

#234

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Beyond the Grave

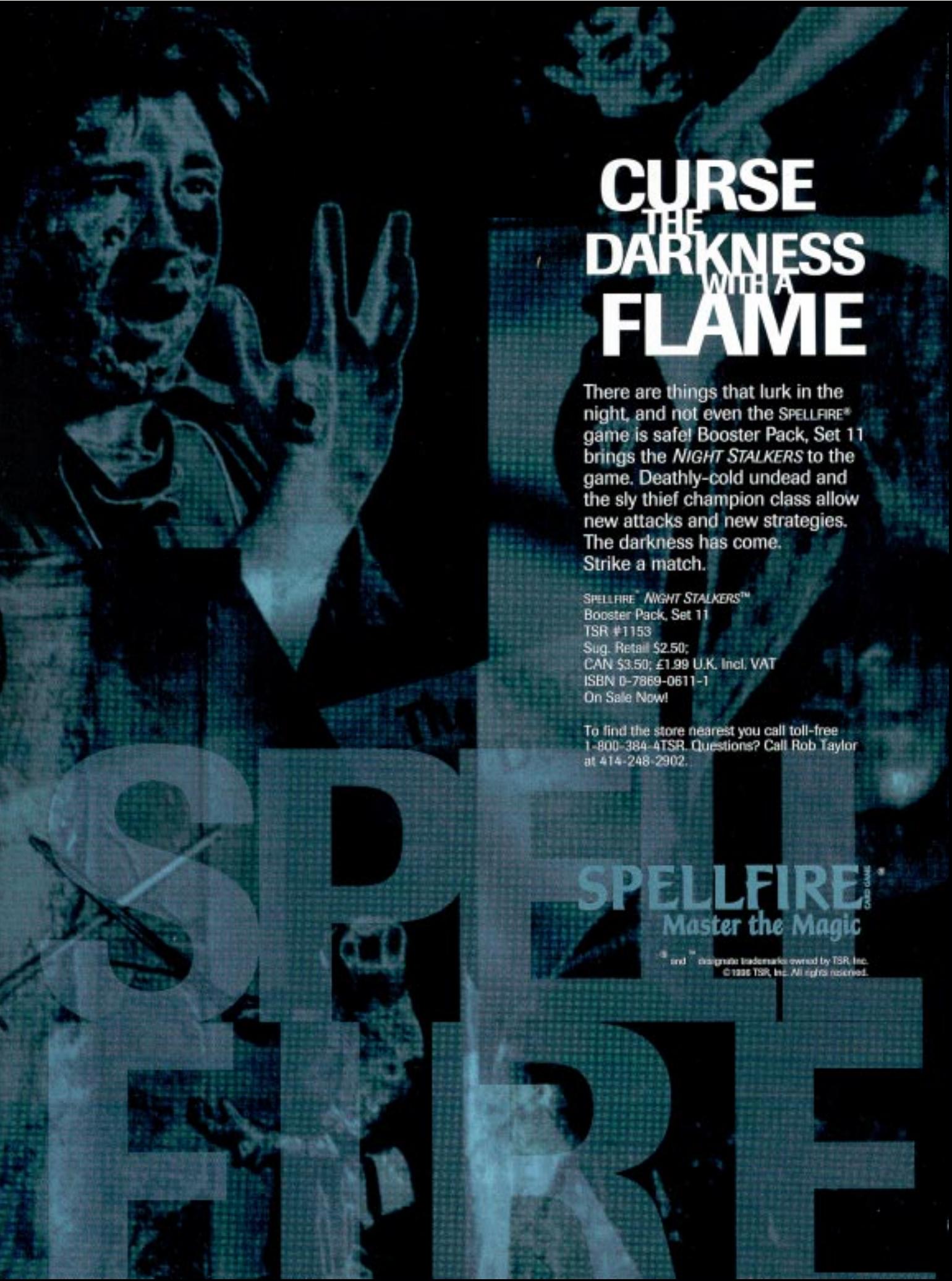
Dragon[®] MAGAZINE

Nocturnal
Crusade

Undead
again

Crypt
Rangers





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The Wyrms' Turn™

Boo!

At the right moment, that's all it takes to scare someone. Or something like, "You didn't have a black Nissan in the parking lot this morning did you?" That'll scare 'em. A scare is a quick triple-shot of adrenaline. It wakes you up, makes you shriek.

Donna played in our campaign mostly, I think, to be with Rick, her fiance. As a relative newcomer, she was the one I targeted for the scares. When Donna's elf wanted to pull a ring from the finger of a limed-over skeleton lying in a subterranean pool, I laid my arm on the table and said, "Show me how." You know what I did, of course. When my fingers clasped her wrist, her shriek nearly summoned the police.

