to hear the alarms. To be sure, he knew they signaled the dragon attack, but at least he was spared the task of signaling the charge on Severus's militia.

As he ordered the Ten to abandon their positions and head for the bombard bays, his eyes met those of the prophet. The latter bore no visage of triumph; he only cursed and whipped about to issue new orders to his men.

The High Thane turned and charged after the Ten.

☯

A great cheer erupted from the gunners following the deafening report of the bombard's discharge. Although most of the deadly missiles had swept past their targets, one of the blazing leaden spheres penetrated the gleaming emerald scales of the lead dragon. The wyrm's tremendous roar of pain drew the attention of the other dragons. Then, as quickly as it began, the howl was choked off.

The dragon, slain, fell to the jagged slopes of Thorbardin with a crash.

Even as Feldspar's bombard crew hurried to reload their weapon, the other guns barked the defiance of the dwarves. Smoldering spheres of red-hot metal leapt out at the wyrms, amid great plumes of smoke and fire.

The dragons, however, were not to be so easily defeated. Having seen the terrible effect of the dwarven guns, they banked steeply to avoid them. For all their efforts, two more beasts were hit. One of them, the bones of its left wing shattered, whirled in a tight spiral that ended as it impaled itself on an outcropping of rock. The other wheeled about and winged its way westward.

The nine remaining dragons, each fully one-hundred feet long, opened their jaws and released great clouds of green smoke toward the gun bays. The deadly vapors poured around the bombards, hammering the crews with a gale of toxic chlorine. Cries of pain became choking coughs as the dwarves drew lungfuls of the deadly fumes.

It was into this chaos that Glade Hornfel and the Ten charged. At once, the High Thane ordered his men into action. As the brisk mountaintop winds swept away the deadly cloud, the Ten directed fresh troops to replace the fallen crew of the bombards. In just over a minute, as the attacking dragons had whirled about to make another suffocating pass, the guns stood ready to fire once more.

Hornfel moved to the firing officer's station only to discover a slain warrior crumpled there. As he pushed the body aside, his eyes fell upon the still face of his faithful Feldspar. He froze. The elder dwarf's flesh was blistered and cracked, his features rigid with pain. As the dragons dove toward the mountaintop, the Hylar thane howled with rage.

Tears pooled in Hornfel's eyes. Suddenly, the world seemed cold and empty. Never before had he considered the possibility that the unassuming Feldspar would be taken from him.

A fury greater than any he had ever felt filled Glade Hornfel. As the largest of the dragons plunged toward the mountaintop, the dwarven king boomed, "FIRE!"

The only sound that answered his order was the howl of an angry dragon drawing in its breath to release another gale of death.

Whirling about, Hornfel saw his gun officer standing frozen with dragonfear. His eyes, wide and unblinking, stared directly into those of the looming wyrm. Hornfel shouted his order again, but again there was no response. Even the Ten, those veteran warriors, were paralyzed by the dragons' assault.

Cursing loudly, Hornfel sprang forward. He

crashed through a pair of warriors toward the stricken gunner. Behind him, he could hear the rushing body of the dragon sweeping through the air. He knew he had only seconds before the beast would destroy him as it had his beloved Feldspar.

"Fire, damn you!" howled Hornfel as he snatched the smoldering blackpowder match from the quivering hand that held it. Pivoting cleanly to face the dragon, Hornfel was shocked to see the beast practically on top of him. As he moved to fire the bombard, the dragon exhaled. A plume of green death blossomed toward him.

Then, much to the surprise of the dragon, the great bombard spoke. A half dozen searing lead spheres tore into its flesh, crushing bones and leaving it no more than a hurtling corpse. Despite his exhilaration, Glade Hornfel realized that his was the only gun that had fired a second salvo.

Then the toxic cloud of blistering chlorine blew into the bombard bay. Hornfel gagged and threw his hands up to protect his eyes. An instant later, before the agonizing gas could take its full effect, the great body of the dead dragon plunged into the bay.

The screams of warriors mingled with the shattering of stone. The impact of the giant wyrm tore the bombard from its carriage and collapsed the entire bay. Tons of rock rained down upon dwarf and dragon alike. Hornfel felt intense pain as his ribs bent and snapped, but then he was released from his agony by a peaceful blackness.



Severus burst into the incubation room as the first salvo of bombard fire shook the bedrock around him. As the blistering heat of that chamber splashed across his body, sweat ran down his face. Arameekos, as always, materialized at his side.

"Is everything ready?" demanded Stonehand over the noise of the forges.

"It is, Prophet," shouted the gnome. His left arm made a sweeping gesture, directing the dwarf's gaze over the intricate apparatus that encompassed the fire dragon egg. "My device will hatch the egg, freeing the fire dragon to ravage the wyrms!" A seething red glow washed across the entire chamber, creating a disorienting effect that caused Severus to steady himself against the wall. The seemingly endless shaft stretching upward right into the pinnacle of the mountain made him feel as if he were looking up from an endless pit.

"Let us raise our voices in thanks as we prepare to destroy the enemies of the dwarven nations!" called out the prophet. As chanted prayers filled the

air, drowning out even the roaring of the bellows, Arameekos sprang to the side of the fire dragon egg. He released several catches and called out an almost unheard command.

In response, a pair of muscular dwarves drew on great chains. Slowly at first, but with increasing speed, the darkly scintillating egg rose up the dark shaft. High overhead, a stone panel slid back to expose the crystal blue sky above Cloudseeker Peak.

Arameekos, standing beside the pulsating egg, looked down upon the receding shape of Severus. He had no thought for the danger above him, only the anticipation of his device's ultimate test. Few gnomes had been privileged to construct so important a mechanism. When he activated it and the egg hatched, his name would be known across Krynn.

As the wondrous device rose out of sight, Severus offered a final prayer of thanks to Reorx for the dragon's egg. Then he turned briskly and hurried into the tunnels. Surely the warriors manning the bombardments above would need his mystical healing powers. Some would be wounded, some dead, and all could use words of comfort. The Gift of Fire was in the hands of Arameekos now. There was nothing more for him to do here.

☯

As the prophet ascended the last of the tunnels that spiraled toward the bombardment bays, a clap of artificial thunder reverberated through the stone around him. Something was amiss: Severus heard the report of only a single weapon in this second round. Clearly, disaster had already struck.

Even as that thought entered his mind, a tremendous concussion hurled the dwarf backward. The tunnel cracked and splintered as his whirling body fetched up against a stout wooden brace. Chlorine gas filled the air, causing his eyes to water.

Blood welled up beneath his tunic, and Severus realized the impact with the brace had shattered the bone of his left arm. Closing his eyes, the dwarf priest focused his inner strength on the tortured limb. Gradually, the pain faded and the bleeding stopped. He could have done more, but he knew he would find others with far greater injuries than his.

Struggling to his feet, he charged forward. The tunnel, once as true and straight as dwarven engineering could make it, was now convoluted and almost impassable. Still, he pressed on. He called out, hoping to find survivors in the bombardment bays. Working with only one arm retarded his progress, but his determination made up for the handicap.

Several times the prophet rushed to the aid of a fallen dwarf, only to discover that he was too late

to do more than offer a final prayer. An arm protruding from beneath one pile of debris bore a gauntlet of the elite Ten. With a gasp, Severus realized that the High Thane himself must be nearby.

With renewed fervor, he began to dig through the rubble within the bay. With every passing minute, however, he became more disheartened. It was impossible that the High Thane could have survived such a collapse.

Or was it?

Hearing a faint groan from the debris ahead of him, Severus tore into the shattered rock. He even brought his almost useless left arm into play as he drew stone after stone away from the pile and came upon the neck ridges of a green dragon corpse. The dusty air combined with acrid wisps of chlorine to make it almost impossible to breathe, but the prophet would not give up.

At last, he uncovered the still-breathing Glade Hornfel from beneath the very body of the dragon. However, his triumph promised to be short-lived. Hornfel's breath came in shallow gasps, accompanied by a gurgling that spoke of severe internal injuries.

"By Reorx," vowed the prophet, "I have not found the High Thane alive only to watch him die!"

Again, the mystic reached for the strength deep within his heart, finding the healing power and directing it outward. Carefully, he focused his essence on the fading life within Hornfel. Just as the fire within the Hylar's breast threatened to falter, Severus fanned it back into life.

Minutes later, the prophet collapsed beside the body of the High Thane. He used so much of his own energy to revive Hornfel that he had brought himself to the very threshold of death. Still, the risk had paid off. Hornfel breathed more steadily, much of the damage to his shattered body reversed. He would be long in recovering from these injuries, but he would live.

Severus gasped a few bitter lungfuls of the tainted air in the half-collapsed tunnel, then forced himself back to his feet. With as much strength as he could muster, he lifted the body of the High Thane onto his shoulder and staggered down the tunnel.

"You do not die this day, my Thane," he whispered, "although you may wish you had."

☯

The trembling within the mountain was so great that Arameekos began to despair of reaching the peak. Only when the fire dragon egg and its harness were locked into place at the top of the seemingly endless shaft could he call his journey done.



Finally concluding that long ascent, the gnome took in the sight from Thorbardin's highest point and gasped in horror.

Eight massive dragons had landed on the slopes of Cloudseeker Peak. Some tore at the stone where the dwarves had cut their bombard bays, others hammered at the mountain with massive tails to collapse tunnels within, and the rest sprayed streams of deadly chlorine into air vents that opened into the warrens of Thorbardin far below. Although he knew it was impossible, Arameekos thought he could hear the screams of dwarf women and children from the depths of the mountain.

At that moment, one of the dragons swept its massive head up and looked toward the peak, directly at Arameekos and his device. With a cry, the beast leapt into the air and flew toward him.

The gnome reached for the great lever that would send a final surge of warmth into the egg to crack its magma shell. Spurred on by that cascade, the chaos dragon within should awaken and rise to defend Thorbardin with all its otherworldly power.

As his fingers tightened around the lever, a strange sensation passed through his body. The dragon seemed so impossibly large, Arameekos could think of nothing else. The withering gaze of

its yellow eyes threatened to stop his heart and crush the breath from his lungs. Some portion of his mind remained clear enough to tell his arm to draw down the lever and release the fire dragon egg, but his limb refused to obey.

Only as the massive talons swept toward him did the gnome find the power for one final act: High atop the summit of Cloudseeker Peak, as Thorbardin cried out in agony beneath him, Arameekos screamed in terror. As his body was torn apart by the scimitar-claws of a green dragon, the lever that would test his ultimate mechanism remained unthrown.

The green dragon perched atop Cloudseeker Peak and let out a howl of triumph. The incredible sound echoed from mountainside to mountainside like a great bell heralding the doom of a nation.

Then, it swept its snakelike tail down and crushed the frail device that clearly had been designed to destroy it.

A creature of Chaos was freed.

☪

Miles away, a wounded green dragon atop a snow-capped mountain watched the eastern sky.

The injury from the damnable dwarven bombard pained him terribly, and he cursed his bad luck. He had so hungered for the flesh of dwarves!

A tiny spark, like the twinkling of a distant star, caught his attention. Something was amiss atop Cloudseeker Peak — but what? The beast leaned forward curiously, straining his reptilian eyes to see.

As the amazed dragon watched, a great sphere of white flame blossomed from the top of the mountain. The roiling, expanding globe swallowed the tips of the interceding peaks, and the scrub-pine littering the upper slopes burst into flame at its touch. Snow caps and mountain streams boiled away into clouds of steam.

As the dragon cocked his head to one side, he realized what was about to happen.

In the last seconds before the wall of heat struck him, the dragon managed to speak a spell of protection. Even with this barrier of sorcery, the green felt nearly broiled alive by the heat that licked at him from all sides. The roar of agony that leapt from his throat echoed for miles.

Close on the heels of the blistering sphere, a tremendous shockwave hammered the dragon. Under the wrath of this magical assault, the mountain beneath him trembled, and it was all the wrym could do to dig his claws into the rock. Beneath the tree line, vast stretches of forest burst into flames.

The ground beneath the dragon tore itself apart, pitching the beast into the air. A rain of stones expelled by the blast hammered through his sorcerous wards to batter his scales. The green's cry of pain was drowned out by the roar of destruction around him.

Then, as quickly as it had hit him, the shockwave passed.

Struggling to right himself, the dragon understood that the dwarves had employed a powerful spell to defend their mountain home. Such incredible power was beyond his imagination — he couldn't begin to guess at what magic might have created it or how the dwarves might have harnessed it.

His Great Green master, Beryllintranox, must be told. With awkward and painful motions, the twice-wounded wrym made his way home.

☛

The great doors of the High Thane's personal chambers in Hybardin slammed shut. Despite their thickness, Hornfel could hear the sounds of stone masons working just outside. No section of Thorbardin was untouched by the dragon attack or the destruction caused by the explosion of the egg. Thousands had died in the conflagration.

"You sent for me, my Thane," announced Severus as he stepped away from the doors. His face was smudged with dirt, proof that even the splint on his left arm had not kept him from aiding in the repairs to the city.

"I have not yet thanked you for saving my life," said Glade Hornfel. "I do so now."

"I could not have done otherwise, my Thane," replied the prophet.

The master of Thorbardin nodded. "Nonetheless, I am grateful."

The prophet looked obviously uncomfortable. "If that is all," he said, "there is much work to be done. Even the absence of one arm is felt."

Hornfel fell silent for a moment, searching for the proper words. "The High Council has met on the subject of your actions, Severus. Are you aware of its decision?"

The prophet tensed. He knew there was no chance for leniency on his part. The other thanes hated him and were probably glad to hand down their decision. "I assume I am to be executed for my role in the devastation to the kingdom," he said in a calm, measured voice.

"That was the decision of the Council," said the High Thane. "It was unanimous, save for one vote."

Severus was startled at that. "Might I know the name of my lone ally?" he queried. But even as he posed the question, he realized the answer.

"I did not vote for execution," said the High Thane, "although I daresay it has cost me much support from some of your more determined enemies."

Severus chuckled, a sound that the High Thane was not sure he had ever heard before. "I was not aware that anyone on the Council was less determined to see me removed than his peers." Then, without allowing the moment of levity to linger, he asked, "When is the sentence to be carried out?"

"It is not," said Hornfel. "I have absolved you of your guilt."

At the Daewar's skeptical expression, the High Thane stepped nearer and looked him squarely in the eye. "Do not fear, Prophet. I did not make my decision in gratitude for my life. If I were to allow the other thanes to carry out their rash decree, the repercussions would be far greater than they realize. Without you to guide them, the refugees would fall into despair. They would hold you up as a martyr, Neidar and Daewar rallying around your banner and, in time, plunging all of Thorbardin into a civil war. So, Severus, I am afraid that you must live."

The prophet, having prepared himself for his death sentence, was at a loss. He could only nod silently.

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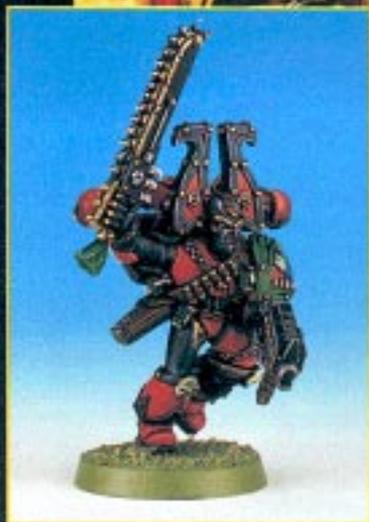
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"That is not the end of the matter, however," Hornfel continued. "Your continued presence in Thorbardin could lead to problems nearly as severe as those that would follow your execution."

The High Thane stood as tall as possible, a feat that caused him considerable pain, and cleared his throat. In his most commanding voice, he pronounced the Daewar's fate.

"Severus Stonehand, you defied my orders and heedlessly released the powers of Chaos. Such an act must not go unpunished. From this day forth, you and those who choose to follow you are cast out of Thorbardin. Do not return here, for you will find the Great Doors closed against you. I shall make food and water available to you, what little we can spare, and a score of ponies to lessen your burdens. But within one hundred hours, you must depart the realm."

☪

It had taken far less time than Severus had imagined to prepare his traveling pack. So many things he had surrounded himself with had little or no meaning in the wake of the High Thane's decision. Indeed, he could hardly believe that much of what he had acquired had ever appealed to him. In the end, all that he cared about fit into a single sack.

To be sure, he was abandoning enough wealth to make any three dwarves content for the rest of their long lives. But these were the things of his old life. Now he looked ahead to a new life, in the east.

Five long steps carried him to the door of his chambers. He placed his hand on the latch but paused a moment and glanced at the room. Was there anything else that mattered here?

He sighed and opened the door, stepping through into the press of his followers. At the sight of their leader, a cheer of support rose from their worn and tired ranks. Severus smiled and acknowledged them with a wave of his good arm.

Yes, there was something else that mattered.

☪

Glade Hornfel looked out a broad window on the road leading away from Southgate and Thorbardin. Here, in a private room guarded by the newly selected Ten, he tried to decide whether history would record him as a villain, a hero, or a fool.

Far below, he saw the followers of Severus moving away from Thorbardin. To them, he knew, he was a villain. They would curse his name with every step of the journey before them. He hadn't forced them to join their leader in exile — these

hundreds of Daewar and Neidar had chosen banishment of their own accord.

To the people on the other side of that gate, those who would remain in Thorbardin, he supposed he was a hero. Most of them believed that he had managed to incinerate the dragons. It did not seem wise for Hornfel to dwell too long or too publicly on this matter. The beasts had been turned aside and were unlikely to menace Thorbardin in the immediate future. In the interim, the dwarves would rebuild their shattered warrens and cities, and mourn their dead.

Below, the stream of refugees had ended as the last of their carts was drawn out of Southgate. After a few seconds, the final exiles were followed by Severus himself. Where he would lead them, Glade Hornfel did not know. As the prophet looked up, his gaze finding the eyes of the High Thane, no trace of emotion showed on his face. To that determined and grim soul, Hornfel knew, he would always be thought a bit of a fool. Perhaps he was right.

Then Severus turned away from Thorbardin, and Southgate slammed behind him with a boom that reminded Hornfel of the report of the bombard. He knew that, at the same moment, Northgate was closing as well, and his men were going to work sealing the gates of Thorbardin off from the surface world. The last sealing of these gates almost four hundred years ago had led to a brutal war, Hornfel knew. Yet he had no choice — he could not place his weakened realm at risk again. As he watched Severus stride away, he heard the prophet break into a powerful, mournful song that beseeched the gods to watch over their pilgrims on a holy quest.

Hornfel turned away, tears in his eyes. His gaze fell upon a bolted oak door. Behind it, he knew, lay three more fire dragon eggs, recovered during the excavation of the bombard bays. None of the other thanes, especially not the exiled Severus, knew about them. And if Glade Hornfel had his way, that was how it would remain.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "I am a fool who has not yet known the depths of his folly."



William W. Connors has just completed work on the RAVENLOFT® second edition game. A fan of old-time radio shows and baseball, he was also the primary designer for the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ game.

Sue Weinlein Cook worked in TSR's book department and edited BIRTHRIGHT® accessories and adventures before helping to create the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE game. She lives with her game designer husband, Monte, in a converted Church.



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Tools of destruction

With the invention of magical items, the wizards of Esfah have devised a way to harness the power of the land into startling new shapes. Items to match every element (fire, water, earth, air, and death) have evolved. One of the few weaknesses of magical items is that their strong tie to the land remains: magical items do not function when taken away from terrains into reserves.

Magical items bring a new focus to the battle. Like normal units, each item appears in common, uncommon, and rare varieties. Unlike normal units, magical item dice have four sides instead of six. Every one is devoted to a single purpose: maneuvers, saves, magic, missiles, or melee. **Speed slippers**, **winged sandals**, and **seven-league boots** enhance an army's battlefield movements.

Flicker foils, **dawn blades**, and **vorpals** promise havoc in melee, as the **trueflyer**, **eyebiter**, and the **heartseeker** do for missile fire. A **sight stone**, a **ring of stars**, or a **magi's crown** bolster magical strength. The effects of a **bronze targe**, a **silver buckler**, or a **gilt shield** provide protection for an army against all manner of attacks.

Magical items can't be killed, but their price is high. Like a normal unit, each magical item has a cost—the more powerful the item, the greater the cost. Also, magical items must be wielded by a unit. For each magical item in an army, at least one unit must be there to carry it. To carry a magical item, a unit must match the element (color) of the item. For example, a dwarf unit can wield gold or red magical items. Without someone to wield them, magical items are absorbed back into the land, never to return.

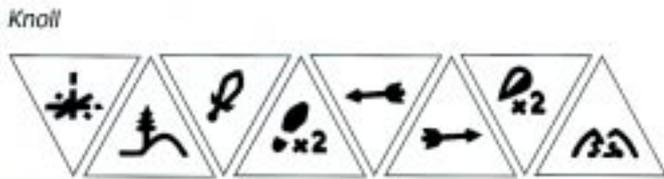
Feats of destiny

Like the strongest soldiers, magical items bear new and terrible special action icons.

Attune: Found only on the **magi's crown**, during a magic action, the **attune** icon can be used to generate one point of any color of spells, regardless of the magical item's actual color. In addition, the player may convert the magical results of one unit in the same army to that same color.

Bash: When an army is foolish enough to engage in a trial of arms with a army equipped with a gilt shield, it is





the attacker who is wounded. When saves are rolled, the icon reflects the melee results of any opposing unit back onto the attacking unit.

Decapitate: One might expect a **vorpal sword** to present such a menacing prospect as the ability to remove heads. If used during a skirmish, this icon indicates that, after the defending army has rolled for saves, the wielder of the **vorpal sword** can select one unit of any size with an ID result — a face — to be killed.

Impale: Found only on the **heart-seeker**, the **impale** icon does in missiles what the decapitate icon does in melee. One defending unit that rolls an ID icon is sent to the graveyard.

Wayfare: The **seven-league boots** were originally developed by the dwarves using their hidden magics of Pathing. When this icon is rolled during a maneuver, it may immediately transport itself and one unit in the army to any other terrain or to the reserves.

Today's artifacts

Just as the magicians of Esfah have outdone themselves, their mightiest archmages have devised even greater sources of power called artifacts. In their creation, mages have produced objects that combine the strength and unpredictability of a monster unit with the extraordinary characteristics of magical items. These 10-sided dice work in many ways just as the smaller magical items: they consist of one element (color), they cannot be killed or discarded to account for damage to an army, they must be wielded by a unit, and they do not func-

tion in reserves. Because of the energy involved, artifacts have grown into unpredictable engines of war.

The first **blade golem** combined the talents of dwarven engineers with those of magicians. Since then, the appearance of these war machines in armies dedicated to melee combat has become common. In addition to its chance of producing melee hits, saves, or maneuvers, the **blade golem** may enter a flurry, attacking a single army again and again.

The **dragon staff** was forged by Morehl seeking a greater mastery of dragonkind. The intensely powerful magical focus has the ability to summon dragons, and when it is used, they are likely to come.

The **flying carpet** is the ultimate creation in improving an army's talents for maneuvering. In addition, it has the power to **elevate**, allowing missile fire to be used in melee combat.

The **mantlet** is a war engine proving its use in battle every day. An enormous shield with wheels, its likelihood to produce a saves is extremely high. Moreover, it may generate a sortie special action icon, which can count as saves, hits, or both.

The largest of the new war engines is the **trebuchet**. This enormous throwing machine can cast boulders and missiles that may crush its foes into the earth, not only killing but also burying them for all time.

Weapon specialization

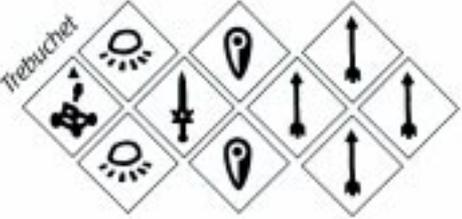
Magical items and artifacts display the same wide range of abilities (melee,

missile, etc.) that normal units do, and finding good uses for their talents is easy.

Specialize or generalize? Since the advent of the DRAGON DICE game, the argument over whether to specialize or generalize has raged. Many claim that without a focus on one or two types of troops, an army cannot generate enough results to succeed. Players have witnessed the magic/cavalry combination, the light infantry/missile mix, and even heavy infantry and magicians paired together. Meanwhile, other players maintain that, on the unpredictable battlefield, every army must be able to do a little bit of everything. Here is a look at the two opposing strategies.

Concentrate your strength. Magical items are by nature a focused energy, and even artifacts demonstrate a focus, though it is not as absolute. If you're playing a melee army, the addition of a few **dawn blades** or a **vorpal sword** can do more than just another unit. A magician army without a **dragon staff** is wasting its potential. In addition, the special action icons on rare magic items appear almost twice as often as they do on a normal unit, and all of them work to augment one type of action. For example, an attune result almost guarantees that you'll be able to cast just the right spell.

Power in diversity. Magical items do guarantee at least one result of what you're looking for. Tired of your opponent rolling no maneuvers and still being able to adjust the terrain die because of your bad luck? Including a pair of **speed slippers** in each of your armies guarantees it will never happen

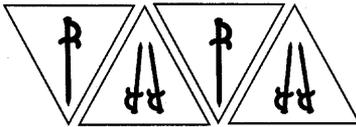


COMMON MAGICAL ITEMS

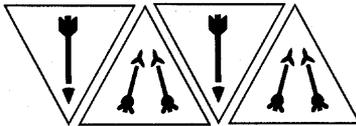
Speed Slippers



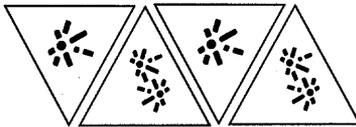
Flicker Foil



True Flyer



Sightstone



Bronze Target



again. Because of the item's individual focus, the generalist can forge an army that he knows will never completely fail in any given task.

Children of the beast

When the dragons conjured dragonkin from their own life energies, they hoped to bring the war to a quicker end, and perhaps to end the many summons that brought them to decimated lands of conflict. Unfortunately for the children of the wyrms and drakes, the magicians of Esfah quickly discovered the weaknesses of these dragonkin. Like dragons, they can be summoned to battle, but unlike those primal beasts, the dragonkin can be controlled.

Dragonkin bear many of the same properties of their parents. They consist of a single element: fire, water, earth, air, or death. When not in use, dragonkin are set aside near the dead unit area. Should they be killed in battle, they return to their own area. Dragonkin are creatures of the land, and they cannot be buried through black magic or any

other means. Furthermore, they refuse to battle dragons of their own color. Best of all, from the standpoint of the DRAGON DICE game commander, their tough skins provide an army with automatic saves. These saves they provide to themselves and their army are nullified only when the dragonkin unit rolls its belly icon.

Today, every magician knows the spell to **summon dragonkin** into the fray:

Cost 3
Spell

Summon dragonkin: Add one health worth of your dragonkin to the casting army. The color of magic determines the color of dragonkin summoned.

In play, each player may bring a health value of dragonkin equal to one-third of the total army size. In the standard tournament game (24 health), eight health worth of dragonkin can be brought to the table by each player. The kin, however, do not actually count against the army construction of the player. Unlike dragons, however, each player can summon only his own dragonkin.

On the battlefield, dragonkin behave much as normal six-sided units, but they do not serve willingly. They will not leave the terrain to which they are summoned, and if a group of dragonkin is ever left alone, they quit the fray (return them to their owner until he summons them again). Moreover, they will not enter into a combat with a dragon which matches their color. In the event that an army containing dragonkin is attacked by a dragon, any dragonkin which match the dragonkin's color will merely watch as their comrades are assaulted. Limited in their scope, the fierce dragonkin do not practice the arts of archery or magic, choosing instead to charge their foes and rend them limb from limb.

Deadly breath

All of the most powerful (3-health) dragonkin possess the ability to breathe clouds of gas when they attack their foes. These breath attacks bear much in common to the great wyrms that spawned them. These breath weapons only take effect when the dragonkin are used in melee combat, close to their foes. The breath of the gold dragonkin turns to stone one unit of the enemy army; the target must save or die. The paralyzing breath of the blue dragonkin immobilizes one enemy unit, and the

frost breath of the green kindred halves the rolls of a single unit. The fiery flame breath of the red and the disease effect of the black dragon kin are brutal and direct: a single unit is killed and buried. Just like normal special action icons, the breath of the dragonkin takes effect before normal action icons.

Commanding the Dragonkin

An army playing without dragonkin to back them up will be at a significant disadvantage against one with these allies. An opponent must move fast before all those additional forces show up on the scene. Unlike magical items, dragonkin do not count against your starting allowance of units, and no other player can muster your dragonkin, so there's no reason not to bring them along the next time you go into battle. And remember, dragonkin don't do you any good sitting out of play. Cast some quick magic as soon as you can and summon them in. After that, do a quick switch to group some melee units in with the dragonkin, and move the mages out the way so you can get into the battle's glory.

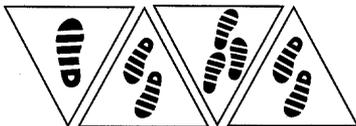
Charge: Your dragonkin are useless in a trial of missiles or magic. Don't waste any time. Get them into melee range as fast as you can, and charge. Besides their breath attacks, dragonkin have nothing but maneuver and melee icons, so it's difficult for them to perform badly in an all-out attack. Plus, even though your army won't get to roll for saves in the charge, you'll still get the benefits of the dragonkin's automatic saves to protect you (unless you were unlucky and rolled their belly icon during the charge roll). Combine the dragonkin with a good army of cavalry, and Esfah trembles beneath you.

Fight my magicians: Often in war, magicians have been caught without support and have died quickly. Few magicians have the ability to maneuver or to save their skins when attacked. Now mages can call upon the dragonkin when confronted with the prospect of melee. The dragonkin fortify the mages' weaknesses, providing a good number of maneuvers on their faces, and their save results are the best that the world has seen.

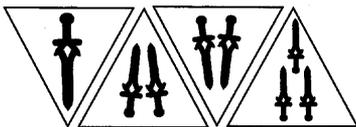
Drake and dragonkin: One nasty tactic you can experiment with is to summon a dragon that matches the color of the enemy's dragonkin. His dragonkin won't help him at all during its attacks, and the protection he may have been

UNCOMMON MAGICAL ITEMS

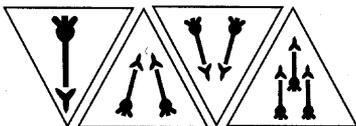
Winged Sandals



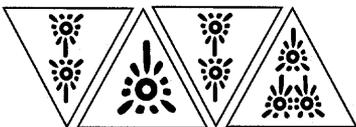
Dawn Blade



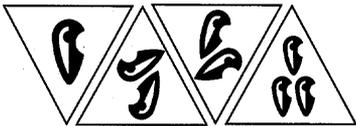
Eyebiter



Ring of Stars



Silver Buckler



counting on will be gone. Meanwhile your dragonkin (of a different color) will still give you automatic saves and good attacks.

Facing the dragonkin: The dragonkin are useless in missiles and magic. If you're confronting a group of them, don't give up all hope and flee. Instead, get some of your best maneuvering troops and keep the die away from melee as long as possible. Use a *Wind Walk* or *Transmute Rock to Mud* spell to help. Meanwhile, take advantage of any opportunities to kill the non-dragonkin units in the enemy army. If all the normal units die, the dragonkin must leave. It's no easy task, but it can be done!

A piece of the action

The last new jewel of strategy that *Magestorm* presents are minor terrains. (The larger terrain dice that came in the original game are now called "major terrains" and they haven't changed.) For years now, the war has raged over cities, towers, standing stones, and temples while ignoring some other points of ter-

rain that can aid in the struggle. You can include the **knoll**, which assists in missile combat. An army lurking in **woods** has a good chance not to be hit by enemy attacks. Construction of a **village** aids in melee. Finally, the **bridge** allows an army unrestricted movements.

You may bring up to four minor terrains to the game. Instead of adjusting the die after a successful maneuver, you may instead choose to place a minor terrain in the army. The minor terrain is immediately rolled, and your army may gain one of a list of advantages. The advantage remains in effect for your army until you take another march with that army. Then the minor terrain is rolled again, and your army is likely to receive a different benefit.

Depending on the individual die, they may provide double moves, double saves, allow the army to take an action (missile, magic, or melee) other than the one shown on the major terrain die, or some combination of these advantages. Each of the minor terrain dice has a focus toward giving one kind of benefit. Unfortunately, each minor terrain also has some small chance of being destroyed through the whims of nature. **Bridges** can be flooded, **villages** experience revolts, **knolls** suffer landslides, and whole armies can become lost in the **woods**.

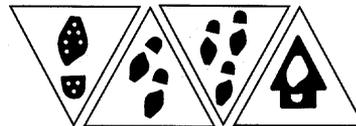
Seizing the advantage

Minor terrains warrant a good deal of care and consideration before you put them into use. Remember that despite the advantages they provide, it costs you a successful maneuver to put the minor terrain in play. You could be using that same maneuver to turn the major terrain closer to the eighth face, which is the ultimate goal.

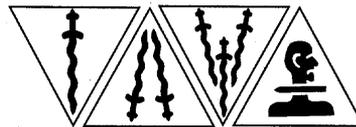
That said, minor terrains may be a greater friend to you than even the dragonkin. Often you may have found your heavy infantry troops stuck far away from the enemy army, and thus made useless. Now you can prepare for this eventuality by bringing a **village** minor terrain with you. Your chance to use your melee troops is suddenly doubled — and even if the minor terrain doesn't provide that opportunity, you may be doubling your saves or maneuvers instead. Similarly, your missile army can be standing by with a **knoll** to shoot from. And, as terrible as the catastrophes of a flood or revolt may be, the odds of such an event are only 1-in-8.

RARE MAGICAL ITEMS

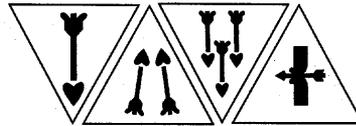
Seven-League Boots



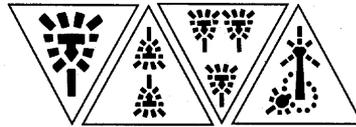
Vorpal Sword



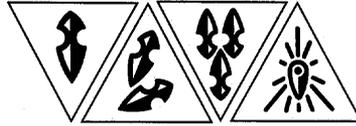
Heartseeker



Magi's Crown



Gilt Shield



The question remains not whether to use these terrain, but when. Generally, you shouldn't use a minor terrain when you're close to achieving the eighth face. Never put a minor terrain in play when the terrain die is at seven, and you probably won't want to do it at six. The minor terrain's advantages disappear when the eighth face is captured. The best time to use a minor terrain is when one of your armies is confronted with a formidable enemy at the same terrain, and you know you're going to be in a long and bloody fight. The minor terrain can give your army just the edge you'll need to fight the long journey to victory.



David Eckelberry spent the first two decades of his life plotting to take over the world from Washington D.C., so it only makes sense that now he helps create worlds for TSR in Lake Geneva, WI. For quick answers to DRAGON DICE questions, e-mail tsrdaide@aol.com.





The Flying Flame

by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

The survey of dragon rulers of the North conducted by the notorious Volo (and corrected by Elminster) continues with one of the most famous dragons in all Faerun: Balagos, the Flying Flame. This great red wyrm is legendary for his gigantic size and temper, and for the spells he hurls so often and recklessly in his boisterous, brawling rise to supremacy (he intends) over all Faerunian dragonkind. Balagos acts like a much younger dragon, betraying no weakness nor loss of fire and showing wisdom only in his avoidance of well-prepared mages who come looking for him. He strikes hard and unexpectedly, and he has slain so many other dragons that the elves dubbed him “Dragonbane.”

Balagos is *Ulla Bahor* in the tongue of the flind. Shortened to *Bahor*, this name has passed into wider use among the humans. Whatever he is called, this giant dragon is a fearsome foe who delights in slaughtering adventurers, wizards, and dragons alike. He has been the death of the Company of the Firestar (based in Esmeltaran), the Company of the Coin (out of Amnwater), the Laughing Lynx Long-haul Caravan Company of Riatavin, the wizards of the Tower of Tyruld east of Keshla, and the entire seven-ship Silver Swords Boarding Company pirate fleet!

In addition, Balagos is thought to have destroyed Tastrar Nagthalass and at least four other Red Wizards, as well as three or more Zhentarim magelings sent separately on a mission to steal magic from the Flying Flame’s hoard. This fool’s errand was ordered by Lord Manshoon not to win powerful magic but in hopes that Balagos would be goaded into pursuing the magelings to recover the lost treasure — only to be lured into a trap. Certain of the elder orb beholders who support (some would say manipulate) Manshoon have developed a spell they believe will (if they surrounded the great wyrm and cast it together) put Balagos in mind-thrall to them, helpless to escape the endless watchful weight of a dozen old and mighty beholder minds. Presumably this trap still awaits Balagos, who avoided it by slaughtering all the Zhentarim who dared approach his lair.

Balagos is a megalomaniac who truly believes he has the wits and might to rule all Faerunian dragons — and lead them in a war of extermination against humans and elves, leaving other beings as fodder to be devoured at will by the victorious wyrmkin. His mighty ego and raging temper doesn’t render him stupid, however. Where many a red dragon charges into waiting death, Balagos coolly slips away and plots revenge by

striking foes at their weakest point. (He typically flies away to strike at the homes and mates of those who come seeking to slay him, if he can learn who and where such targets are). The great red wyrm is more intelligent than most red dragons and has three outstanding talents: he never forgets the face, name, or attitude of any being he meets (dragon, human, or other); he is a shrewd judge of character (of many races, not just dragons); and he always looks ahead for consequences and likely outcomes. These faculties allow him to act in just the right way to defeat foes or further his aims as effectively as possible.

If cornered or pressed into a fight, Balagos is merciless and fearless, taking hurt if need be to disable a foe when he faces many opponents, and moving to force enemies to hamper or harm each other with spells and wielded weapons intended for him. He’s called ‘the Flying Flame’ for the effective aim of his fire-breathing dive, but he prefers to snatch up rocks, wagons, or horses and drop them on foes from aloft before spending his fire-breath or moving close enough to face the blades of his foes directly.

Balagos seems to need less sleep than most red dragons and spends the additional wakeful time he gains in wary observation of the land around. He can often be seen perched motionless atop a

mountain peak in his domain, looking out over the landscape for hours. As the sage Thoravus of Athkatla commented in a public speech (given on Mirtul 26, 1354 DR), "The mind of Balagos is never still. He is always thinking — thinking on how best to rise to rule all Faerun. Most red dragons think they are fit to rule the world, if only the rest of us would acknowledge them. Balagos knows he is, and he just might, for once among all the arrogant, lazy failures that make up the dragonkind of today, be right. He bears watching. He will always bear watching."

Three days after that speech, Balagos swooped down from a clear sky and devoured Thoravus, smashing apart the sage's home in central Athkatla to do so. Most who witnessed the attack say the dragon intended to be seen, taking a deliberately leisurely approach beforehand, and a majestic pose atop the ruins afterward, to ensure that as many humans as possible saw him and were impressed. The bowmen of a mercenary caravan escort company hustled out into the street to fire at him, and he ignored their arrows as he leapt into the sky, circled slowly, and then flew away — but the next day, when that company left the city guarding a mixed-wares caravan bound for Iriaebor, Balagos dove down out of the clouds and blasted or devoured every horse and man of the escort company — leaving the caravan itself untouched. It's no wonder that in Amn and the surrounding lands, Balagos is deeply feared. His confidence and might make him seem truly a "Dragon King."