But scaring the newbie is cheap and easy (though it was fun, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat). Scaring a veteran player is different.

Every Halloween, we'd play a horror adventure. While DMing the game, I liked to sit in the window sill, partly for the cool October air, and partly so I could see everyone in the big group. Mike, one of my housemates and a veteran player, thought it would be fun to slip outside, sneak around the apartment, and lay a cold hand on my neck from outside. Unfortunately for him, I saw Mike slip outside, listened carefully for his feet upon the gravel, then gently dropped a hand in front of his face just before he'd have rounded the corner and gotten to me.

His shriek was magnificent.

Of course, it isn't fair to tell on Donna and Mike without telling on myself. Those Halloween sessions almost always transformed into story-telling sessions, often with me sitting alone on the couch, facing the six or eight players who gradually huddled closer in the dark, airy room. Another Mike, much smaller, slipperier, and just downright sneakier than the other one, managed to get out of the room without my noticing. Just as I was getting to the most tense moment in the Bear Story, inhumanly strong fingers clamped my ankles from under the couch. I flew up with a terrific shriek, scaring the hell out of all my players, who joined me in an unholy chorus that would have shriveled Great Cthulhu itself.

Scares are easy. They work on the player and have little to do with the game itself. Fear is a whole 'nother animal. Where a scare widens your eyes, fear squeezes them shut. You don't want to see what frightens you. Scares evoke a shriek; fear swallows your voice.

Bruce Nesmith wrote a number of truly frightening RAVENLOFT® tournaments. His theory was that the only way to frighten a player is to threaten the thing he most cares about in the game — his character. Bruce must have something there, because his tourneys frightened hundreds of people (including me) at convention tables, a decidedly un-frightening environment.

Fear has to be more than that, though. You fear the things you can't see or that you don't understand. The worst fears are indescribable.

I didn't manage to frighten my own players very often. The only time I can remember seeing real fear in their eyes was when I described not their dragon enemy but the scars he'd left in a stone wall for them to discover. That one worked, I think, because there was so little for them to visualize. Everything else came from that vague pool of imagination that spawns the night terrors that leave you cold, damp, and trembling — but which you can never remember.

How do you frighten players when the most frightening things are indescribable? I resort to tricks these days. One of my favorite is to seat all the players so that their backs are to an open window. At night. In October.

Try this one. If you don't have a window, open a closet, or any door behind the players. Just be sure to leave the lights off in that other room. And don't let the players look behind them. Make 'em look at you. Then while you describe what their PCs **can** see, they'll be wondering more about what's behind them, what they can't see.

And they'll be afraid.

Dave Gross

The logo for the magazine 'Dragon' is rendered in a stylized, 3D font. The letters are primarily orange and yellow with a blue gradient on the sides, giving it a metallic or fiery appearance. The 'D' is particularly large and prominent.

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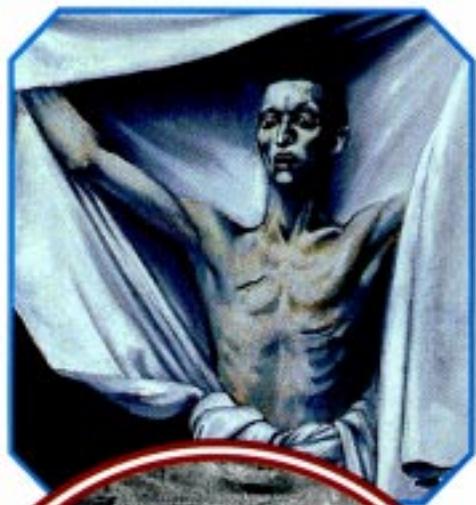
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October 1996
Volume XXI, No. 5
Issue #234



Nocturnal Crusade

Jay Knioum

In the war against the undead, the wise crusader arms himself.

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The Draconomicon

Jamie Nossal

The dracolich isn't the only form of undead dragon, only the greatest. Here are the "lesser evils."

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The Book of Souls

Robert S. Mullin

Some books really should be banned.

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Crypt Rangers & Defenders

Ross Allen Clifton

It's one thing to stay overnight in a graveyard on a dare . . .

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Undead Again

Steven Brown

Death has never been the end to a hero's career, but this isn't what you probably had in mind.