The Flying Flame's lair

Balagos lairs in the Smokespire, the most westerly peak of that arm of the Troll Mountains that shelters the upland forests of Amn north of Eshpurta, and points toward The Ridge.

The Smokespire is a long-extinct volcano, with a central cone or shaft whose walls are covered with caves and pits. Most of these Balagos has turned into traps, filling the pits with the jagged, cracked bones of creatures he has devoured, then covering them with the scales of fallen draconic foes and dirt. The central pit is adorned with a mound of blackened stone coffers and melted coins, upon which is coiled the bones of a burned dragon, the remains of Hulrundrar, the old red dragon Balagos slew to take this lair as his own. With the

aid of a few fire spells to provide a burnt smell and some drifting smoke, they fool some adventurers into thinking Balagos has been slain — but their foe is usually watching them from aloft, or lurking in a side-shaft that opens into the bottom of the central shaft, allowing the Flying Flame to send his breath out across the scorched pit in a deadly sheet of flame.

He rarely has to. Counting on his own immunity to fire, the great red wyrm often shows himself to foes. As they are concentrating on him, he activates the deadliest trap in his lair: the *firestaff* of Aunagar the Black (a long-dead mage of Tashluta). This weapon is buried among the scorched coffers so that its tip is exposed, and Balagos can activate only one of its powers from a distance — the one that unleashes a *meteor swarm* silently up and in any one direction desired, thrice a day. The Flying Flame triggers this behind a band of adventurers who face him and often melts or at least fries them all before a single spell is hurled or a sword raised in earnest.

Those who free themselves from this trap discover that the Smokespire is riddled with large, smooth-walled tunnels and that Balagos delights in dodging in and out among them, wearying intruders until they stop for a rest — and become easy prey for spells or fire-breath sent down their tunnel.

Balagos keeps all of his magical treasure, and most of his gems, buried under sand in two of the deepest caverns of his lair, but most intruders never find them: they're busy battling one of the trio of young or juvenile (never older; Balagos devours them when they grow too old) dragons that Balagos has captured and forced to guard areas of his lair, with their wings bitten away and their hunger kept ravenous.

Balagos doesn't even spend most of his time in the Smokespire, using it instead as a lure for adventurers, Dragon Cultists, and other foes and would-be thieves. When he's not out exploring wider Faerun (flying freely, daring other dragons to challenge him while in their territories) or enforcing his growing rule, he's inspecting his other lair, in Tethyr: the Wyrmwel, in Mount Thargil (easternmost of the Starspire Mountains), overlooking the former duchy of Sulduskoon (the upland farms between the upper Sulduskoon River and the Forest of Tethir).

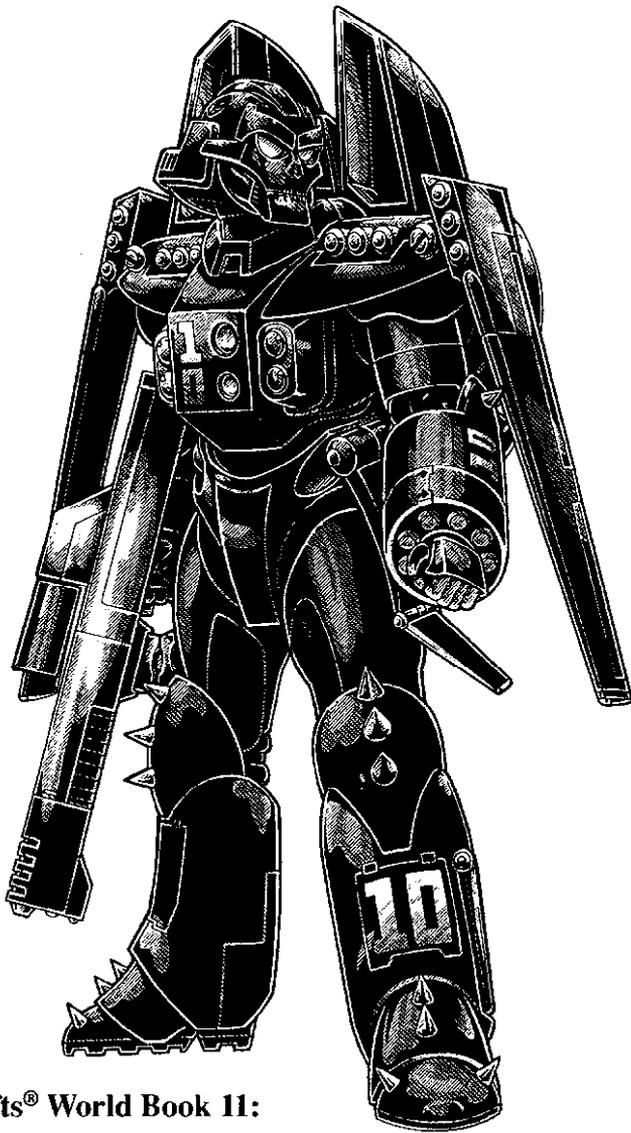
This lair is named for its entry shaft — a natural cauldron formed by the long-ago collapse of a volcano. A thoroughly miserable, always-cold young adult brown dragon, Altagos, inhabits this bowl valley, spending most of his time huddled in a tunnel he's scraped out in the ash, trying to get warm. He scrambles out smartly when intruders enter the cauldron: they're almost the only food he receives.

Altagos is the doorguard of a lair that begins as a huge cavern in the eastern side of the shaft walls, a cave that is home to bats. Altagos swoops among them, mouth agape, as they leave at dusk and return at dawn, but it takes many bats to feed a hungry dragon. It is also home to several helmed horrors, operating under orders to attack all humans, demi-humans, or humanoids who try to enter or leave the cavern unaccompanied by Balagos.¹

This cavern leads to a steeply-descending tunnel whose floor is a slick chute of melted and fused glass (prepared by Balagos, with his flame breath) and whose ceiling is graven with regular holds for a dragon's claws. (Balagos slides down into the lair to enter, and — on his back, with wings folded to fit into the tunnel — climbs up out of it, to exit.) At the bottom of the tunnel is a large, irregular natural cavern whose once-molten walls resemble iron-red flows of ice (everything is smooth and sweeping, because the rock flowed like water before hardening), once a gas cavity at the heart of the volcano. In the sulfurous gloom here slithers a young black dragon, Auroxas, wingless (thanks to the Flying Flame's jaws) and tethered here with an *energy drain chain* by Balagos, to serve as a second lair guardian. This chain is too short to allow him to reach the bottom of the tunnel, and when Balagos enters this lower cavern, he can avoid contact with any acid Auroxas might dare to spit by turning sharply to the left, down a way along the edge of the cavern that keeps many pillars of rock between the two dragons.

This route leads to a spot where the cavern narrows, noxious volcanic vapors waft up into it — and a channel of chokingly-hot lava crosses the open space. Only a red dragon or other creature immune to fire and heat effects can leap, stretch, or climb across the channel without harm. Beyond the channel, the way widens again in two smaller cham-

1. These animated suits of armor are detailed in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual*, Volume One, and in the (revised) *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting* boxed set.



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bers, where Balagos keeps his main metals (coins, trade-bars, and items such as coffers, candlesticks, and platters, that are fashioned of precious metal) hoard. No one knows exactly how much wealth has been amassed here, but the guardian dragon Auroxas believes both caverns are heaped almost full, because increasing amounts of coinage are spilling down the passage to where they can reflect the dull, angry red glow of the lava.

Balagos keeps his two servitor dragon guards hungry and hating each other (by annually offering freedom to whichever one kills the other, and then towing Auroxas up into the Well to do battle with Altagos, only to declare neither worthy of freedom when the evenly-matched dragons collapse from their wounds), but both would cooperate in an instant if they truly believed that they could win their freedom by doing so. The problem is that they don't believe there's a creature in Faerun — demigods and all — who can defeat Balagos, so they dare not help any intruder against the Flying Flame, for fear of suffering the fate he often promises them: to cook small portions of their anatomy with his flame and

then dine, leaving them alive as he nibbles away, taking meal after meal.

The Domain of Balagos

Balagos holds sway over a domain that stretches from the southern edge of the Wood of Sharp Teeth to the Giants Run Mountains, and from the southern banks of the upper River Chionthar (hard by the walls of Iriaebor) to the River Ith.

Many stretches of land around the edges of this area — and the entire Forest of Tethir, within it — are claimed by other dragons, but the Flying Flame has a rather casual attitude toward draconic dominion that other dragons have learned to accept. Most dragons hide when they see him on the wing or keep to their lairs and ignore his passage. Balagos considers all of Faerun to be his, and lesser dragons (that is, all other wyrms) to be merely custodians of this or that part of it, who hold their offices and lives at his pleasure. Every so often, he makes an example of a random dragon to keep the others in fear of him; his common practice at such times is to slay the other dragon and then fly in a slow, triumphal flight around half the continent, with the corpse of his vanquished

foe dangling from his jaws, for dragons and "cattle" (humans, demi-humans, and humanoids) alike to gawk at.

Balagos won his large personal holding by slaying the old red dragon Hulrundrar (in 1258 DR) and the venerable silver dragon Eacoathildarandus (in 1216 DR), whose lair was atop Scarsiir's Crag on the northern side of the Cloud Peaks, overlooking The Neck. The abandoned lair is now a monster-haunted place, with wyverns and peryton battling for use of the high ledges, and giant slugs and far worse things roaming the depths.

The deeds of Balagos

Balagos is most fond of human flesh, particularly that of youngish females, though few communities think he can be appeased by offering him live maidens as sacrifices (as was once done in the villages of eastern Amn, in less civilized times). He relishes a good fight almost as much as a good meal, and he plays with prey that scrambles to escape or tries to fight back, while ignoring terrified cows that cower in fields in plain view.

The Flying Flame likes to bathe (unusual in a red dragon), and prefers to do so in the Chionthar (from which he has risen, dripping, at dusk, to terrify many a bargeman). He usually takes water at Lake Esmel or the Gaping Face Cascade (where Gaping Stream, the westernmost of the two tributaries of the upper Esmel River that join each other in the Troll Mountains and then flow south to join the Esmel at Trollford, is born). Balagos hunts anywhere he pleases, always over land and usually taking creatures on the move and not actually in mountains (the great wyrm is too cunning to trust confined spaces and the cover that caverns and rock pinnacles afford enemies).

To Balagos, there is no such thing as a 'typical day.' He's always varying what he does, so no foe can catch him in a routine and no creature living in his domain can come to feel safe and complacent. He's as likely to alight on the roof of a coster hall in Athkatla as to sun himself on high ledges in the Troll Mountains, and every so often he flies hard and fast along the Trade Way, 40' or so off the ground, terrifying horses and humans alike, and sending goods and wagons tumbling in the wind of his passing. If a farmer in Amn checks over his shoulder to look at the roof of his barn when coming in from the fields at dusk, grunting that "the King of All Dragons could be a-sittin' up there — or

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anywhere!" Balagos is well pleased; that's exactly how he wants all of the creatures he rules over to feel.

Such behavior has won him no shortage of foes, and many a wizard has sought to win fame as "the destroyer of the dread Balagos" — but such titles must be earned, and though a lone red dragon shouldn't be able to prevail against the right combination of spells and items, somehow Balagos always seems to survive, and the list of wizards who ended up as smoldering bones spit into bone pit by the Flying Flame grows ever longer.

Balagos takes no mates, though it's said he once consorted with Uluuthavarra, a venerable red dragon who laired somewhere near the Lake of Steam. In the end he had to slaughter all of his offspring, after they slew and ate their mother and came looking for him. Several wizards (including Elminster) share the belief that Balagos is covertly trying to research clone magics or a new kind of lichdom that will allow him to retain more of his powers than the Cult-assisted undead dragons that he contemptuously calls "bone dragons."

Balagos holds no special affinities or hatreds for anyone; all beings are his rightful subjects, and all who defy him must be destroyed. To many observers, he seems one of the few mad tyrants in the Realms who just might have a chance to carry out such a policy and survive, as he already has done, for more than a thousand years.



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A party of brave adventurers is hired by some farmers to drive off savage flying creatures that attack at night. By the moon's light, a great battle ensues. The next morning, the party is seized for malicious property damage by the farmers who hired them. Assuming our heroes are guilty, how did it happen?

Answer: The party fought darknebeas, created from the pets and livestock of the farmers.

Currently, Balagos is thought to be assembling a small band of loyal human agents whose tasks will be to strike at any human organization or dragon cabal that plots to work together against Balagos. The first few of these agents have already slain a Red Wizard who tried to poison the Gaping Face Cascade, so as to render Balagos blind and paralyzed. (The wizard had the concentration of liquids wrong and succeeded only in causing the great wyrm several days of discomfort).

The magic of Balagos

Little accurate information is known of the magics of Balagos, but it is certain that he uses some powerful items crafted by others. One such is the *energy drain chain*, believed to have been crafted in long-ago Netheril, where they were used to capture, subdue, and control (as steeds, digging forces, or beasts of burden) large monsters such as dragons.

Energy Drain Chain

This ancient, rarely-seen item consists of two mithril manacles that expand or shrink magically (from about 3" in interior radius to about 20") to pass around a living body or stone spar that they're touched to as a command word is whispered (they do not change size if touched to wood or metal). A second command word causes the manacles to shrink again until they touch something solid — allowing them, for instance, to be put over a man's head and then shrunk to clasp his neck snugly.

To open a manacle or change its size, the correct command words must be uttered by a creature who is directly touching the manacle to be affected, and at the same time also carries (in direct flesh contact) a specific trigger substance (usually a disk of a particular type of metal, although anything made of the trigger substance will do). This substance is kept secret (usually hidden under clothing) to prevent others who overhear the command words from opening the manacles.

The manacles of an *energy drain chain* are linked by an arc of energy that appears as a flickering blue-white helix of small, darting lightnings. To change the length of this "chain," a wielder must possess a second trigger substance (always different than that for the manacles), touch the arc of energy, and then utter a command word and pull directly on one of the manacles to shorten or lengthen the arc. (The change ceases

when the being lets go of the manacle.)

A creature that strikes manacles or chain directly or with any sort of weapon (regardless of its conductivity) suffers 2d6 hp electrical damage per blow, and such attacks cause no damage to the item (beings imprisoned in the manacles at the time don't suffer this damage). Missile attacks don't harm the launcher, but they also leave the chain unaffected.

If a being imprisoned by an *energy drain chain* tries to cut it, otherwise attacks it, or tries to stretch it to reach something beyond the length set by its wielder, it drains 1d4 hp life energy (energy that can be regained only magically, not through rest and recuperation). For every 10 hp lost this way, the prisoner loses a Hit Die or experience level. (Wizards and priests forget memorized spells, all victims lose a level of class abilities and combat ability, etc.), to a minimum of 6 hp and 1st level (beyond which the chain does not drain, but instead confers 1d4 rounds of paralysis per attempt to stretch or harm it). Note that the chain stretches 5' per round; a determined prisoner who pulls continuously suffers one "drain" from the chain per round but may succeed in making the chain longer (until the aforementioned paralysis occurs, temporarily ending stretching attempts). A prisoner can't strangle, climb, or descend by means of the chain — it floats in a straight line between its anchor and its prisoner, *levitating* a prisoner who steps out into a chasm, for example, gently in its clasp.

The only known ways of severing an *energy drain chain*, or forcing open a manacle, are the application of *dispel magic* spells from a dozen different casters within a 2-turn period, the application of a properly-worded *wish* or *limited wish* spell, or the casting of a *disintegrate* spell so as to touch some part of the chain and simultaneously to destroy something made from, or partially made from, either of the trigger substances used to control the chain. A *legend lore* or similar spell always fails when used to learn the trigger substances of these chains. Note that other harmful effects used on an *energy drain chain* are transmitted with full effect to any prisoners of the chain.

Typically an *energy drain chain* is used to tether a powerful being to a stone spar — or two beings to each other, usually with the chain between them wrapped around a stone pillar or other anchor. (Note that in such a case the

horizontal level of such a chain can be altered if both prisoners work together to shift the arc up or down the pillar — which is why this sort of tether often involves passage of the chain through a hole or slot too narrow for the prisoners to pass through between the anchor and either prisoner.)

XP Value: 4,000
GP Value: 15,000

One spell employed by Balagos is known to Elminster:

Choking Claw

(Evocation)

Level: 5

Range: 10 yds./level (120 yds. for Balagos)

Components: V

Duration: 5 rounds

Casting Time: 5 (1 for Balagos)

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Special

This spell creates a black, taloned claw of translucent, shimmering magical force that appears in midair near a chosen target and slashes at that being. A choking claw can't strangle, grapple, or stab, only rake, and it makes one attack per round. Its caster can choose to

change targets, causing the claw to wink out of visibility for one round and then reappear adjacent to the new target on the next round. A *choking claw* disappears permanently if the caster undertakes the casting of any other spell, but otherwise it attacks by itself, moving and striking without the caster's attention, for round after round.

On the second round in which the claw attacks, the target rolls 1d6 and the claw rolls 1d8. If the scores are equal or the target rolls higher, the claw misses; otherwise, it deals 2d6 hp damage and disrupts any target spellcasting during that round. In addition, struck targets who are climbing or attempting other delicate or dangerous tasks may have to make a successful ability check to avoid a fall or other mishap, as the DM decrees.

The fate of Balagos

It's conceivable that The Simbul, any two of the other Seven Sisters, or a cabal of wizards led by Khelben, Elminster, or perhaps Halaster of Undermountain could defeat Balagos in face-to-face battle — and that a score or more of beings resident along the Sword Coast, such as the

ultra-lich Larloch, could destroy the Flying Flame if he attacked them on their home ground, where they could call on servitor creatures, magic items, and traps. Yet none of these mighty ones ever seems to manage to corner Balagos — and so his arrogant rule continues from decade to decade, century to century, and age to age. Misadventure or a lucky attack could weaken the wyrm and leave him vulnerable to the attacks of his many enemies, but at the moment such a fate seems unlikely. His recent efforts to achieve immortality, or at least a second chance, suggest that Balagos is at last feeling the hand of time. . . but they also mean that his first death may not be his last. Only his unpredictability keeps his tyranny from becoming intolerable — and so long as his brilliance never strays into foolishness, the Realms may live in fear of the Flying Flame for centuries to come.



Ed Greenwood, like his alter ego Elminster, is tall, bearded, untidy, prankish, and generally annoying — but he freely admits it all.