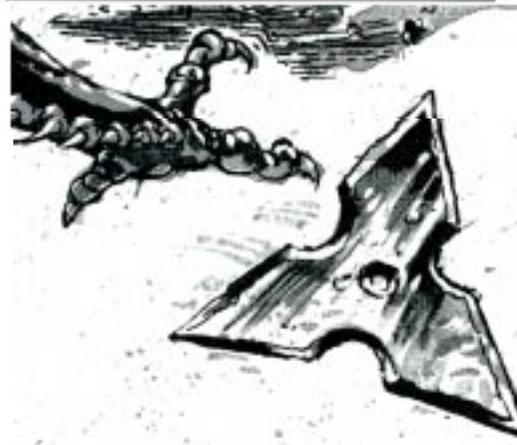
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Artifacts of Athas

Kevin Melka

The magical artifacts of the DARK SUN® setting are just as dangerous as they are powerful.

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Daurgothoth

Ed Greenwood

The most fearsome of the great wyrms are those that just don't know when to die.

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Rudy Thauberger

The necromancer's weapons are walking nightmares.

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Swampstalkers

David Eckelberry

Add some cold-blooded killers to your armies.

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Johnathan M. Richards

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(DRAGONLANCE®: Tales of the Fifth Age)

Dave Gross

Old assassins never really retire, especially when they work for the Dark Knights of Palanthis.





If you have a comment, opinion, or question for the staff of DRAGON® Magazine, write us a letter. We'd love to hear from you.

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You can also send "D-Mail" submissions to us at tsrdragon@aol.com. Please send change of address notices by regular mail, as the volume of e-mail we receive makes that medium actually slower than a post card or letter.

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

First of all, I love what you've done with the place. Its been a long time since your magazine has had so much of interest in each issue. Keep up the good work.

Reading issue #231, I came across John Bunnell's review of *The Two Georges* by Richard Dreyfuss and Harry Turtledove. Having not read the book I can't comment on his review, but I did want to help clear up something that seems to have mystified Mr. Bunnell. He says that one flaw of the book was that it failed to make clear why it contained sharp divergences from real world history. By way of example he writes, "It's a mystery, for instance, as to why the British Empire outlawed slavery in 1834, neatly forestalling an

alternate civil war . . ." In the real world, the British Empire outlawed the slave trade in 1807, and the institution of slavery itself was outlawed in 1833. Not much of a mystery there, save for why it took the Empire a year longer in the book than in real life.

Again, the magazine is getting better every month. I'll be reviving my subscription. Good luck!

Brad Johnston
Newfoundland, Canada

Help!

The Ravenloft® Players encountered technical difficulties while videotaping their two performances of the 7th Annual Night of Terror — *The Treasure of Granville Manor* at this year's Gen Con® Game Fair. If you videotaped one or both of the shows and are willing to provide us with a copy, we would greatly appreciate it. Please write to: Thomas M. Reid, c/o TSR, Inc., 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or send e-mail to TSRThomas@aol.com.

Dear DRAGON Magazine

Hey, I just was wondering . . . do you guys plant hidden cameras in our gaming rooms? Your "Knights of the Dinner Table" hits a little too close to home. There may be lawsuits from some of my friends. They think they're being made fun of!

Keep 'em coming!

Vern McNulty
Via AOL

We unequivocally deny placing hidden cameras in any gaming room. Of course, we can't speak for Jolly himself: However he manages it, we sometimes find him poking fun at our own gaming pals. Never at us, ourselves, of course. We're nothing like the Knights. Not even a little bit. Really.

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

I'd like to write stories and novels, but I can't find any college classes around Ontario. I was told that Journalism is what many writers take, but I'm not

interested in writing for newspapers. I just want to write fantasy stories.

Can you suggest some classes that might help? I have the imagination and the ideas. I just need the knowledge and help from professionals.

I was recently going through my COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ boxed set and wondered why you haven't continued this. I have already played all the adventures in the boxed set, plus some that I made myself, but I would like to play some more professional games.

It would also be nice to see some novels about this land. Fantasy itself was originally dragons and dragon slayers, and you have both of these on the Blood Isles of Io.

Shawn Morley
Oakville, Ontario

To start, you can learn much about writing by reading — and not only fantasy novels. Of course, you're probably already doing that. You can find good creative writing classes at most colleges or locate a nearby writers' group. Most importantly, write every day, and have a friend read your writing back to you. We'd love to see some good COUNCIL OF WYRMS submissions for our "Campaign Classics" department, so keep an eye on that department.

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

Let me be one of the many to congratulate you on your wonderful new format. I was looking through some of my old DRAGON Magazines, and I noticed that in DRAGON Magazine issue #224 you had an article detailing the ways castles could withstand a magical attack. I read the entire article and I enjoyed it thoroughly. In issue #232, I noticed that you had a small section on a magical battering ram called the *Arien of Thang-Nor*. This is what I love about your magazine: You tell us how to build up a wall, and then you tell us how to knock it down. The magazine doesn't just deal with making super characters or DMs. Instead you focus on balance in the game, something that I haven't yet picked up when designing adventures.