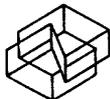
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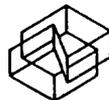


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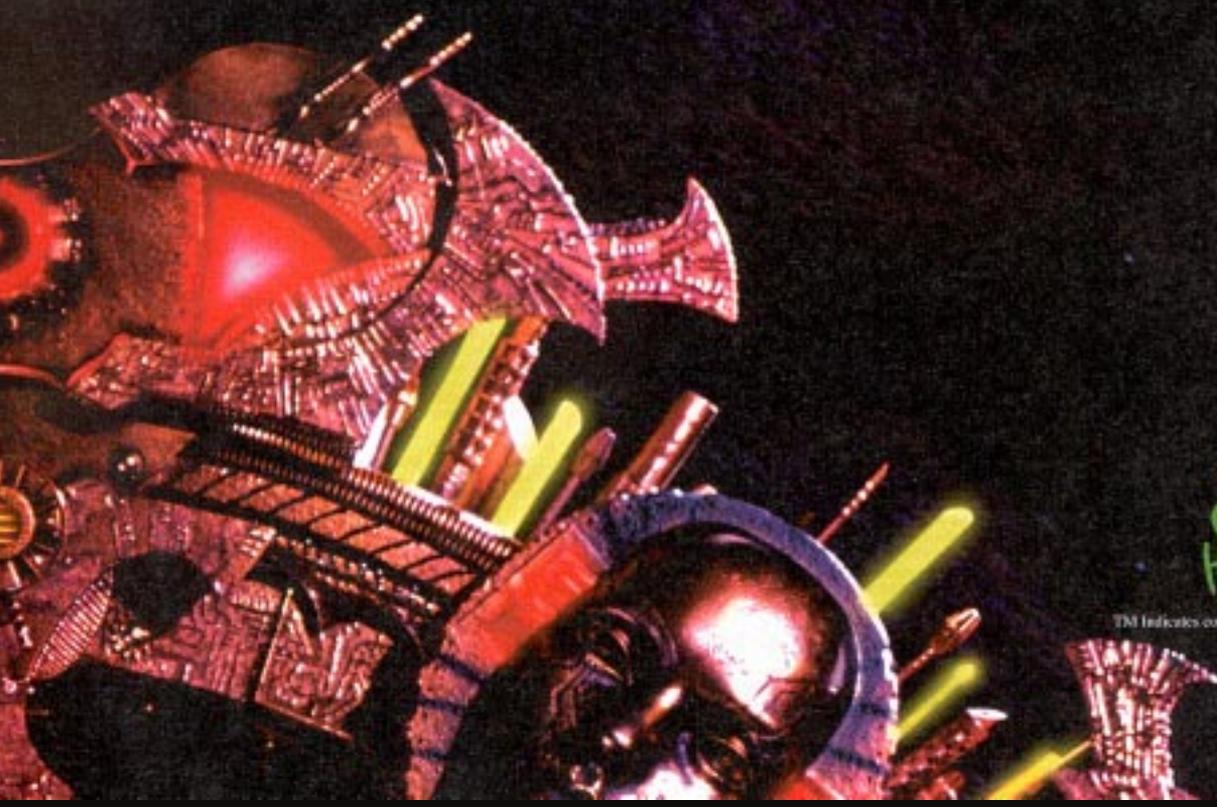
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This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

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.

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If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been canceled, 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.).



August Conventions

Gamefest XVII

August 6-10 CA
Old Towne, San Diego.
Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$20 pre-registered, \$30 on site. Gamefest, 3954 Harney St., San Diego, CA 92110.

Gamecon 9

August 18 VA
Holiday Inn, Fair Oaks Shopping Mall, Fairfax.
Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a flea market. Registration: \$3 NOVAG members, \$5 general public. NOVAG, P.O. Box 7158, Reston, VA 22091.

Dragonflight '96

August 23-25 WA
Bellarmine Hall on the Seattle University Campus, Seattle. Events: role-playing, card, board, miniatures, and network computer games. Other activities: seminars, dealers, and an auction. Registration: varies. Dragonflight, P.O. Box 417, Seattle, WA 98111-0417.

Migscon XVII

August 23-25 *
The Royal Connaught Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel, Hamilton, Ontario. Events:

miniature gaming, dealers, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: varies. MIGS, P.O. Box 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Hamilton, ON L8L 8E9, Canada.

Bubonicon 28

August 23-25 NM
Howard Johnson East, Albuquerque. Guests: Dennis McKiernan, Gordan Garb, and Lisa Scott. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, panels, an art show, a costume contest, movies, and more. Registration: \$25 on site. NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque, NM 87178.

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August 24-25 PA
Newberry Town Fire Hall in Etters. Events: political, economic, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers. Registration: varies. M. Forner's Games Only Emporium, 230 S. 8th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043.

LA Con III

August 29-Sept. 3 CA
Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim. Guests: James White, Roger Corman, and Connie Willis. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other

activities: exhibits and a charity raffle. LA Con III, 4557 Rueda Drive, San Diego, CA 92124.

Emperor's Birthday Con August 30-Sept. 1 IL

Arlington Park Hilton Hotel in Arlington Heights. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA® Network tournaments. Registration: varies. Randy Giesey, 1775 Ashford Circle, Wheeling, IL 60090-5100.

Gateway 16 August 30-Sept. 2 CA

LA Airport Wyndham Hotel, Los Angeles. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, seminars, and an auction. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502.

Campbellford Scottish & Medieval Festival

August 31 -Sept. 1 *
Campbellford Fair Grounds in Campbellford, Ontario. Events: role-playing games and a medieval feast. Registration: \$6 preregistered, \$8 on site. Harry Heydon, 81 Ranney St. S., Campbellford, Ontario, K0L 1L0, Canada.

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Dragon® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with our first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it 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 do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

Mage Con South XI
August 31 -Sept. 2 IA
Sioux City Hilton, Sioux City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and an art show. Registration: varies. M.A.G.E., P.O. 114, Sioux City, IA 51250.

September Conventions

Round Table Gaming Society
September 7 SC
The University of South Carolina, Russel House. Events: *Magic: the Gathering** tournaments including a type one tournament offering a Black Lotus, a sealed deck tournament, and a type two beginner's tournament. Registration: varies. Round Table Gaming Society, University of South Carolina, P.O. Box 80018, Columbia, SC 29225, or e-mail: uscrtg@aol.com

Wincon
September 13-15 *
Ramada Marlborough, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction. Registration: varies. GITS, P.O. Box 28073, 1453 Henderson Hwy, Winnipeg, MB, R2G 4E9, Canada.

Falcon '96
September 14 *
Lord Nelson Hotel, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Guests: Robert Sawyer, Peter Francis, Michael Gallant, and Luisa Nadalini. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: cabaret, a costume contest, and an art show and auction. Registration: varies. Falcon, P.O. Box 36123, Halifax, NS, B3J 3S9, Canada, or e-mail: gtucker@fox.nstn.ns.ca.

Fron 14
September 21-22 *
Burgerhaus Griesheim, Schwarzerlenweg 57, Frank-

furt. Guests: James Wallis and Andrew Rilstone. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: demos, tournaments, workshops, movies, and a miniatures painting contest. Roleplaying and Simulation Game Club, Martin Kliehm, In der Roemerstadt 164, 60439 Frankfurt, Germany, or e-mail: martin.kliehm@frankfurt.netsurf.de

Bogglecon 4
September 21 PA
Wind Gap Legion Hall on Broadway, Wind Gap. Events: Living City™ tournaments, card, board, and role-playing games, and free games demonstrations. Other activities: dealers, a games auction and raffle, and canned food drive. Registration: \$3, or \$5 at the door. Most game events cost \$1. For more information, send SASE to M. Griffith, 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap, PA 18091.

Civic Con
September 22 IN
Hammond Civic Center, Hammond. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a comic show. Registration: \$2. Atlantis Productions, 2654 Forest Park Dr., Dyer, IN 46311, or e-mail: atlantis@tsrcom.com.

Cog Con
September 27-29 MO
The Miner Recreation Building at the University of Missouri, Rolla. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 on site. CogCon, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla, MO 65402, or e-mail: CogConIV@aol.com.

Hostile Aircraft Aces Tournament
September 27-29 NY
Travel Lodge, Kingston. Events: open gaming, and a hostile aircraft tournament. Registration: \$20 preregis-

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tered, \$25 on site. Goblin-tooth Enterprises, 46 Highland St., Reading, MA 01867.

Shorecon '96
September 27-29 NJ
Berkeley Carteret, Asbury Park. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a masquerade, an auction, art show, anime, a dance, etc. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Multigenre Inc., 266 Spruce Drive, Brick, NJ 08723.

Nuke-Con
September 28-29 NE
Holiday Inn Central, Omaha. Guests: Tom Prusa and Fredd Groham. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: varies. Nuke-Con, 13115 Josephine Circle, Omaha, NE 68138, or e-mail: nuke-con@synergy.net.

Organized Kahn Fusion-Battletech
September 28-29 PA
Newberry Town Fire Hall, Eters. This is a *Battletech* -only con featuring: single, lance, free for all, and mechwarrior games. Other activities: dealers and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: varies. M. Forner's Games Only Emporium, 230 S. 8th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043.

October Conventions

Cangames
October 4-6 *
Ottawa Congress Centre, Ottawa, Ontario. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: auction, seminars, dealers, and miniatures painting. Registration: varies. Cangames, 6930 Sunset Blvd., Greely, ONT, Canada K4P 1C5, or e-mail: cangames@iosphere.net.

Westward Ho 1
October 5 TX
Best Western, Midland. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers and open gaming. Registration: \$4 preregistered, \$5 on site. Westward Ho 1, P.O. Box 9805, Midland, TX 79708.

Necronomicon '96
October 11-13 FL
Camberly Inn, Tampa. Guests: Tim Powers, Michael Straczynski, and Brinke Stevens. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a Ygor party, panels, an art show, dealers, and a masquerade. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$25 on site. Necronomicon, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview, FL 33569 or e-mail: 74273.1607@compuserve.com.

Continued on page 97

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RAL PARTHA

New Undead Army?



Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 51347, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, Dragon Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge, CB1 3LB, U.K. You can also e-mail questions to tsrsage@aol.com.

This month, the Sage lays down the law about personal replies, considers the finer points of backstabbing, and looks at a few optional rules and spell effects for the AD&D® game.

In January of this year, I sent you a question about the ghul lord kit from *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook* (specifically about the process of leeching). I enclosed an international postal reply coupon that cost me \$5.16 Canadian. For five bucks, I think I'm entitled to an answer.

I pointed out two things back in issue #228 that bear on your case. Alas, #228 was the April issue, too late to save you from the horrible fate of being \$5.16 (Canadian) poorer: First, "Sage Advice" does not send personal replies, even if you include return postage and a properly addressed envelope. Of course, the good folks at DRAGON® Magazine require you to enclose a coveted SASE (Self Addressed, Stamped Envelope) with any article submission or other piece of correspondence that requires a reply from them, such as a request for submission guidelines. But "Sage Advice" sends no replies and you're wasting your money if you send a SASE to the Sage. In the world of gaming this is what we would call an exception to the general rule. In a rulebook, it might read something like this:

The "Sage Advice" column does not send personal replies. Readers should not send SASEs with questions for the Sage.

Now, there are a few little details that our theoretical rulebook writer above left out. (Rulebook writers are always doing

this; that's why the Sage has a job.) So here they are: When writing to the DRAGON Magazine staff, you have to send a SASE that is big enough and has enough postage to do the job. You can't send in a 30-page manuscript along with a dinky little envelope and 32¢ (US) postage and expect to get your manuscript mailed back to you when the staff finishes with it. Also, the Sage is not a member of the DRAGON Magazine staff, which is one reason why he doesn't send personal replies. It doesn't make a difference how much return postage you send or how hard you have to strive to drop your question into a mailbox. I'd love to maintain personal correspondence with all my readers, but I'm just one guy with only 10 fingers, and it's just not possible for me to answer everybody's questions individually.

This whole exception-to-the-rule business confuses people, and each month I get a couple of SASEs. I turn those over to the DRAGON Magazine staff, who stuff the envelopes with writer's guidelines and mail them back. I'll take your word for it that your January letter had a postal reply coupon in it, and I'll pass your current letter on to the DRAGON Magazine folks so that you can get your writer's guidelines, too. I should point out that writing the Sage is a bad way to get writer's guidelines, as your reply will be delayed at least a month, maybe more.

On to the second useful (but belated) thing from issue #228: Check your back issues for the answer to your question before sending it in. As it happens, I answered your question about ghul lords back in issue #218. See if any of your gaming pals has the issue (in my experience, every group has at least one pack rat who saves copies of anything gaming related). Failing that, check out your local library or game store. If you've got a computer and a modem, you can get the text from issue #218 (and lots of other back issues) from the TSR, Inc. area on America Online (keyword TSR).

If a thief sneaks up on a sleeping character and attacks him, does he get extra damage from a backstab? Attacking a sleeping opponent has the same attack modifiers as a backstab according to the new rules in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Combat & Tactics* and *Skills & Powers* books.

A backstab requires that the thief be behind his target and that the target be unaware of the thief or unaware of the thief's intention to attack. Sleeping characters generally aren't very aware. Many creatures can't be backstabbed at all; however, see the next question.

My DM insists that thieves gain extra damage from backstabbing only because they know how to strike at a creature's vital organs. He allows characters to get damage bonuses from backstabbing only if the target creature actually has a spine. He says backstabbing doesn't work against undead at all. Is this right? It seems to me that the damage bonuses ought to apply to anything that has an actual front and back.

Overall, your DM is being more generous than he has to be. If you read the description of the backstab ability in Chapter 3 of the *Player's Handbook*, you'll learn that part of the skill involves knowing where to strike. The *PHB* goes on to say that a backstab target must be a humanoid with a definable back and that the backstabbing thief must be able to reach a significant target area. So, your DM has expanded the list of possible backstab targets by opening it up to anything with a spine. In either case, your thief character couldn't backstab a roper or beholder.

Incorporeal undead should remain immune to backstabs, judging from the text in the *PHB* (no significant target areas). One could make a similar argument for other undead as well; zombies just don't care if somebody sticks a knife into their kidneys. On the other hand, most undead are humanoid, which is the basic requirement for backstabbing. A skeleton or a ghoul probably is going to find a severed spine inconvenient. In campaigns where the DM strictly limits backstabbing to humanoids, corporeal undead should be susceptible (if they're humanoid). If the DM has loosened up the general restriction (as yours has), there's justification for limiting backstabbing in other ways (as your DM also has).

When a flying creature makes a “swoop attack” against a fighter who is using the guard option from the *Combat & Tactics* book, and the swooping creature moves away at full speed, how many attacks does the fighter have? If the fighter is normally entitled to multiple attacks (due to level or specialization or both), does he gain any extra attacks?

It all depends on the exact sequence of events and how the fighter is facing relative to the swoop attack. If the swooping creature makes a flank or rear attack, the fighter has no attack at all, because he doesn't threaten the swooping creature.

If the swooping creature makes a frontal attack, the fighter has his first attack phase as soon as the creature comes within reach (this is not an attack of opportunity). If the swooping creature makes its attack, then flies away in the same round, the warrior gains an attack of opportunity when it leaves. Remember that an attack of opportunity allows one phase's worth of attacks. If the fighter has one weapon, he has one attack. If the fighter has a weapon in each hand, he has two attacks. Each separate attack, however, counts against the maximum number of attacks of opportunity the fighter can make in a single round.

If the swooping creature attacks the warrior and ends its movement, then uses the withdraw option on the next round, the fighter might not get any more attacks against it, because withdrawing from a threatened area doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity.

Does a character's movement rate have any effect on his base initiative phase in the optional combat system from the *Combat & Tactics* book? For example, a mountain dwarf is size M, giving him a base phase of fast. Does the dwarf slow down to average because his Movement Rate is only 6?

A character's base movement rate (see *Combat & Tactics*, page 13) does affect his base initiative phase, as explained on page 18. Note that base movement can be improved by high ability scores (see pages 14 and 15), which can allow dwarves, gnomes, and halflings to avoid the penalty to base initiative because of a movement rate of 6. Note also that you calculate the base initiative adjustment for movement rate before calculating a character's final movement score, which includes encumbrance. Otherwise, you could penalize an encumbered charac-

ter's base initiative twice, once for his reduced movement rate and once for his encumbrance category.

Note that the rules on page 18 are intended primarily for monsters, not player characters. Most PCs are supposed to have base initiative phases of fast. You should treat all dwarves as man-sized creatures with base initiative phases of fast despite their actual heights and their racial movement rates of 6. That is, do not treat some dwarves as small creatures (with the attendant limitations on weapon use) just because they happen to be under 4' tall, and don't sock any dwarf with a base initiative of average just because his legs are short.

When casting *cause light wounds*, or similar touch-delivered spells, does the target get the full benefit of armor, or does it not apply? The logic behind it not applying would be that the touch does not have to contact flesh, that it can simply touch the armor and be effective. I have ruled that the armor does apply, except in the case of *shocking grasp*, which can be transmitted through a conductive object such as metal armor.

Any touch-delivered spell requires a successful attack roll against the target's normal armor class, including adjustments for armor worn. There's no law of physics that applies here, it's just the way touch-delivered spells work. Allowing *shocking grasp* to ignore metallic armor sounds fine to me, but any adjustments for the target's shield, Dexterity, and defensive magic (including metal armor's enchantment) should still apply.

When you dual class a character, do you pick new weapon proficiencies and nonweapon proficiencies as you would when starting a new character? Bonus proficiencies from a high Intelligence score would not apply, right? Can the character immediately use the nonweapon proficiencies from the general grouping learned under his previous class? Or does he have to wait until the new class's level exceeds the old? What about weapon or nonweapon proficiencies that belong to a grouping allowed to the new character class? If the character learns the same nonweapon proficiency twice, once for the old class and once for the new, what happens when the new class level exceeds the old? Does the character have the old proficiency score plus a bonus for learning it again?

I'm inclined to favor the simplest possible answer to your questions. A dual-classed character gains no new weapon or nonweapon proficiencies upon choosing a new class. This differs slightly from an answer I gave to a similar question a few years ago, but your question has caused me to reconsider.

Nonweapon proficiencies really aren't a function of a character's class. The character has full access to all the nonweapon proficiencies he knows (no matter what groups they're from) but doesn't receive any new nonweapon proficiencies until after his level in his new class exceeds his level in the old class. I'm assuming nonweapon proficiencies are something like hit points; the character acquires them by virtue of his class and level, but they aren't really class abilities. Instead, they become part of the character, and the character takes them right along when assuming a new class.

Weapon proficiencies, on the other hand, are a class function. The character cannot use weapons not normally allowed to his class without forfeiting all experience he would otherwise gain on an adventure. If the character is proficient in a weapon allowed to the new class, he can use it without penalty. If the character is not proficient in any weapons allowed to his new class, he has to struggle along as best he can until his new level exceeds his old one and he can learn to use another weapon. Characters who do a little advance planning will be much better off than characters who leap unprepared into a new profession.

This answer does not quite conform to the letter of the dual-class rules in Chapter 3 of the *PHB*, but it sticks to the spirit pretty well and saves both players and DMs a lot of headaches.

Under the description of the 2nd-level priest spell *nap*, from the *Tome of Magic*, it states that wizards can memorize a new set of spells after benefiting from the *nap*. But what about priests? Even though it is a priest spell, they are not specifically mentioned as being able to memorize new spells after benefiting from the *nap*. My current ruling has been that priests receive spells from their deities only once per day (provided they get enough rest before memorizing them), much like many of the other granted spell-like powers. It is not just a question of rest and memorization it is a question of how often the power will grant the request for spells.

If it is allowed for priests, then we will likely find a lot of annoyed deities who are getting called upon three or more times a day to grant each one of their priests spells all over again. One of the criteria for priests is Wisdom; this includes enough common sense on how best to use their spells, and not to waste them. Therefore I believe that other than the rest and healing effects of the spell, *nap*, it has no other effect on priests and their memorization of spells. Is this correct?

You've offered a darn good logical argument for not allowing priests to learn fresh spells as a result of a *nap* spell. On the other hand, nobody is going to use this spell three or more times a day, because characters can *nap* only once every 18 hours (see spell description). I'm inclined to follow your logic this far: wizards and bards (who cast wizard spells) can memorize spells immediately after a *nap*. Rangers, paladins, and priests (including clerics and druids) cannot unless the DM decides the deity who grants the spells has some compelling reason to bestow spells on the characters in question at the time in question. No deity is going to withhold spells from a character who is ready to receive them if the character has been faithful to his alignment and to his deity and who faces a situation in which outcome could affect the deity's interests. Of course, the DM is under no obligation to tell the players whether more spells

will be granted when the characters awaken from their *naps*; the players will have to weigh the risks carefully. In any case, granting extra priest spells after a *nap* should be fairly rare; as you point out, no deity looks favorably on a character who's constantly requesting spells just to waste them or use them for self glorification.

As you point out, this whole discussion begs another question: Just how often can a priest or any other spell caster memorize new spells. The answer is literally as often as the DM is prepared to let them. As long as the character gets a good night's sleep (about eight hours), he can expect to start memorizing new spells whenever he wakes up. It's pretty difficult for anyone to sleep for a full eight hours unless he's been awake and active for the preceding 10 to 14 hours, but exceptions do occur. Priests, as you point out, can be an exception. If the priest has done something to offend his deity, no spells are forthcoming no matter how well rested the priest is.

If a character is a dual- or multi-classed wizard/priest, can he use a contingency spell to activate a priest spell? What about a psionic power or any special ability?

There's nothing in the spell description that says the *contingency* caster has to use a wizard spell, but the effect to be triggered via the *contingency* must be a spell. Effects from magical items, psionic abilities, priest granted abilities, or innate

powers cannot be included in a *contingency*. Note that all the normal limitations still apply to priest spells; that is, the spell must be cast in conjunction with the *contingency* spell (as part of the *contingency's* one-turn casting time), it must affect only the *contingency* caster's person, and it must fall within the level limit (half the caster's level, rounded down and no higher than 6th level in any case).

Is there an initial saving throw against charm -type spells? Or is the target automatically charmed? One player "threw a cow" when I told him that the charm spell his character had cast didn't work.

Check the spell's description. I expect you'll find that any *charm* -type spell has a saving throw of "neg," which means that the recipient is entitled to a saving throw when the spell is cast, and the spell has no effect at all if the saving throw succeeds.

In any case, there are two things you don't have to do when adjudicating *charm* spells. First, you don't have to say whether the spell worked; you can let the player figure that out on his own. If the target is familiar with spell casters, it might surmise that it has been subjected to a *charm* spell attempt and only pretend to be charmed. Second, you don't have to put up with bovine ballistics. Players who can't handle the occasional failure shouldn't be playing the game.

What would happen to the cloud generated by the 2nd-level wizard spell *stinking cloud* if a 3rd-level *fireball* spell were cast in the same area? Would the fiery blast bum up the cloud? Would the area be choked with smoke from the *fireball* and noxious gases from the *stinking cloud*?

The gas from a *stinking cloud* spell is not flammable, and it takes a pretty stiff breeze to blow it away. A *fireball* doesn't generate nearly enough pressure to disperse a *stinking cloud*. A *fireball* doesn't generate any smoke by itself, but flammable materials might smoke quite a bit if a *fireball* sets them alight. Usually, however, the leftover smoke from a *fireball* wouldn't be noticeable within a *stinking cloud*.

Skip reports that he encountered a large, smoky cloud personally as he fired up an outdoor grill right after finishing the first draft of this month's column.

By David Hanson



"Then, last week we had a medusa in here! She wanted all of her snakes bleached blond..."



Forum welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games.

In the United States and Canada, send any correspondence to "Forum," DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, send mail to "Forum," DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, U.K. You can also send e-mail to tsrdragon@aol.com.

We ask that all material be neatly typed or handwritten. You must give us your full name and mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed (we will not consider a letter sent anonymously), but we will withhold your name if you ask us to do so, and we will not print your full address unless you request it.

I simply had to respond in turn to Tim Nutting's response (issue #230) to my Forum letter about the Muscle subability (issue #228). It took a second glance to verify that his earlier (and more civil) letter in issue #226 was written by the same individual. Tim states in #226 that he has no problem with people airing their complaints, but I wonder . . .

Let's address each point: firstly, when I mention the number of years I've been playing the AD&D® game at the start of my letters, it is simply a way of introducing myself. I agree, everyone makes mistakes. I have met excellent DMs with one year of playing experience and jaded, inept DMs who have been playing since the white-box days. There is no seniority in role-playing games, and my letters were not meant to imply this.

Regarding the nature of the rules: They're optional? Really? You mean TSR thugs won't come to my house and rough me up if I delete or change some rules? Obviously, I'm joking. I actually mentioned to friends that an "It's optional, you guys!" letter would soon be coming, and some of them threatened (jokingly) to write one.

The reason I mentioned my objections with the PLAYER'S OPTION™ rules is simple: the Forum was introduced in issue #81 as "a place where we can print your opinions and observations." Get it? (Obviously not.)

Lighten up, people. Most (or all) of us know the rules are completely optional, but we can all benefit by being fussy about what TSR makes "official" and by engaging in some thought-provoking exchanges! Any DM worth his dice knows enough to change offensive rules. I was simply curious if anyone shared my opinion, and I wanted to start a little debate. If stating my opinion strongly makes me an illithid, so be it. (Mind flayers do have a "genius" intelligence, you know.)

The Forum is an *opinion* column about the AD&D game; therefore, letters debating rules imbroglis are certain to appear, just as the "Mom thinks gaming is evil" and "no more fantasy women in bikinis" issues will reappear every so often. I'm truly sorry if Tim Nutting or others find the semi-constant rules arguments and game balance observations tedious; I find them educational, thought-provoking, and occasionally amusing, but never

Despite Tim's comments, the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Skills & Powers* book states on page 12: "no subability score can be lower than 3, and — with the exception of Strength — no subability score can be higher than 18." There is also a clear reference on page 19 under the Strength heading: "Or, the fighter might have a 20 Stamina or Muscle...." I'm typically not a "rules quoter," but I wanted to illustrate the parts of the book that may be causing problems. I am well aware of racial maximums, but there is no rule stating that a racial Strength maximum of 18 also limits relating subabilities (Muscle or Stamina) to 18. Most convention groups I have encountered interpret the rules in a manner that allows fighters to possess Muscle scores of 20; hence, my original letter.

Discarding rules is great when you are the DM, but what about the player who enters a convention event where *PLAYER'S OPTION* rules are used? What about the player who joins a group in which the DM follows *all* of the *PLAYER'S OPTION* rulebooks to the letter? This latter example actually happened to me recently, yet the DM is both knowledgeable and competent. My first Forum let-

"They're optional? Really? You mean TSR thugs won't come to my house and rough me up if I delete or change some rules?"

boring. If a person cannot read Forum without condemning others as whiners, inexperienced, or whatever, perhaps that person should simply skip the column. Long-time readers (including me) must remember that what is an "old" Forum argument to you may be entirely new and have great merit to others.

In my campaigns, the Muscle problem isn't a factor, because I ignore the rules as they are written and substitute the remedy I mentioned in my first letter. By the way, Tim mentions the same solution I mentioned in issue #228. To quote my letter: "I recommend treating the Muscle and Stamina percentile divisions as whole numbers; thus, a character with 17 Strength can adjust to gain a 15 Stamina and maximum 18 (01) Muscle." Tim's interpretation of the *strength* spell is somewhat incorrect (the spell actually lets an 18-Strength fighter increase by 10% increments per point, not chart brackets per point), but his basic implications are sound.

ter was actually the result of a post-game debate I had with two long-time players and the aforementioned DM, all of whom insisted that fighters should have Muscle scores of 20.

On a side note, I agree wholeheartedly with the comments made by Larry Framness and Tres DeLoach in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #227. Gentlemen, I salute you. What made the "oldie" modules such as the "S" and "G/D" series great was *atmosphere*, coupled with detailed lairs and monster tactics. I have never seen a better series of giant lairs than the G1-3 series nor a creepier tomb than the *Tomb of Horrors*; perhaps mind-numbingly long plots and pages of trite NPC descriptions are not necessary if a module is written creatively. I'd also like to thank Tim Gray for his letter (issue #228); it was both funny and dead on target in its player descriptions.

Rick Maffei
Ridgewood, NJ

I am writing in response to Adam Cole's letter from issue #228. Mr. Cole (like so many others) is admonishing players who like fantasy role-playing, as opposed to historic role-playing. I am not certain which "fantasy literature and games" he is referring to, but I hardly consider the nobles from, say, the RAVENLOFT® or the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting as "corporate officers."

Mr. Cole needs to realize that this is fantasy, not Europe of 1513. Even in medieval Europe the "divine right" of kings was not always heeded. The peasants' revolt of 1381 proved this.

Fantasy games like the AD&D game offer us much in the way of diversity. There is room for all aspects, historical or otherwise. Not everyone needs to be a student of history to play the game.

Jeffrey Martin
Rockwell NC

I am writing in response to the letter by Nick Spear in issue #229.

First of all, I understand his point. Without magic, we would have to rename the game "Dungeons," and all of the really strange things that make the

game fun and interesting would be gone. However, I think he misunderstands what Paul Fraser was talking about.

Mr. Fraser is not advocating the elimination of all magic, merely the limitation of PC access to it. As Mr. Fraser states early in his article, "... an overabundance [of magic] is the easiest way for any fantasy role-playing campaign to get out of control." How many mid-level characters do you know walking around with the powers of the gods in their pockets? By the time that dwarven warrior has his *girdle of giant strength*, his *sword +2*, his three *potions of healing*, and his *necklace of missiles*, what can you threaten him with other than an archmage or the tarrasque? If every city has two or three archmages in it (as seems the case in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting), why journey to a far country to visit the only wizard who can remove your character's curse? Why bother with creatures that can be hit only by magical weapons when every character has at least three?

Besides that, look at your favorite fantasy novels. In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*,

there are only a few true wizards, but does that make Middle-earth less magical? Why, in Middle-earth, the very stones and trees are alive! On the other hand, in Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, the Aes Sedai are not exactly uncommon and have even formed a society (the White Tower), but they have not begun to open shops in the markets, and magical items (called *angreal*) are still exceedingly rare treasures.

Certainly, one can create a world of djinni-driven railroads, flying castles, and *crystal ball* booths, but after a while, magic in these worlds grows stale, and the wizards are taken for granted. If you are a wizard, which world would you rather be in: one in which you are in competition for attention with three more on the same block — or one in which you are treated with the fear and awe anyone who can slay with a few mumbled words and a gesture or two deserves? You can have your fleet of airships; I'll take the path to wonder and awe.

Michael D. Bugg
Lilburn, GA



Cons

Continued from page 90

Knight Games '96

October 11-13 NY

Berkeley Carroll School, Brooklyn. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$15 preregistered. Knight Games, P.O. Box 3041, Brooklyn, NY 11201 or e-mail: DSamuels@aol.com.

NovaCon '96

October 11-13 TX

The Memorial Student Center of Texas A&M University, College Station. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, *anime*, open gaming, and an art show. Registration: \$12. Alison Tashima, Director of Public Relations Memorial Student Center, Texas A&M, Box J-1, College Station, TX 77844-5117, or e-mail: mscnova@tamu.edu.

Pensacon

October 11-13 FL

Pensacola Grand Hotel, Pensacola. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and an auction. Registration: \$30. Pensacon, P.O. Box 9350, Pensacola, FL 32513.

TolCon XIV

October 12-13 OH

Scott Park Campus of the University of Toledo. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, an auction, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$8/weekend, \$5/day. TolCon XIV, c/o Mind Games, 2115 N. Reynolds, Toledo, OH 43615.

Totally Tubular Con IV

October 18-20 CA

Days Inn, Fullerton. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a LIVING CITY tournament. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Totally

Tubular Con, P.O. Box 18791, Anaheim Hills, CA 92871-8791, or send e-mail to: partdragon@aol.com.

Fantacon

October 26 IN

Porter County fairgrounds, Valparasio. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a card and comic show, tournaments. Registration: \$2. Atlantis Productions, 2654 Forest Park Dr., Dyer, IN 46311, or e-mail: atlantis@tsrcom.com.

Frontier Wars 11

October 26-27 IL

Miller Park Pavilion, Bloomington. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction and a painting contest. Registration: \$10/weekend, \$6/day. Becky Spenser, 218 Kaiser Ave., Normal, IL 61761.

Gamma Con

October 26-27 TX

Four Points by Sheraton, Texarkana. Guests: Roxanne Longstreet, Cat Conrad, Joy Marie Ledet, and Elissa Mitchell. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, tournaments, an art show and auction, and a costume contest. Registration: \$25/weekend, \$15/day. Outpost Productions, 503 Courthouse Ave., New Boston, TX 75570.

Sibcon '96

October 26 PA

Days Inn Conference Center, Butler. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, demos, and tournaments. Registration: \$5 preregistered, \$7 on site. Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003.



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Network NEWS

by Nicky Rea

"Hear ye, hear ye! Milords and miladies, heroes, champions and gentlefolk, all..." So begins the call to adventure for the GEN CON® Game Fair's third annual LIVING CITY™ interactive event. Set in the member-created city of Ravens Bluff, the Interactive has become a popular attraction at the Game Fair, DragonCon, and other conventions throughout the United States and the world. But what exactly is an interactive? And how does it differ from tabletop gaming and live-action role-playing?

Role-playing is like extemporaneous theater. The player characters respond with ad lib dialogue and describe their actions in response to a set plot line. Players and game master usually remain

The RPGA® Network serves over 9,500 members worldwide. Network clubs sponsor conventions, support charities, write tournaments, playtest new games, and participate in a friendly competition known as the Decathlon. Members meet online, on campuses and at conventions.

The Network publishes the POLYHEDRON® Newszine, which members receive monthly. This award-winning publication features articles from members and industry authors, news from HQ, and original artwork. The Network sanctions tournaments for AD&D® game, *Shadowrun**, *Star Wars**, *Amber**, and other game systems for use at hundreds of conventions.

For more information about the Networks programs, write to: RPGA Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or send e-mail to: rpgahq@aol.com.

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seated at a table and roll dice, draw cards, or use other methods of determining whether their actions succeed or fail. Games such as *Amber Diceless Role Playing** are said to be interactive because they compare relative skills rather than utilizing random factors such as dice. Such systems require more description from both game master and players to determine the outcome of character actions.

SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) events, White Wolf's *Mind's Eye Theatre**, the LIVING CITY Interactive, *Dark Confrontations**, and the *Shattered Isles** (a new medieval fantasy live-action) are all interactive. They take role-playing a step further, adding physical movement and often costumes, props, and scenery to the mix. Even among these, however, there are differences. The SCA is not so much about role-playing as recreating a medieval society in which mock battles are fought and kingships claimed. *Mind's Eye Theatre*, *Dark Confrontations*, and other live-action events encourage doing rather than describing, and provide room for characters to interact with one another and solve problems presented by the plot. They do not allow physical contact, instead resolving actions through playing rock-paper-scissors or tossing coins. Groups who play at home often have ongoing story lines and characters who grow and improve with experience. *Dark Confrontations* has ongoing characters as well, but these are not always played by the same person.

LIVING CITY Interactives are much like live action role-playing, but all the PCs are created by those who play them, and each has a background in the city of Ravens Bluff, established through play during other LIVING CITY events. The

world background itself is consistent; the Interactives take place against the backdrop of ongoing events that affect the city and those who adventure there. Finally, rather than having storytellers who move about resolving conflicts, and who may take NPC roles during play, most of the NPCs to be met in LIVING CITY Interactives are there to run booths, spread rumors, and entice characters into skill contests and adventures. And that may be the main difference: booths, shops, recognizable continuing characters and a variety of activities for character participation. While there may be a plot, not every character has to assume a role in it. You are free to roam, interact with others, play poker at Thud's House of Cards, or trade magical items. The Interactive is what you make of it.

This year at DragonCon, the interactive, named "A Night in the Old Harbor," featured the launching of the city's first warship since the war began. Sites to visit included the Temple of Tempus; the fortune-telling booth of Reina, the Gypsy Princess; Thud's House of Cards; Sharkey's Bar (familiar to many from the recent Weekend in Ravens Bluff convention); and Potions, Lotions and Notions.

At the GEN CON Game Fair, characters will enter "A City Under Siege." Ravens Bluff has, of late, been besieged by well organized and powerful enemies. Now the city celebrates its first victory of the war. Knights on leave from the front may participate in contests utilizing practice weapons. (The real ones are needed at the front.) The Ministry of Art and the Wizards' Guild combine forces to present the Dartboard of Transmutation from the "Mansion of the Mad Wizard Ren," and enthusiastic "recruiters" for the war effort will be out in the street. Elminster, the sage of Shadowdale, has consented to a brief appearance, heartening all good and true citizens during their darkest hour. Both of these interactive scenarios were written by prolific RPGA Network member Dan Donnelly. You're all invited, so come to Ravens Bluff and enjoy!



Nicky Rea is a freelance game designer and member of the RPGA Network. She lives in the mountains of western North Carolina, where she is owned by five cats and a personal computer.

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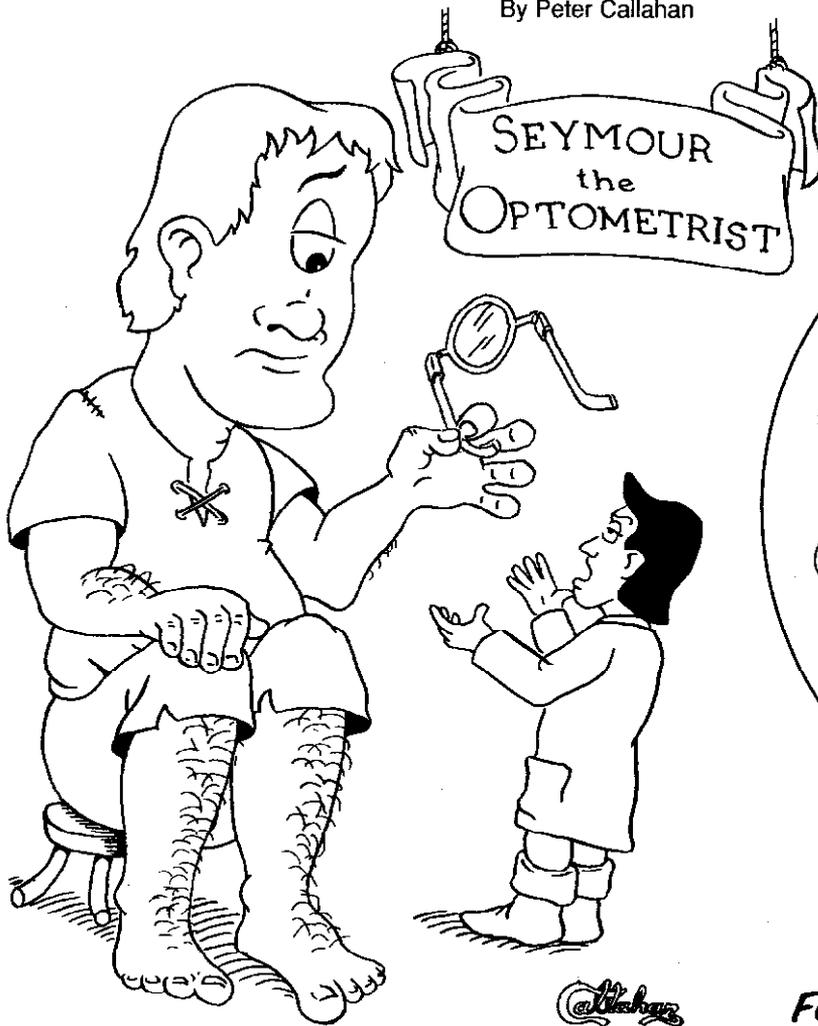


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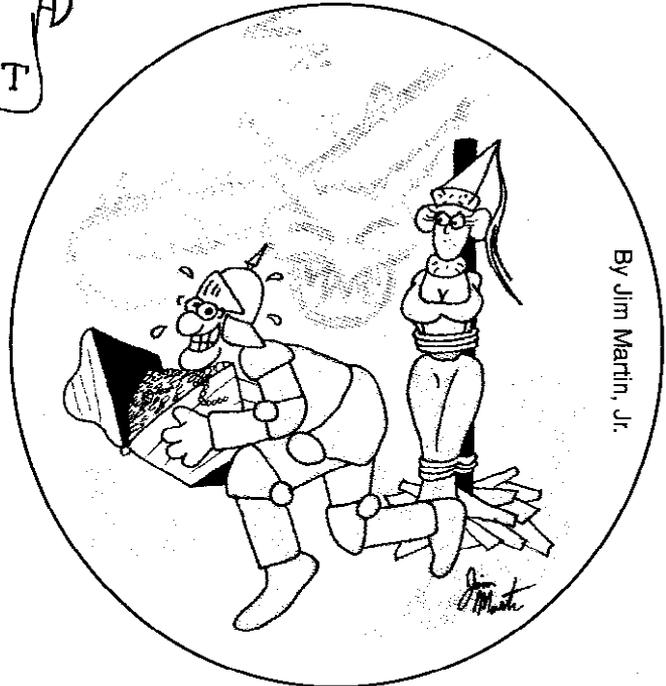
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"What do you mean, are they half priced?"