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I enjoy the "Knights of the Dinner Table" as well as your other sections. Please don't stop doing stories about the FIFTH AGE™ setting. I noticed that in an advertisement for the AD&D® game in your magazine, the DRAGONLANCE® setting wasn't even mentioned as a campaign world. Technically DRAGONLANCE won't be a part of the AD&D world anymore, but that doesn't mean it isn't worthy enough to fill your pages. Keep up the brilliant work!

Andrei Goldfain
Syracuse, NY

No worries, Andrei. As articles concerning the new era of Krynn arrive, we'll print the best ones. After brisk sales of the new FIFTH AGE game at the GEN CON® Game Fair and the interest displayed by those who attended the periodicals seminars, it's a safe bet that we'll be printing plenty of articles concerning the Age of Mortals. As for fiction, we won't rule out a FIFTH AGE story next year, though we aren't extending this year's story-arc into 1997

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

DRAGON Magazine issue #232 was very useful. There were some parts I skipped over though, like "Weapons of the Waves," which seemed to be a plug for the Naval Battle rules for the BIRTHRIGHT® setting. "En Garde!" was a plug for SAVAGE COAST™ campaign and, while well done, should have been made more general so that it could be used in all campaigns. (The fighting styles from A Mighty Fortress suffered this problem as well.)

"A Flurry of Swords" was excellent, but I can't see granting bonuses for proficiency and specialization, unless one

were to go back to the core weapons and do the same for them. In addition, some of those damage ratings are way too high. The "Sorcerous Sixguns" was overdue, and while it had a few too many reference points, it is an excellent starting place. I hope to see more about bullets and holsters, and maybe even containers for smoke powder itself.

The "Ecology of the Roper" article was interesting. The DRAGON DICE™ articles I skip over, but I don't mind them. I realize that not all articles will fit my needs. The latest "Wyrms of the North" has helped set up my future campaign, and I'm just waiting to spring some rumors and legends of this mighty beast upon the party.

I like the "D-mail" section and the "Forum," but perhaps the "Network News" column could be expanded, as well as "Role-playing Reviews" and "Current Clack." "Hellbound," "Floyd," and "Knights of the Dinner Table" are excellent as always.

"The Walls Came Down" was well done, but it states that the *Arien of Thang-Nor* spell is more powerful than the ordinary battering ram, but it lists no damage. *The thunderstrike rod*, however ... heh heh heh.

Thank you for continuing to produce a great magazine.

Joe C. Kushner
Chicago, IL

Somewhere between the "continued on" and "continued from" notices, we lost that crucial table for "The Walls Came Down." As noted in the article, walls or other structures struck by a battering ram or similar device must make a saving throw to withstand the attack. Here's the chart, below.



Table 1: Structural saving throws vs. battering ram damage

Battering Ram Type	Hard Stone	Soft Stone	Thin Earth	Thin Wood	Thick Metal-bound Wood	Thick Metal-bound Wood
Normal	5	9	3	20	17	13
Arien	6	10	4	20	18	14
Frost-Rent	8	12	5	20	19	17
Khalmick-Graz	5	9	3	20	17	13
Thunderstrike Rod	7	11	5	20	19	15

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On the Cover

This is the second of our "collaboration" covers. Like the first (Tim Bradstreet and Fred Fields, on issue #203), this one was also born from a conversation at the GEN CON® Game Fair. In Fred and Tim's work there are similarities of approach that I felt would ensure a successful piece. I couldn't find such similarities in the work of Alan Pollack (left) and Tony DiTerlizzi, but the synergy shines through. They've produced an image that blends both of their styles into a unique and memorable cover.

Well done, guys!