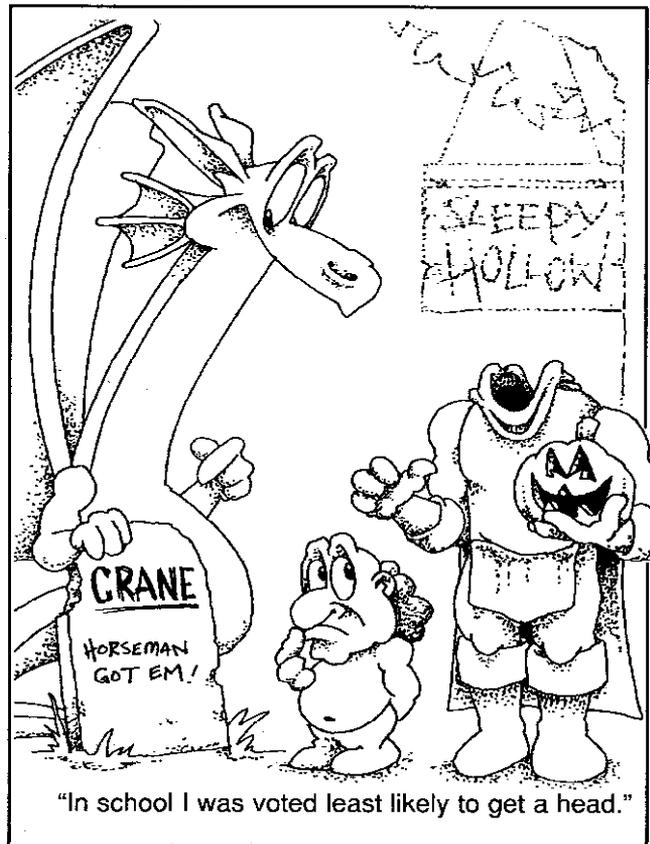
Callahan



By Jim Martin, Jr.

"What do you mean, 'I'll be right back...'"

FLINT AND STEEL By Bill Hrenchuk



"In school I was voted least likely to get a head."

By Edward B. Wagner



"Oh guard, you dropped your key-ring, sir..."

E. B. Wagner

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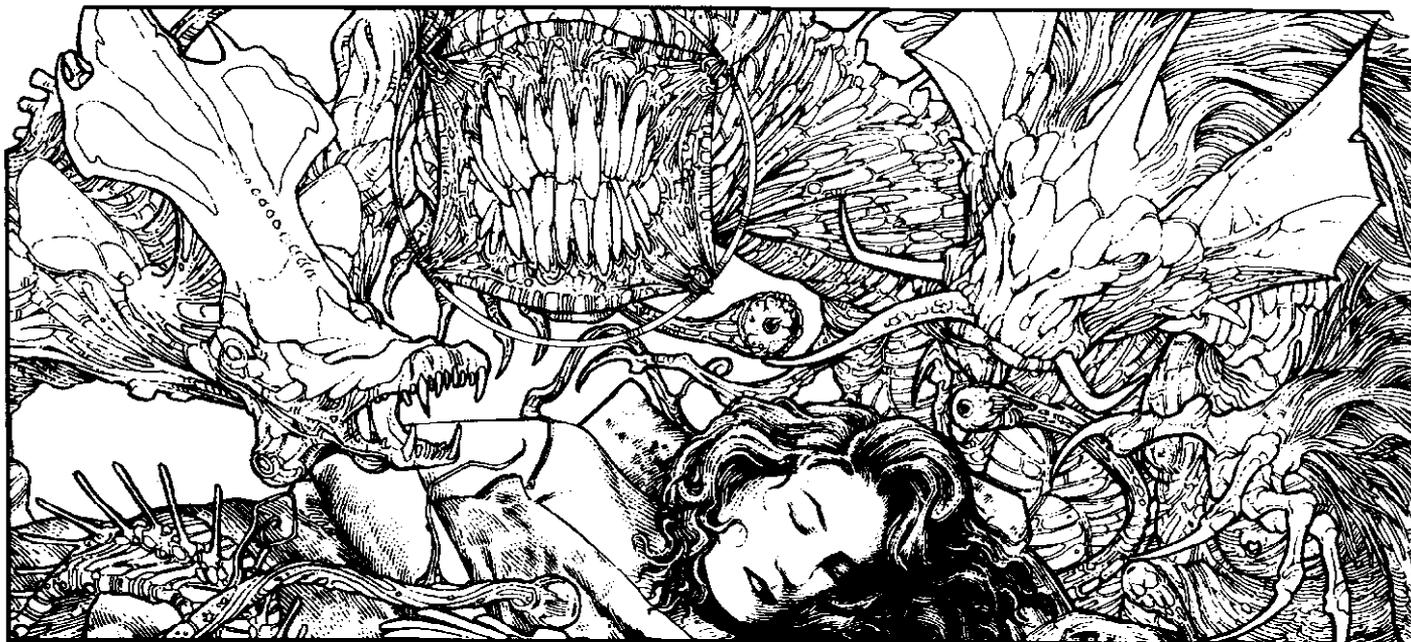
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Knights of the Dinner Table™

OKAY GUYS, TONIGHT'S ADVENTURE WILL CONCLUDE THE LAST SIX MONTHS OF GAMING! MANY OF YOU **MAY NOT SURVIVE** THE TERRORS THAT AWAIT YOU.

TERRORS? YEAH RIGHT, B.A., I'M SCARED. (SNICKER) I LOAD MY **CROSSBOW** WITH THE **ARROW OF SLAYING** LIKE THE ONE I USED TO KILL ZEUS!

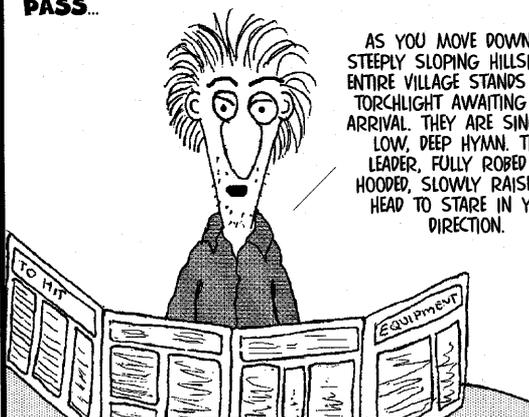
YEAH, AND I GET OUT MY **SWORD OF INFINITE SHARPNESS**. I WANT TO SEE WHOEVER'S FACE I HACKA HACK HACK WITH THIS!

NOW GUYS, WE SHOULDN'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF OUR FOE. B.A. WOULDN'T HAVE GIVEN US SUCH POWERFUL EQUIPMENT IF IT WEREN'T NEEDED. WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL.



CAREFUL? WE'VE NEVER HAD THIS MUCH FIREPOWER **EVER!** OUR COMBINED DAMAGE DELIVERANCE AVERAGE PER TURN IS HIGHER THAN THE FIREPOWER OF AN ENTIRE **CARRIER TASK FORCE!**

HOURS PASS...



AS YOU MOVE DOWN THE STEEPLY SLOPING HILLSIDE, THE ENTIRE VILLAGE STANDS IN THE TORCHLIGHT AWAITING YOUR ARRIVAL. THEY ARE SINGING A LOW, DEEP HYMN. THEIR LEADER, FULLY ROBED AND HOODED, SLOWLY RAISES HIS HEAD TO STARE IN YOUR DIRECTION.

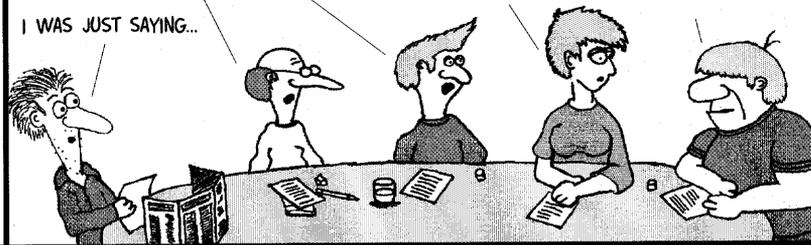
WOW! AN ENTIRE VILLAGE UP AT THREE A.M. WAITING TO PAY HOMAGE TO US UNDER THE LIGHT OF A FULL MOON! HOW TOUCHING!

YEAH! I'VE ALWAYS WANTED GROUPIES! FINALLY SOME RECOGNITION FOR THE YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE TO THE MORONS OF THIS WORLD! I GET DIBS ON MARRYING THE BEST LOOKING DAUGHTER!

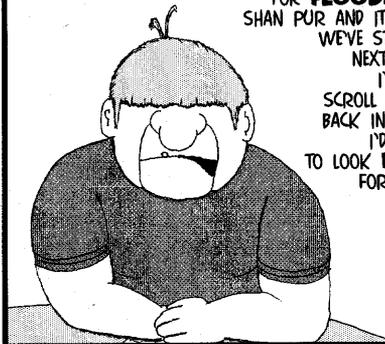
GUYS! THIS IS A TOTAL SETUP! THEY'RE HOLDING SOME DARK RITUAL! ATTACK THEM, BEFORE THEY FINISH!

1,757 ORCS. 432 TROLLS. 47 HILL GIANTS. ONE MEDUSA, A RED DRAGON...

I WAS JUST SAYING...



...44 PIXIES THAT GOT CAUGHT IN THE CROSSIRE, AND A LIME GREEN QUIVERING MASS! THIS IS OUR **BEST TAKE YET!** EVEN AFTER SUBTRACTING THE EXPERIENCE POINTS YOU'RE TAKING AWAY FOR **FLOODING** THE TOWN OF SHAN PUR AND ITS 7,900 INHABITANTS WE'VE STILL GONE UP TO THE NEXT LEVEL! BY THE WAY, I'M TAKING OUT THAT SCROLL OF WISDOM I FOUND BACK IN '91. NEVER THOUGHT I'D USE IT, BUT I WANT TO LOOK **EXTRA SMART** FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL.

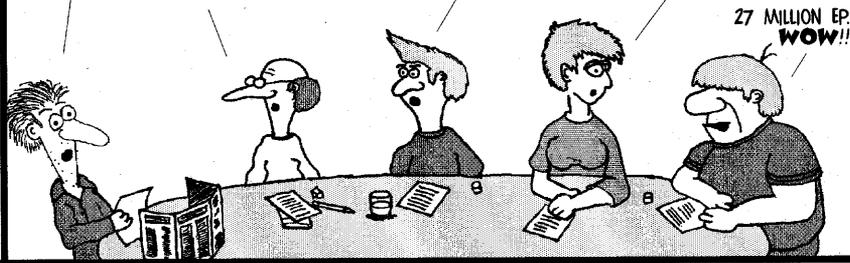


AS YOU APPROACH THE TOWN, THE SOUNDS OF THE GATHERED VILLAGERS GROW LOUDER AND MORE HARMONIC. A PRIMAL ASPECT OF YOUR BEING IS TOUCHED BY THE PURITY AND BEAUTY OF THEIR TIMELESS LANGUAGE, WHICH YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND BUT WHICH MOVES YOU TO TEARS.

B.A. THIS IS BEAUTIFUL. I'VE NEVER ENJOYED THE ENDING TO A GAME THIS MUCH!

GOOD JOB B.A.! WE KICKED BUTT AND DIDN'T EVEN GET A SCRATCH!!

THIS WAS TOO EASY. I STILL THINK WE SHOULD ATTACK!



27 MILLION EP. **WOW!!**

AS YOU CLOSE WITHIN 20 YARDS, THE LITANY STOPS. IT APPEARS THEIR **RTITUAL** IS OVER. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY A 1200-FOOT-TALL **CREATURE** TEARS OUT OF THE EARTH, **RIPPING IT OPEN** AS IF IT WERE AS FRAGILE AS AN EGG SHELL. THE VILLAGERS AND YOU ARE TOSSED ABOUT LIKE RAG DOLLS. THOSE OF YOU WHO LOOK AT THE CREATURE GO IMMEDIATELY **INSANE**, AND THE REST ARE **GOBBLED UP** BY THE TERROR BEFORE YOU IN SHORT ORDER!



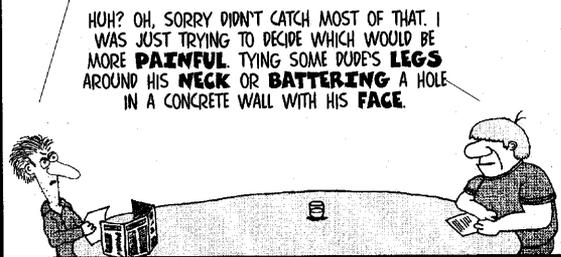
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT B.A.? I TALK TO THE LEADER ABOUT OUR FEE.

I TAKE MY BOWS! NOW WHERE IS THAT PRETTY DAUGH... **WHAT!?**

I **KNEW** IT!

I FLEE, B.A.? ANY CHANCE OF ESCAPE? I HAD MY EYES COVERED.

WELL I'VE NEVER BEEN SO **INSULTED!** I MADE IT A POINT TO GO EXTRA HEAVY ON THE EP AND TREASURE. DID YOU SEE BOB CRUMBLE UP HIS CHARACTER SHEET AND **THROW** IT AT ME? AND DAVE **KICKED MY CAT** ON THE WAY OUT, AND LET'S NOT EVEN TALK ABOUT SARA'S **TIRADE**. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW SHE **KNEW** SOME OF THOSE WORDS. BUT AT LEAST YOU, BRIAN, MY **OLD LOYAL PAL**, YOU'RE BIG ENOUGH TO TAKE YOUR LOMPS AND LEAVE IT AT THE TABLE.



HUH? OH, SORRY DIDN'T CATCH MOST OF THAT. I WAS JUST TRYING TO DECIDE WHICH WOULD BE MORE **PAINFUL** TYING SOME DUDE'S LEGS AROUND HIS **NECK** OR **BATTERING** A HOLE IN A CONCRETE WALL WITH HIS **FACE**.

The **Blitz** is on!

DRAGON



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The 1996 tour has begun. Look for TSR at these conventions, and watch for updates as Dragon Blitz '96 gets underway!

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Club Con
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February 3-4

Src Con
Los Angeles, CA
February 16-19

Conat Con
Waterbury, CT
March 22-24

Con-Trail
Houston, TX
April 19-21

3-Rivers Game Fest
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Ontario
Toronto, ON, Canada
June 15-16

Mawfest
San Francisco, CA
June 21-23

Orléans
Columbus, OH
July 4-7

Des Con
Somerset, NJ
July 10-14

Kal Con
Wichita, KS
January 5-7

Geopis Con
Bevins, CA
February 16-18

Total Confusion
Marlborough, MA
February 22-25

Neovention
Alcoa, OH
March 22-24

Mage Con III
Bellevue, MI
May 4-5

Twix Con
Bloomington, MN
May 24-27

Dragon Con
Atlanta, GA
June 29-31

Con May
Manchester, NH
June 28-30

San Diego Comic Con
San Diego, CA
July 4-7

Bark Con
Oklahoma City, OK
July 19-21

Constitution
Arlington, VA
January 19-21

Ark Con
Columbus, OH
February 16-18

Little Wars
Chicago, IL
March 22-24

Nerwescon
Sea Tac, WA
April 4-7

Games Concess II
Oakland, CA
May 24-27

Ben Con
Denver, CO
May 31-June 2

Chicago Comic Con
Chicago, IL
June 21-23

Galabricks
Evansville, IN
June 28-30

Westerns 48
El Paso, TX
July 4-7

Dallas Fantasy Fair
Dallas, TX
July 26-28

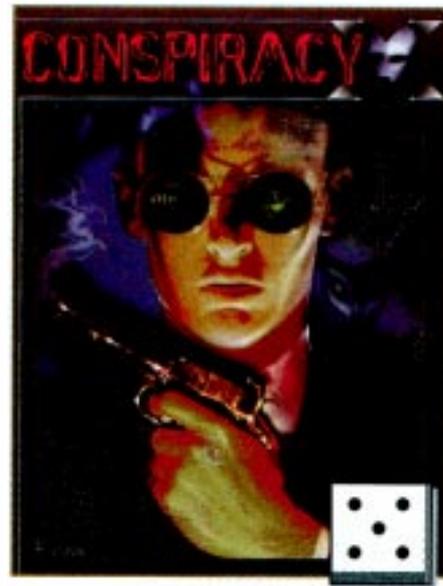
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Role-Playing

Reviews

Roll out the oddballs

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has been aware of an extraterrestrial presence but prefers to keep the general populace insulated from the truth because, well, you know, regular folks like you and me can't be trusted. **Conspiracy X** fosters a more paranoid world-view than *The X-Files*; it has almost as many secret societies crawling out of the cracks as the *Illuminati: New World Order** game. And its poltergeists and zombies might strike you as refugees from *Tales From the Crypt*. That said, *Conspiracy X* captures the paranoia and general creepiness of *The X-Files* so effectively that it'll more than suffice until an official product finds its way to the stores.

Each player constructs his character from a pool of 100 points, buying ratings for everything from basic attributes (Agility, Reflexes, Willpower, Perception) to skills (Demolitions, Martial Arts, Photography) and resources (Media Connection, Police Contact). Depending on the number of points invested, ratings range from a low of 1 to a high of 5. You can boost your point pool by saddling your PC with disadvantages; Schizophrenia adds an extra 15 points, Wanted by the Law adds as many as 20. A PC's skills derive not so much from his choice of career as from the organization to which he belongs (or, more accurately, the organization to which he belonged before he joined Aegis). A PC from the Center for Disease Control, for instance, has access to Computer Use, First Aid, and Science skills. A Drug Enforcement Administration agent knows Lockpicking, Small Arms, and Stealth.

Illustrations: C. Brent Ferguson, Francis Hogan, Heather McKinney, Chris Pallace, Robert Taylor, and George Vasilakos

Cover: C. Brent Ferguson

Extraterrestrials have taken over the game business. How else to explain the flurry of alien-inspired RPGs in the past few years, such as the *Don't Look Back**, *Pandemonium**, and *Nightbane** games? Either that, or game designers have been watching too many TV shows, like, oh, I don't know, *The X-Files* maybe?

Conspiracy X is the latest entry in the Aliens Walk Among Us sweepstakes, and it's also the best. **Conspiracy X** has no official link to the *The X-Files* — as far as I know, the RPG license for *The X-Files* is still up for grabs — but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that Mulder and Scully have crossed the design team's field of vision on more than one occasion. Here's the premise: players assume the roles of secret operatives charged with investigating mysterious abductions, psychic experiments, and other bizarre phenomena on behalf of a government agency called Aegis. For 40 years, Aegis

I lost my favorite socks, the yellow ones with the zebra stripes and the holes in the heels. They're in my closet, I'm pretty sure, somewhere among the boxes of old Tarzan paperbacks, back issues of *Spin* magazine, and my collection of Captain Beefheart albums.

Hmm... here's a 1988 GEN CON® Game Fair T-shirt... a ham sandwich, probably from the same year... the first three volumes of my autobiography... and — hey, here's a whole pile of game products I intended to tell you about, but for some reason never got around to.

Forget the socks. Let's dab a little mustard on what's left of the ham sandwich and see what we have here . . .

Conspiracy X* game

224-page softcover book

New Millennium Entertainment \$25

Design: Rick Ernst, Shirley Madewell, and Chris Palace with Mike Lewis, Jim Parks, and Willie Williams

Editing: M. Alexander Jurkat

Additional editing and development: Tina Beaven, Brian Herbek, and Bernard C. Trombley

Yep, we've seen a lot of this before. Disadvantages have been around since the *GURPS** game at least, and I think cave men came up with the idea of skill points. And yep, some of the abilities, like Animal Animosity and Supernatural Focus, could've used more explanation. Still, the system generates winning characters; a typical PC combines the resourcefulness of James Bond with the hardiness of Arnold Schwarzenegger. And if playing a guy from the Center for Disease Control sounds like a snooze inducer, obviously you've never seen *Outbreak* or read *The Hot Zone*.

The task resolution system also mines familiar territory, using rules similar to those in *Don't Look Back*, the *Masterbook** game, and about a zillion other RPGs. The gamemaster assigns a difficulty rating to a task, then determines the relevant skill or attribute; if a character wants to break down a door, for example, the difficulty level might be 5, with Strength the relevant attribute. The player rolls 2d6; if the roll is less than or equal to the difficulty level, the character executes the task. It works pretty well, providing the gamemaster can come up with equitable and accurate difficulty ratings. And he has to come up with them fast, unless he wants his players to fall asleep while he ponders the rating for riding a bicycle or baking a cake. Experienced gamemasters shouldn't have any trouble. But novices may find themselves struggling, as the rulebook skimps on examples and advice.

Combat also incorporates difficulty levels and attribute rolls, complicated by a long list of modifiers, including those for range, armor, and called shots. Lacking the patience to decide if the light was too dim to fire my dart gun (a -2 penalty), I ignored most of the modifiers, which didn't seem to make a whole lot of difference since the system relies on educated guesses anyway. Besides, *Conspiracy X* discourages combat, so why fuss with all the numbers? I got a kick, so to speak, out of the martial arts rules, which mix traditional fare like jump kicks and nerve punches with wacky options like Gun Fu.

Overall, we'd be talking an acceptable but undistinguished set of mechanics, were it not for a pair of pretty cool concepts that earn *Conspiracy X* a standing ovation. Cool Concept Number One is the Cell, the base of operations created by the players at the outset of the game. Each player begins with a fixed number of Resource Points to invest in the Cell,

purchasing the real estate, inventories, and personnel which the group as a whole will exploit throughout the campaign. Properties of the Cell include Location (military base, warehouse, office building), Facilities (barracks, laboratories, storage vaults), Staff (technicians, soldiers, pilots), and Equipment (weapons, software, medicines). All properties must be chosen communally, by vote, bargaining, or even intimidation. Is it fun? Well, my group spent an entire afternoon and a good chunk of the evening fiddling with their Cell, and got testy when I suggested it might be time to move on.

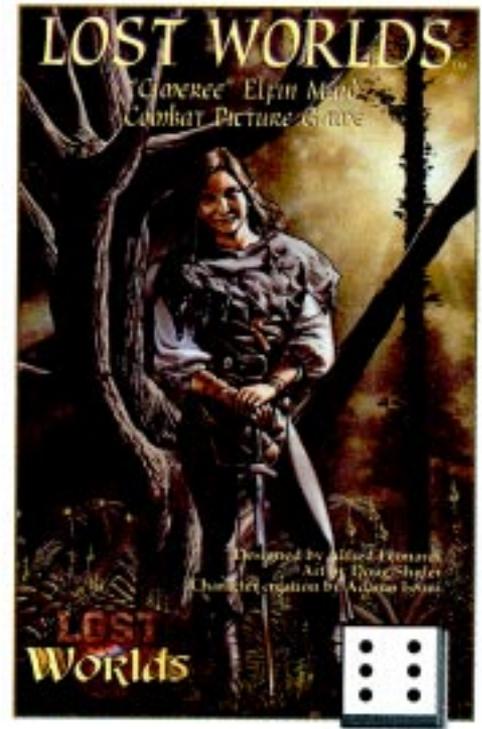
Cool Concept Number Two is the Rhine Test, the mechanism used to resolve psychic abilities. The test employs a set of five Zener Cards that come with the game. (Before you can use them, the cards must be photocopied and pasted over regular playing cards.) You've seen these before, probably in conjunction with ESP experiments; each card has its own symbol: a square, star, wave, circle, or cross. When a player wants his character to use a psychic ability, like foretelling the future, he names one of the cards. The gamemaster then draws the number of cards corresponding to that particular ability. If the card that the player picked is one of the cards drawn by the gamemaster, the ability succeeds. Thus, the character's success depends on the player's real-life "psychic" powers. Neat, eh?

A series of sharp, engaging essays brings the campaign world into focus, providing enough information to acclimate newcomers but not so much as to bury them in trivia. A solid chapter of gamemastering tips introduces an intriguing gallery of adversaries, including cannibals, shapeshifters, and voodoo priests. But apparently aliens abducted all the adventure hooks, as there's not a single ready-to-go scenario to be found.

Evaluation: Since I've only lived with it for a few weeks, I'm hesitant to give *Conspiracy X* an unqualified thumbs up. In a game this meaty, there's always the possibility that a long campaign might turn up a glitch that pushes the whole thing over a cliff. But our introductory scenario — which I adapted from an old TOP SECRET/S.I.™ game supplement — revealed no serious flaws. More importantly, it generated a table-full of satisfied customers, hungry for more. (Memo to New Millennium: bring on the official adventures — now.) *Conspiracy X* plods

you smack in the middle of a world gone nuts, where paranormal psychopaths are as common as cab drivers, and the man next door just might be a dispatcher for a fleet of UFOs. In other words, it's like *The X-Files* come to life. Or it that just an eerie coincidence?

Information: New Millennium Entertainment, Dept. X, 15 Ledgewood Drive, Albany, NY 12205.



Lost Worlds* game

32-page softcover book, one character sheet, four playing cards

Chessex \$6

Design: Alfred Leonardi

Character creation: Adamo Leoni

Development: Dennis Greci

Illustrations: Doug Shuler

For Christmas in 1986, my wife gave me a bundle of *Lost Worlds* books, at that time published by Nova Games. It turned out to be one of the best presents I ever got, for two reasons. First, more than 10 years later, I'm still playing with them, making *Lost Worlds* a gift with serious legs. Second, at six bucks a pop, the books weren't exactly cheap, and as a chronic tightwad, I never would've spent the money to buy them myself.

So now it's 1996, and hallelujah, a new publisher has brought *Lost Worlds* back from the dead. It's as terrific as ever, meeting all the criteria that elevates a product from the merely enter-

taining to the dazzlingly classic. It's easy, learnable in a couple of minutes (no kidding). It's challenging; 10 years on, and I still haven't cracked all its secrets. And as a design, well, it's nothing short of spectacular, on par with such ground-breakers as the *Magic: the Gathering** and DRAGON DICE™ games.

Thankfully, Chessex didn't mess with the fundamentals. You begin by choosing a character, represented by a picture book and a character sheet. The initial assortment of characters — Chessex promises more in the near future — includes Cimeree the Elfin Maid, Othere the Djinn, Brimstone the Fire Giant, and Sir Percival, Knight of the Realm. You swap picture books with your opponent, each of you retaining your own character sheet. You turn to page 57 (yes, the books only have 32 pages, but the game uses a weird numbering system) and find yourself staring at a full-page image of your opponent, ready to attack. If, for instance, you're fighting Brimstone, you see a snarling giant gripping a battle axe, crouched and ready to spring.

When it's your turn, you select a maneuver from the list on your character sheet. Among the elfin maid's options are Charge, Jump, Throw Dagger, and Cast Magic. If you pick Charge, you call off the corresponding maneuver number; in this case, it's 50. Your opponent finds 50 on the movement matrix at the bottom of the page he's currently looking at. The matrix refers him to a new page. He turns to the indicated page and sees that — gulp — a sword-swinging elf is about to filet him. He responds with maneuver 60. You check your matrix. Yikes! The giant's heaving a lava rock! Back and forth you go. If the word "score" appears on a picture page, you've inflicted some damage, modified by the last maneuver you attempted. (If you just Charged, you boost the damage by 4.) The first player to reduce his opponent to zero damage wins the game.

What makes *Lost Words* so engaging, aside from the ingenious combat system, is the menu of maneuvers, customized to give each character a distinct fighting style and personality. Cimeree comes across as sneaky and versatile, able to fling her dagger in one round, and pick a pocket in the next. The brutish Brimstone specializes in such crude tactics as grabs, shoves, and beard pulls. Othere's a whirlwind of energy — literally; he can transform into a sentient tornado and fling his enemies into the next county. To prevent players

from endlessly repeating their best maneuvers, the matrix tables limit their options; a fire giant who's being charged can't hurl lava rocks, an elvin maid who's being grabbed can only dodge, duck, or jump.

Fans of the Nova version will note that Chessex has wisely ditched the confusing multi-player rules and experience points. Chessex also added a set of four "fantasy cards" to each package, allowing characters to cast spells (like *Dalclion's blur*, which protects the caster from damage) and wield magical items (*Booga's taunt*, which forces the opponent to make an impulsive attack).

Gripes? A few. The images don't always correspond to the actions; no matter what weapon you're wielding against the elf, her pictures always show her being struck with a sword. The sequence of events doesn't always make sense; one minute the elf's thrusting her weapon, the next minute she's crouching behind you. And considering the price of these things, how come Chessex didn't spring for color instead of this blah black and white?

Evaluation: Chessex claims, with tongue in cheek, that *Lost Worlds* makes

a perfect alternative for jaded card players. After all, a *Lost Worlds* book costs only six bucks, a typical starter deck will set you back eight. Of course, Chessex neglects to mention that you need a minimum of two books to get a game off the ground. And *Lost Worlds* doesn't begin to match the aesthetic appeal and collectible value of, say, *Magic: the Gathering*.

Still, the comparison to collectible card games is not without merit. Like *Magic* and its host of imitators, *Lost Worlds* aspires to simulate the give-and-take of a real-time duel. But the dueling aspect of a card game is abstract at best; rarely do the players lose sight of the fact they're arranging cards on a table top. In *Lost Worlds* the action is immediate and vivid; you get to see what happens when a fire giant flings a rock toward your skull, and that's a thrill unmatched in the world of paper gaming.

As for the cost, *Lost Worlds* is, admittedly, hard on the wallet. But a *Lost Worlds* set remains a better buy than a stack of comic books you'll never read or a weekend's worth of artery-clogging cheeseburgers that'll only hasten your journey to an early grave. And in the

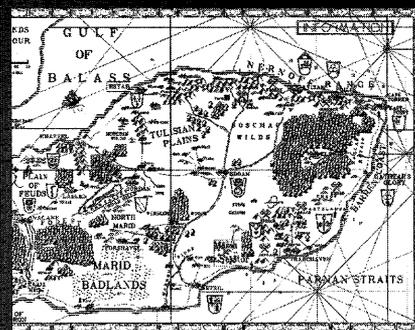
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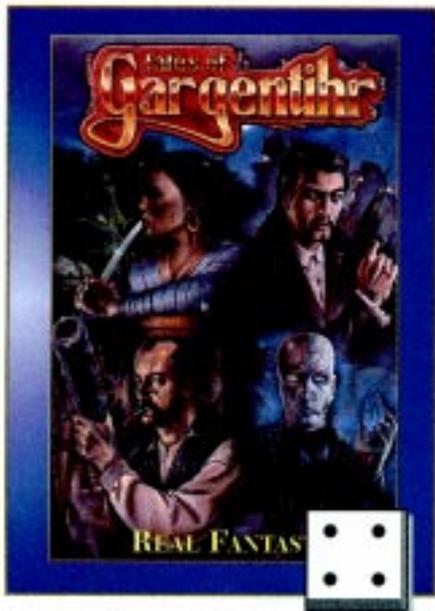
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unlikely event you get sick of your **Lost Worlds** books, you can always give 'em away at Christmas. You'll endear yourself to a loved one, probably for a long, long time.

Information: Chessex, 2990 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702.



Tales of Gargenthir* game

344-page softcover book

Sanctuary Games/Mind Ventures Games \$25

Design: Richard Cooper and Alastair Cowan with Robert Eccleston and Jamie Reid

Illustrations: Alastair Cowan

Cover: Richard Fox

When I say "Scotland," you might think of bagpipes, moors, and kilts. But role-playing games? I doubt it. That may change with the publication of **Tales of Gargenthir**, a Scottish RPG imported to the U.S. by Mind Ventures, the folks responsible for the alien-infested *Don't Look Back* (see *DRAGON*® Magazine issue #230). As thick as a phone book and oozing ideas, **Gargenthir** ranks among the most ambitious RPGs of the past five years. And it also ranks among the toughest. It's how I imagine the *Earthdawn** game would've turned out if it'd been designed by history professors.

Gargenthir defies a simple summary, but let's give it a shot. The game takes place in a world of floating islands surrounded by a magical energy called Sa. About a hundred years ago, a band of human explorers known as the Karro settled on the continent of Agasha and proceeded to oppress the natives, the

peaceful but primitive Ha'esh. Enter the player characters, members of a legendary organization called the Clondis, dedicated to preserving Ha'esh traditions and keeping the Karro at bay. Tension exists not only between the Clondis and the Karro, but also between the Church of Sanctology and the practitioners of science. The mysterious Kyromancers, who combine the power of Sa with the discipline of technology, lurk on the fringes. The book presents the world in meticulous detail, right down to the number of witch-hunters on the Sha-Bro Province Sanctology Council (two), making it one of the most lifelike settings this side of the *Runequest** game's Glorantha.

Character creation isn't just a part of the game. In a sense, it is the game. You begin by choosing an archetype (Fighter, Rogue, Scholar, or Mystic) and making D20 rolls to determine 10 basic attributes (including Strength, Agility, Knowledge, and Stealth). Next, you choose a race (with Ha'esh the most likely), roll for a family background (raised in a swamp, a port, or a noble's house), jot down the skill levels associated with your background (swamp-

dwellers are good at Swimming and Animal Lore), and roll for your age.

Is that all? Er, not quite. Now you're ready to embark on your Travel Path, a series of mini-encounters (a duel with a Kyromancer, a meeting in the Museum of Archaeology) in various locales (Geva, Jevin, Rol-Katel) that generate apprenticeships (Pathskiller Recruit, Siltreaver) to determine your occupation (Doctor of the Healing Arts, Armsman) and another set of skills (Herb Lore, Tracking, and about 150 others).

Is that all? Silly boy! You've still got Skill Points to spend, Wealth Points to invest, and an Energy Bar to fill out (we'll get to that in a minute). At the end of the road, you're left with a five-page character sheet speckled with enough numbers to gag an accountant. Yes, it takes forever. But, surprise, it's kind of fun to develop a PC in this much detail, shaping every element of his life from the day he leaves the womb. When all was said and done, I knew my Ha'esh Mystic better than my own wife.

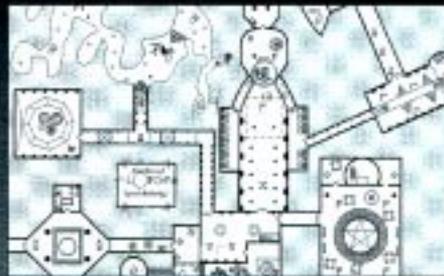
Task resolution involves difficulty levels and attribute rolls, not unlike **Conspiracy X**. The rules are logical and well-explained, though they veer toward

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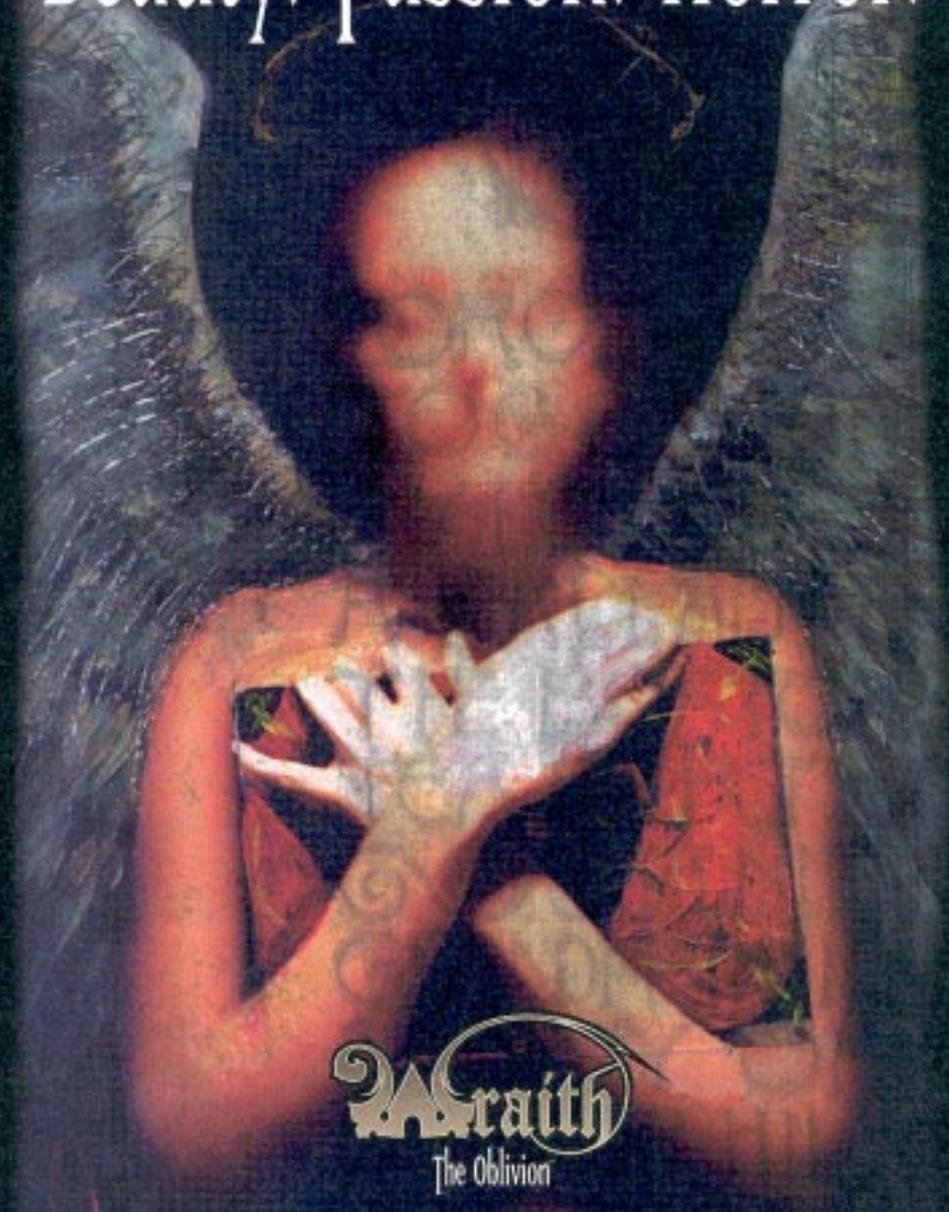
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the nitpicky; before you break down a door, you have to decide if its wooden, thick wooden, or reinforced and apply the appropriate modifier. The magic system, the game's best feature, involves mechanical gizmos that harness Kyromantic powers; Disrupter Plates attach to the hands and enable the caster to discharge kinetic energy, the Hassic Translator clamps over the mouth and allows him to speak any language.

I could've used a Hassic Translator myself to unravel the combat system, an obstacle course of defense rolls, success tests, and wound effects. Each player tracks damage on an Energy Bar, two rows of boxes that show the current Fatigue and Initiative levels. When a certain number of boxes have been marked off, various combat modifiers kick in. The Collapse box indicates when the PC has become exhausted. The Death box indicates when he's, uh, dead.

Though ingenious, all of this Energy Bar stuff seems unnecessary and out of place. *Gargenthir* isn't about combat. It's about exploration, investigation, and character growth. In a well-run campaign, the PCs will form alliances with the feline Chinte' F'har, learn to execute Icedust Rituals, and navigate swamplands on the back of a sleth, a docile lizard the size of a house. They'll talk history with the Geographical Society and bounty-hunt for renegade Kyromancers. And throughout, they'll strive for kai points, a measure of honor and achievement, which can be exchanged for favors and services. The introductory adventure, a page-turner titled "Enter the Clondis," gets the campaign off to a rousing start.