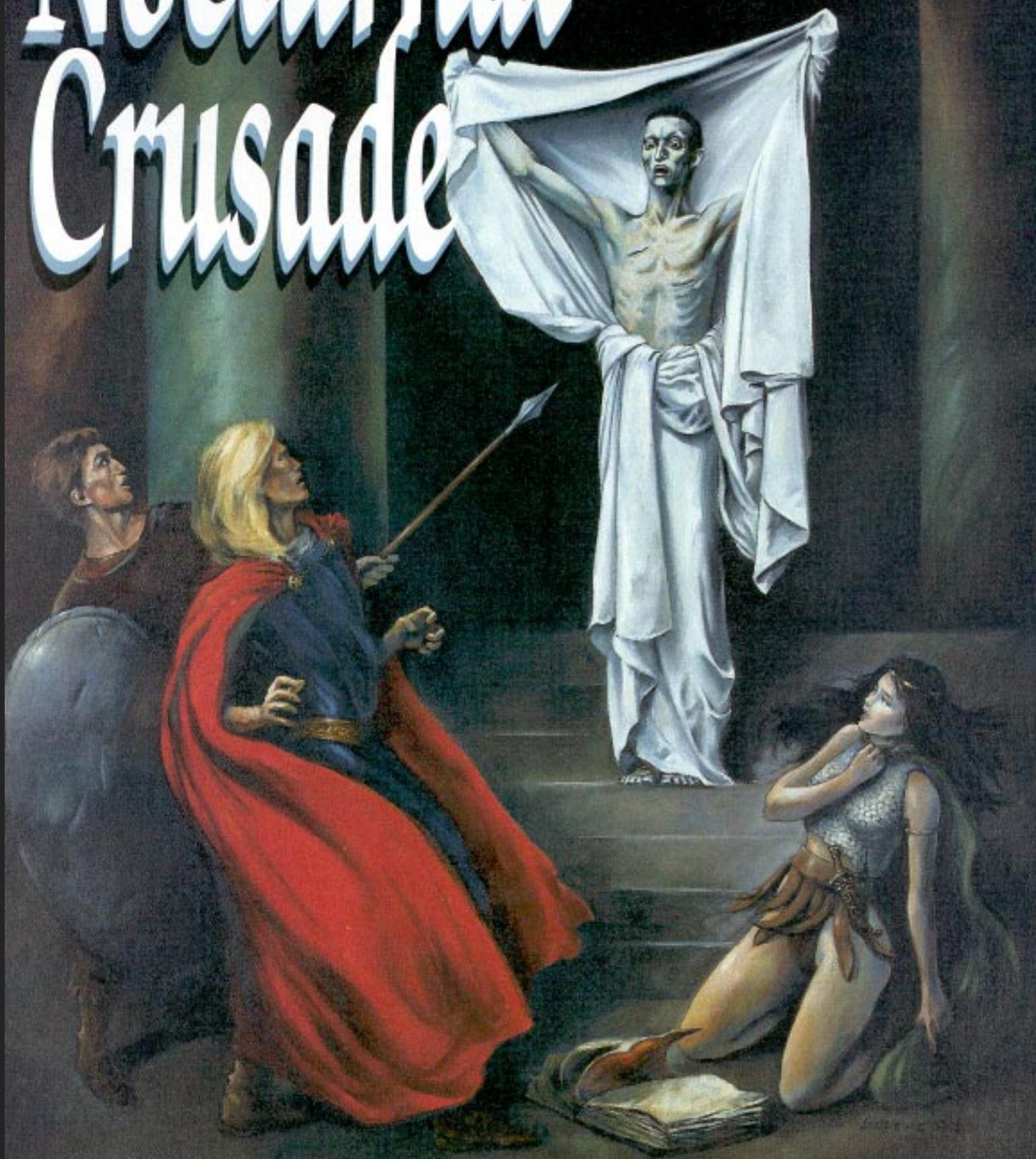
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Nocturnal Crusade



Weapons in the war against the undead

by Jay Knioum

illustrated by Charles Ludeke

The mist-shrouded darkness is filled with fell creatures who prey upon those who live. Some creep in the shadows, like puppets constructed by some mad toymaker. Others stalk the living stealing their victims' vital essence as if mocking the natural order. The living will not be mocked, however, and it is time to fight back.

Here is a collection of powerful spells and magical items that deal with the restless dead. Some were made to gain knowledge of these creatures; others were created to destroy them. The one thing common to all of them, however, is that they are useless to one who is weak of heart. Although the items detailed herein are suitable for any AD&D® setting they are perhaps most at home in a RAVENLOFT® campaign.

Shroud of Sol's embrace

XP Value: 3,000

GP Value: 15,000

This is a delicate shroud of silky, silvery cloth, about 4' wide and 6' long. *The shroud* appears to be made of quicksilver, and its surface has no marking or stitches. The origins of the *shroud* are unclear. The only historical account of the item is from an elven chronicler who writes that the *shroud* was a gift from a faerie queen to an elven hero centuries past. If the *shroud* is left outside in full sunlight for a day, it retains the sun's power. After soaking sunlight, the *shroud* must be rolled up tightly. When unrolled, the *shroud* begins to spill out sunlight from whichever side faced the sky during the day. On the first round after unrolling the *shroud* sheds the morning's light. It steadily grows brighter to noontime light, then slowly fades to twilight.

Morning light, noon light, and twilight conditions both last for two turns each. Thus, the *shroud* cycles through a day's sunlight in one hour. Morning light grows steadily brighter, reaching out one yard per round and causing 2d6 hp damage per round to any vampire in the area of effect. Noon light shines at a range of 20 yards and has the full effect of sunlight on a vampire (death in one round if fully exposed, 3d6 hp damage per round if partially exposed). Twilight inflicts the same damage as morning but recedes one yard per round until extinguishing.

Although there are many uses for this item against vampires and other sunlight-hating undead. *The shroud* is delicate, and all saves against adverse conditions are made at -2. If the *shroud* is torn, its magic is lost.

Once begun, the sunlight ebb and flow runs its course even if the *shroud* is rolled again. Thus, it must be used wisely.

Blood of the angered spirit

XP Value: 600

GP Value: 6,000

This potion is a closely guarded secret of the gypsies. Usually kept in a nondescript ceramic bottle (metal or sunlight ruins it), the *blood* must be gathered from a female gypsy seer who died of natural causes. After the appropriate magic is performed, the *blood* has the power to reveal the presence of evil spirits and undead.

Blood of the angered spirit may be used only at night, but it remains potent until dawn. To use the *blood*, one must pour it into a wooden or ceramic bowl. Then the user must dab the *blood* with a piece of cloth, a brush, or a sprinkler such as is used with holy water. The user must sprinkle the *blood* all about the area he wishes to check for unruly spirits. A single bottle of the *blood* may cover up to 1,000 square feet.

From the time of application until dawn, whenever any undead or evil extraplanar creature passes into the area covered by the *blood*, the liquid hisses and steams. It does this regardless of whether the intruding creature is disguised, invisible, or noncorporeal. *Blood of the angered spirit* only warns of the evil's presence; it does not serve as a ward.

Javelin, bane of the black heart

XP Value: 400

GP Value: 2,000

(Warrior, Priest)

This weapon is similar to a *javelin of piercing*, but it has a specialized function: to stake a vampire from a distance.

The *bane* is a long shaft of wood tapering to a sharp point at one end. At the other end is a decorative carving in the shape of four leering gargoyles, with their batlike wings held straight up and back-to-back, giving the appearance of a macabre tulip. The entire length of the *javelin* is covered with light but detailed carvings of blackbirds so tightly meshed that their shapes are not recognizable with only a cursory examination. The weapon is otherwise smooth, and the wood is a rich, dark brown.

The javelin is said to have been created by a priest who dedicated his life to destroying the vampire who had turned the priest's daughter into one of the undead. In their final struggle, the priest suffered a mortal wound, but not before he sent the weapon screaming into the vampire's heart.

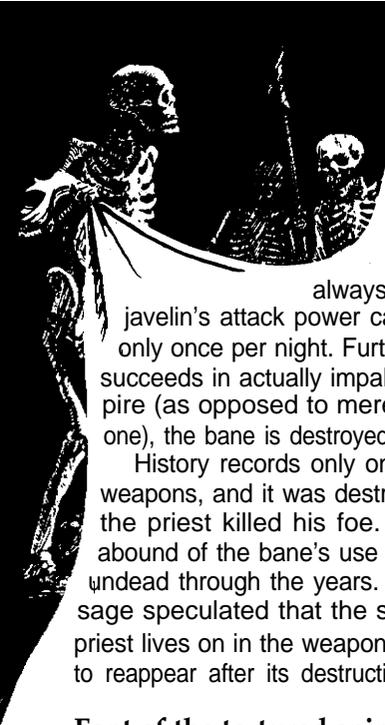
The *bane* functions as a normal javelin unless brought within 30 yards of a vampire. When this occurs, the *bane* grows warm and throbs with hatred. It tugs its wielder toward the vampire, even if the monster is in animal or mist form. This is an effective way to unmask the monster, but not a subtle one. The vampire becomes instantly aware of the weapon and feels a distinct discomfort.

The main function of the weapon is identical to a *javelin of piercing*. The wielder points the weapon at his foe and speaks the command word. The *bane* launches from the wielder's hand and flies toward the target, attempting to impale it.

The *javelin* is considered +5 to hit against a vampire, and the hurler's THACO is used, but without any modifiers for Strength, Dexterity, or specialization.

If the *javelin's* attack succeeds, it inflicts triple damage to the monster. In addition, if the successful attack roll was 15 or better, the vampire is staked through the heart. The monster then bursts into flame, completely consuming the creature and the weapon within one round.





While the vampire detection power is

always active, the javelin's attack power can be used only once per night. Further, once it succeeds in actually impaling a vampire (as opposed to merely striking one), the bane is destroyed in the fire.

History records only one of these weapons, and it was destroyed when the priest killed his foe. Still, tales abound of the bane's use against the undead through the years. One poetic sage speculated that the spirit of the priest lives on in the weapon, causing it to reappear after its destruction.