Evaluation: Comparing *Gargenthir* to the typical fantasy game is like comparing the Loch Ness Monster to a garter snake. I don't pretend to understand the whole thing; heck, I think I deserve a pat on the back just for reading it all. Despite the Energy Bars and Travel Paths, *Gargenthir* isn't a particularly innovative game — rife with fighters, rogues, and polyhedral dice, it owes a debt of gratitude to the AD&D® game — but it's a rich one. Players who put in the time, I suspect, will be rewarded accordingly. I don't plan to abandon AD&D or *Earthdawn* for *Tales of Gargenthir*. But I might if I had a bigger brain.

Information: Sanctuary Games, Whitworth Building, NEL Technology Park, East Kilbride, G75 0QU, Scotland, UK, or Mind Ventures Games, P.O. Box 1032, Starkville, MS 39759.

Short and sweet

Treasure Tales, by Loren Coleman. TSR, Inc., \$13.

In the tradition of the *Treasure Maps* and *Treasure Chests* accessories, **Treasure Tales** consists of 32 loose-leaf pages, each with a color illustration on one side, and background and encounter information on the other. In other words, instant adventures. The next time your buddies whine about AD&D games taking too long to play, lay one of these beauties on 'em.

The Elder's Revenge, by Jennifer Donaldson with John Flournoy. White Wolf Game Studio, \$11.

It looks like a Broadway program, but it's actually an adventure for *Mind's Eye Theatre*, the live-action spin-off of the *Vampire: the Masquerade** game. The story pits Kindred against Kindred in a struggle to unravel the secrets of a mysterious prince. The lengthy script comes complete with production notes, stage directions, and props (letters, lyrics, newspaper clippings). Be forewarned that a full-scale production requires seven principal actors and a supporting

cast of eight, preferably skilled in choreography. College drama departments, take note: better **Elder's Revenge** than the umpteenth revival of *Bye Bye Birdie*.

Heroic Adventures Volume 1, by Chris Avellone, Bruce Tong, and Jim Crocker. Gold Rush Games, \$16.

This trio of adventures for the *Champions** game combines the excesses of Image Comics with the goofiness of *Mad* magazine — witness the "Throwing Stars and Bars" scenario where the PCs storm Graceland to battle a horde of Presleybots. The art is hit or miss, a few of the encounters are underdeveloped, but any book that features a super-hero peering (puking?) into a toilet is okay by me.

Information: Gold Rush Games, P.O. Box 2531, Elk Grove, CA 95759.

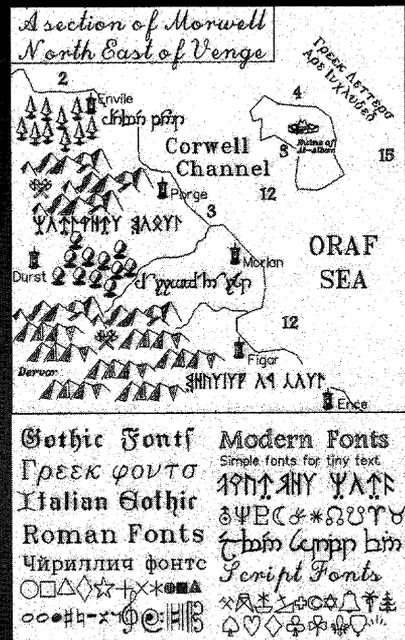
Blackhand's Street Weapons 2020, edited by Derek Quintanar and Janice Sellers. R. Talsorian Games, \$8.

The cover blurb of this *Cyberpunk** game supplement reads: "Over 250 weapons compiled in one volume. Plus one new gun!" One new gun? Big deal! Still, trigger-happy *Cyberpunk* -ers should find this a useful resource, if only for the

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comprehensive statistics and ammunition rules. As for the new gun, it's a double-action revolver called the 757 Cityhunter. Like I said, big deal!

The Galactic Smorgasbord, by the Amarillo Design Bureau. Task Force Games, \$10.

A sampler for the *Star Fleet Battles** game, **Galactic Smorgasbord** contains excerpts from more than a dozen works-in-progress. Among the more promising entries: *F2: The Vudar Enclave*, featuring a race a reptilian killers, and *Star Fleet Assault*, a preview of a new ground combat system. Though sketchy in places, it's a bargain, allowing players to get a taste of an impressive variety of supplements without having to invest a fortune.

Information: Task Force Games, P.O. Box 50145, Amarillo, TX 79159-0145.

Middle-earth: the Wizards* game Companion, by Coleman Charlton and Michael Reynolds with John Curtis, Pete Fenlon, Jason O. Hawkins, Nick Morawitz, Jessica Ney-Grimm, and Dave Platnick. Iron Crown Enterprises, \$10.

This lavish guide to the *Middle-earth: the Wizards* card game includes turn summaries, strategy tips, solitaire variants — everything, in fact, except color illustrations of the cards themselves. The site analysis alone, however, makes it an essential purchase for those more interested in mastering the rules than drooling over artwork.

Eagles* game, by Tom Dalglied. Columbia Games, \$9.

If you're a collectible card fan, you've probably played a wizard, a vampire, or maybe even a dragon. So how about a 19th-Century infantryman? **Eagles**, a sequel of sorts to last year's *Dixie** game, tackles the Waterloo Campaign of 1815, with a 60-card deck representing the French, British, Dutch, and Prussian regiments. (One deck will suffice, but two makes for a better battle.) It isn't fantasy, you say, so who cares? You might be surprised to learn the tactics aren't all that different from those in *Magic: the Gathering*, the battlefield layout is reminiscent of the *Wyvern** game, and Napoleon is a dead ringer for the Lady of Pain from the *BLOOD WARS*™ game. Okay, so I made up that last one. But if you're the adventurous type, you still ought to give this a look.

Information: Columbia Games, P.O. Box 3457, Blaine, WA 98231.

Faiths & Avatars, by Julia Martin with Eric L. Boyd, Ed Greenwood, L. Richard Baker III, and David Wise. TSR, Inc., \$20.

Gods, anyone? This 192-page AD&D® supplement catalogs virtually every entity of the divine relevant to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, detailing their powers, worshipers, and manifestations. In general, the nastiest are the most enticing. Moander, for instance, traffics in corruption and decay, and wields spells like *handfang* and *speed rot*. That's my kind of deity.

Honor of the Samurai* game; by Scott Kimball with Monty Stambler. Gamewright, \$23.

Lets face it — not all card players have the patience for *Magic: the Gathering*, *BLOOD WARS*, or any other game that takes more than 10 minutes to learn. For them, I recommend **Honor of the Samurai**, a game of dueling warlords that goes down as easy as a cup of hot chocolate. Opponents draw daimyo and samurai cards, lay them out in horizontal lines (called houses), then fortify them with castles and armies. Battles are resolved by rolling a set of colorful

customized dice, included with the cards. If you arrange a favorable marriage or acquire a coveted possession, you collect honor chips (also included). But if you discharge gunpowder, hire ninja, or engage in similarly dishonorable activities, your chip stack shrinks. Collect 400 chips, you win. The rules are a little stiff, the cards a little bland, and I don't foresee national **Samurai** tournaments any time soon. That said, **Honor of the Samurai** remains a pleasant diversion and a great way to spend an afternoon on the patio with Dad.

Information: Gamewright, P.O. Box 120, Boston, MA 02258.



Rick Swan has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. Write him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply.

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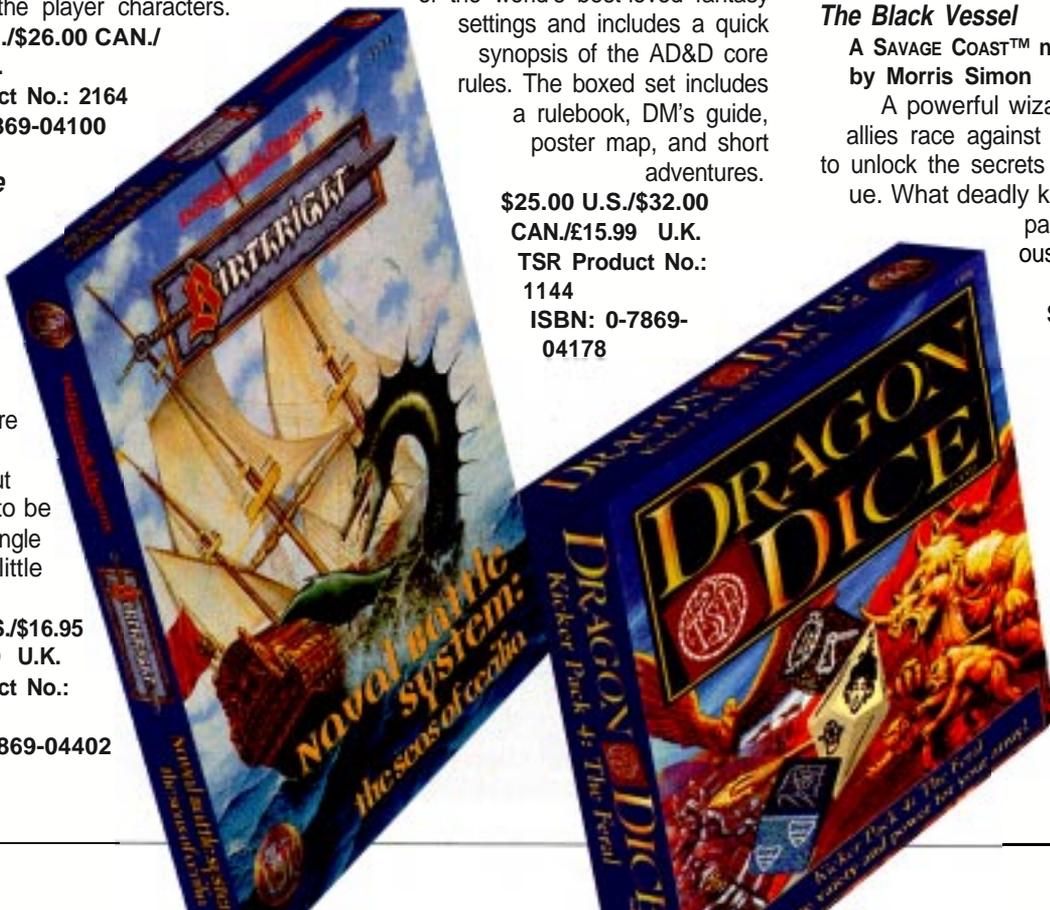
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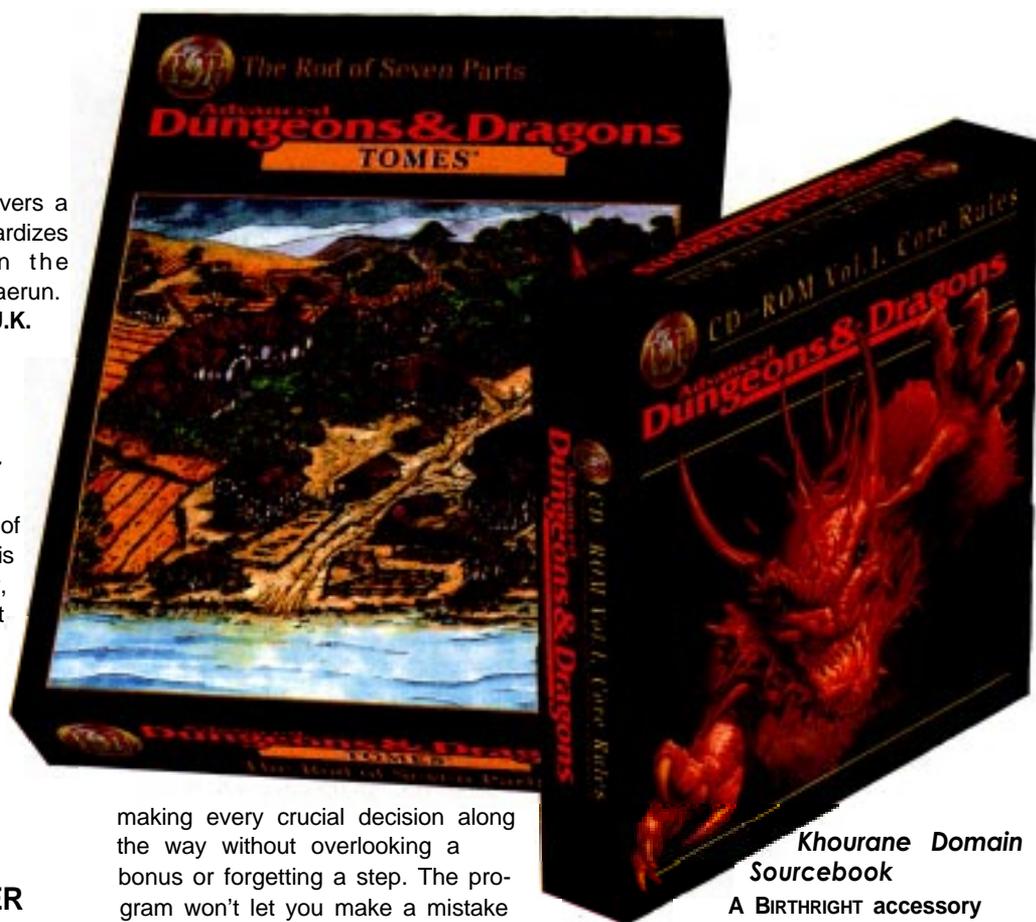
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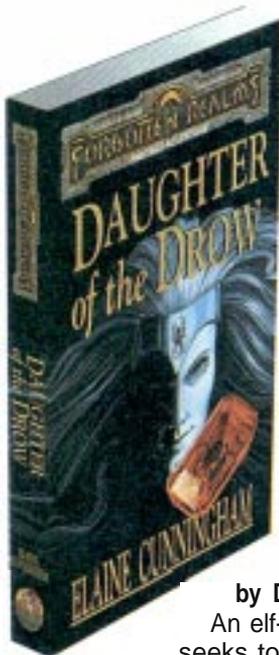
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Clack
Continued from page 120

ship a step further in May by marrying Perrin. Mag Force 7 was recently bought by Thunder Castle Games (Kansas City, MO), publisher of the *Highlander** trading card game.

(Contact: designers@magforce7.com)

Allen Varney wrote the first DRAGON DICE™ novel, Cast of Fate, and so will certainly be worth as much as Bill Gates pretty soon. Send news to APVarney@aol.com.

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the Current Clack

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Everway* game to Rubicon

The announcement of Pagan Publishing's acquisition of the *Everway** game from Wizards of the Coast (see *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #231) was premature. In late May Pagan (Seattle) decided not to take the game after all. "It's a terrific game," said John Tynes, president of Pagan Publishing, "but the more we looked at the acquisition, the more it became clear that this wasn't as good a match as we initially thought. There were a lot of risks in taking on *Everway*, both tangible and intangible, that we hadn't seen initially. Pagan can only do its first RPG once; we thought we'd prefer to do something else instead." For Pagan's debut release Tynes is, currently considering several possible games, which would be designed in-house.

The *Everway* game will instead go to a Seattle-based startup company, Rubicon Games. The changeover was amicable; Tynes said, "We wish [Rubicon] the best of luck, and look forward to seeing new *Everway* products from them in the future."

Everway game designer Jonathan Tweet, who remains at Wizards of the Coast, will help guide his game's development at Rubicon. "Let me make it clear that I am 100% behind Rubicon's purchase of *Everway*," said Tweet in a press release. "I am of course disappointed that I won't be working on *Everway* with my good friend John Tynes. On the other hand, I'm really looking forward to working with [company president] Jesse McGatha and the other Rubicon people."

In other Pagan news, the company's superb *Call of Cthulhu** game magazine, *The Unspeakable Oath*, is going to a twice-yearly format of double-sized issues. Popular artist Blair Reynolds, whose brilliant and disturbing work graced many issues of the *Oath*, has returned after an extended absence. (Of Reynolds' latest artwork Tynes commented, "My eyeballs bled.") Tynes con-

tinues as *Oath* editor and as editor of the *Feng Shui** game line at Daedalus Entertainment. The *Feng Shui* game debuted in late May with strong success.

Contact: paganpub@aol.com; custserv@rubicongames.com; Web: www.halcyon.com/rev/pagan.html.

Atlas Pandemonium* game giveaway

Atlas Games (Roseville, MN) distributed MIB Productions' *Pandemonium** RPG in 1993, but the game "has unfortunately not found a solid market niche," says Atlas president John Nephew delicately. Now Atlas needs warehouse space but doesn't want to junk the *Pandemonium* game — so, through August 1, Atlas is giving it away.

Designed by Stephan Michael Sechi (the *Talislanta** RPG) and co-written by Robin D. Laws (the *Shadowfist** and *Feng Shui* games) and Joel M. Kaye, the *Pandemonium* game casts players as intrepid tabloid reporters, tracking Elvis, Bigfoot, and UFOs all over the world, with the assistance of their own skills and those of their past lives. (In 1994 TSR published a similar game, the *TABLOID™* game, using the *AMAZING ENGINE®* game system.)

To get the game, originally sold at \$20, send a check or money order for \$3 per copy (shipping and handling) to Atlas Games, P.O. Box 131233, Roseville, MN 55113. No credit cards. Overseas orders \$6 surface, \$10 air. The sole *Pandemonium* supplement, *Stranger Than Truth!*, costs \$5 when ordered with the game, \$8 alone. Offer expires August 1.

Contact: atlasgames@aol.com.

Current Clack's recommendation:

This game is a scream! Snap it up!

News about gates

Black Dragon Press (Logan, UT) has been sold to Gatekeeper Publishing, along with the *Tempest of The Gods** trading card game and the *Darkurthe Legends** RPG. Gatekeeper plans to support both games and is also releasing a

hybrid role-playing/card game planned by Black Dragon, the *Dragon Storm** game. Black Dragon announced its trading card game in 1994, but only made it to market in late 1995, after the field's initial fervor had subsided.

Contact: bdpress1@aol.com.

Grey Ghost Press (Randolph, MA) has republished the *Gatecrasher** game, a lighthearted high-tech high-fantasy RPG originally published by Hot Tub Dragon. "Armored knights board space shuttles to pursue their chosen dragons across the solar system. Angels uphold the ideals of truth and justice; demons connive to make a quick buck. Lycanthropes on Saturn's moons howl at the full planet overhead while cybernetic orcs inspect their power armor in preparation for storming a wizard's enclave." The second edition, by Michael Lucas, uses Grey Ghost's *FUDGE** universal game system.

Contact: ghostgames@aol.com.

Gateway Games, a new and rather spread-out company with staffers in Virginia, California, and Utah, is launching *Portals*, a semi-annual tabloid magazine dedicated to the *Rolemaster** game, other Iron Crown Enterprises products, and "the broader art of role-playing." The first issue is planned for this year's GEN CON® Game Fair in August. Gateway's staff includes Todd McGovern (designer of the *Arcane Companion* supplement); David Mullin (*Channeling Companion*, in progress), and John Schmidt (*Creatures & Treasures III*).

Contact: mcg339@aol.com.

The personal fortune of Microsoft president Bill Gates was recently estimated at \$15 billion, sufficient to buy the entire adventure gaming industry 30 or 40 times over.

Notes from the field

DRAGONLANCE® novelist Margaret Weis, partner in Mag Force 7 (Lake Geneva, WI) with Don Perrin, took the partner-

Continued on page 118

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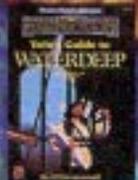
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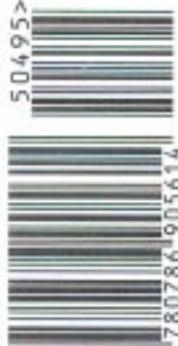


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