Font of the tortured spirit

XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 5,000

Not really a weapon against the undead but more a tool for understanding them, the font allows the living to experience the anguish of restless spirit. Its creation has been traced back to a ghost-hunting sorceress who traveled the land trying to help these undead find their way into the next world by resolving whatever matters they had left behind.

The font is a ceramic bowl about 18" in diameter. The outside of the bowl is painted dead black, and the inside is completely white. The only other feature is a small crystal pyramid set into the bottom of the bowl. This pyramid is about one inch on a side. It has been set into the clay of the bowl and can be removed only if the bowl is broken (and thus ruined). To be used, it must be taken to a haunted place and filled with pure water, with a pinch of gravesoil and shavings of a yew tree added. If no gravesoil is available, then any matter obtained from a place of the dead, such as sand from a tomb, is acceptable. The font must be left undisturbed in the haunted area for one day and night.

After this time has passed, the user may return to the bowl and drink from it. The bowl cannot be moved, or the magic will not work, and the process must be begun again. The water must be drunk from the bowl or a cupped hand. A cup or container must not be used, as any material other than flesh renders the water's power inert. This also means that the hand cupping the water must be free of all jewelry or gloves.

Those who drink from the **font** (up to six may do so) fall into a trance in which they experience those events that led immediately to the death of a particular undead creature. The drinkers learn the creature's name and background during this magical vision. In effect, the drinkers become the person that the restless spirit once was, with all the emotions, thoughts, and experiences the individual had at the time just before death.

After the vision, those who drank from the **font** must save vs. paralyzation with a penalty of -1 to -5, depending on the power of the haunting spirit and the emotional intensity of its demise. Failing the save means that the drinkers are so shaken by what they have experienced that they suffer -4 to any ability check, attack roll, and saving throw made for the next 24 hours. Even if the save is successful, the vision is so intense as to visit the drinkers' nightmares for years to come.

The time spent in this trance is up to the DM, but the vision occurs in real time. Thus, the vision could be as short an hour or as long as a month. Typically, visions last from 1-10 hours. The bodies of those in the trance are in a state of suspended animation and need not eat, drink, or even breathe during this period. They appear to all tests to be dead themselves. However, if smelling salts or a sage branch is held under the nose of an entranced individual, he awakens immediately.

Philter, feast of oblivion

XP Value: 400 GP Value: 2,000

This potion is disgusting but useful to those who hunt vampires. It appears as a syrupy dull red fluid and tastes like salt and bad onions. To make it, various herbs and plants used in embalming procedures must be mixed with a pint of a certain individual's blood (see below) and four drops of sleep poison. Once made, the potion stays intact until imbibed. The potion's effects last for one night.

The potion must be made for use by a specific person. It is the blood of this person that is used in the potion's creation. When this person drinks the **philter**, his blood immediately becomes poisonous to a vampire. Any vampire drinking the blood of a creature under this potion's effect immediately falls into a state of hibernation, just as if the sun were out and the beast had lain in its own coffin. This sleep is overwhelming,

and the beast remains unaware of its surroundings until the next time the sun falls.

If *Van Richten's Guide to Vampires* is used, any vampire of Very Old age or older may make a save vs. paralyzation upon drinking the tainted blood with a -4 penalty to avoid the sleep. If the save is made, the vampire is still sluggish, with a -3 penalty to initiative and all attack rolls, and its movement is reduced by half. Eminent or patriarch vampires may continue to make saving throws every round at the same penalty if the original save is failed. Finally, any vampire who once drank the blood of a victim under the effects of this potion (and survived) is allowed an Intelligence check at -3 to smell the tainted blood in his intended victim. The dire creatures aren't often fooled twice by this devious concoction.

Verses of Belneiranon

XP Value: 2,000 GP Value: 10,000
(Wizard, Priest, Bard)

Written upon this ancient granite tablet are five stanzas of rhyming verse composed by a powerful bard-priest for use in a war against a cult of evil necromancers. Only the name "Belneiranon" carved into the back of the tablet gives any hint as to the identity of the composer.

The tablet is hexagonal, but oblong, about 2' x 1' x 6". Over the centuries, the tablet has been broken, and it is now in three parts of roughly the same size. The author was a skilled carver, however, and the text remains intact.

The **verses** are written in a strange script combining hieroglyphics mixed with letters. The symbols are curved and flowing, suggesting motion or elemental forces. The glyphs appear in a series of six columns that run the length of one tablet face. The other face has only four small glyphs, also arranged in a column, in the center. These four glyphs form the syllables of the tablets author, or so the sages say. Each of the glyphs is about as large as a man's thumbnail.

To make any sense of the tablets writings, the reader must cast a **read languages** spell or make a Read Languages check at -20% or a proficiency check against ancient languages with a -4 penalty. If either check is successful, then the tablet may be read. The language of the tablet is difficult to master, requiring a weeks worth of study and a successful Intelligence check to understand it well enough to use.

Once understanding is achieved, the verses become a potent weapon against the forces of darkness. When spoken with the correct, unbroken rhythm, the verses are extremely painful to the ears of any undead creatures within 50 yards of the reader. Skeletons and zombies simply fall to pieces. Noncorporeal undead suffer incredible agony and immediately leave the area for as long as the *verses* are being read. If they fail a save vs. spell, they can never return to that area again. Corporeal undead between (but not including) vampire and zombie status suffer 3d10 hp damage every round in which they can hear the verses. In addition, these creatures stand still, scream in anguish, and fight only if attacked.

Undead of vampire status or greater suffer 1d10 hp damage per round of hearing the *verses*. They can still act, but the pain they suffer imposes a -5 penalty to initiative and attack rolls. The pain also makes all spellcasting by undead impossible, and psionic power checks for undead are made at a -5 penalty.

The verses' magic channels immense energies through the tablets reader. These energies hammer at the reader's fortitude, and the song continually resounds within his ears. For this reason, the speaker must make a successful Constitution check for every round he recites from the verses. Every other round, a -1 cumulative penalty is added to the check, as the verses' power wears at the reader. Thus, on the first two rounds of reading, no penalty is suffered. On the third and fourth rounds, the penalty is -1. On the fifth and sixth, -2, and so forth.

The reader of the verses must concentrate completely on the complex language of the tablet and can take no other action lest the recital (and the magic) be interrupted. With careful timing, individuals other than the main reader may read along, allowing the original reader to stop. This allows an unbroken reading of the verses but provides a fresh voice (and Constitution) to continue the onslaught against darkness. Transference this way takes a full round, and the new speaker must succeed a Wisdom check. Bards make this check at +4.

The *verses* may be read only once per week. After a reading is stopped, the words fade from the tablet for seven days. A "reading" consists of an unbroken recitation of the verses, but it need not be the same voice.

Chime of dark need

XP Value: - GP Value: -

This item is a long, metal cylinder about 14" long and 2" wide. The cylinder is made of steel, but it is shot through with rust along the bottom. At the top of the cylinder, two holes have been drilled in the metal sides, arranged so that a string may be run through them, allowing the cylinder to be hung. When rung, the *chime* produces a low, mournful noise.

Ringling the *chime* arouses intense hunger in any vampire within the area of effect, sending the monster into a feeding frenzy. Any vampire so affected tries to feed upon the closest warm-blooded creature, in exclusion of all other cares, even its own survival. The affected vampire ignores all attacks against it and all other dangers. Even the presence of sunlight is ignored by the ravenous creature if a save vs. petrification at -2 is failed. Note that the effects of sunlight on a vampire are still the same, only that the creature pays no mind of venturing into it while under this item's influence.

This item is not without its dangers. In addition to the risks incurred in awakening bloodlust in powerful undead, the *chime* can bring about dark urges in the living, as well. When this item is sounded, all living creatures in the area of effect must save vs. spell. Failure indicates that the victim slowly begins to develop cannibalistic urges. With each week, the affected creature exhibits stronger and stronger desires to feed on the flesh of the living. The DM may choose the actual game effects upon characters so infected, but he is encouraged to be descriptive and horrifying. As weeks go by, saving throws may be required to resist the curse of the *chime of dark need*. Remember, the curse does not immediately take effect with full force; a failed save does not mean a character lunges at his nearest companion and begins gnawing on his toes. This is a gradual process, and it should not be immediately traceable to this item. To remove the cannibalism from a victim, a *remove curse* followed by a *bless* spell must be cast while the afflicted character bathes in holy water during a full moon.

The *chime's* history is very sketchy. Most sages who have studied the item speculate that it was once a *chime of hunger* that was later altered by an undead-hunting wizard to perform its current, more specialized function.

Reinhoff's meerschaum

XP Value:
1,500

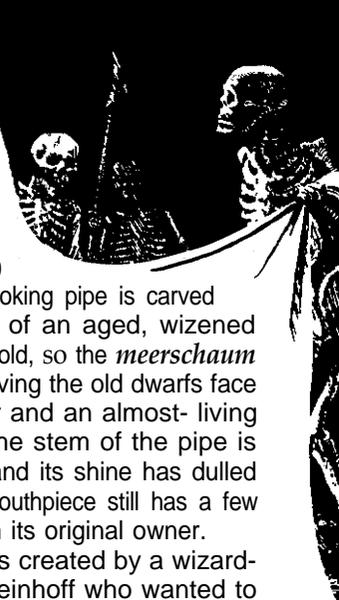
GP Value: 7,500

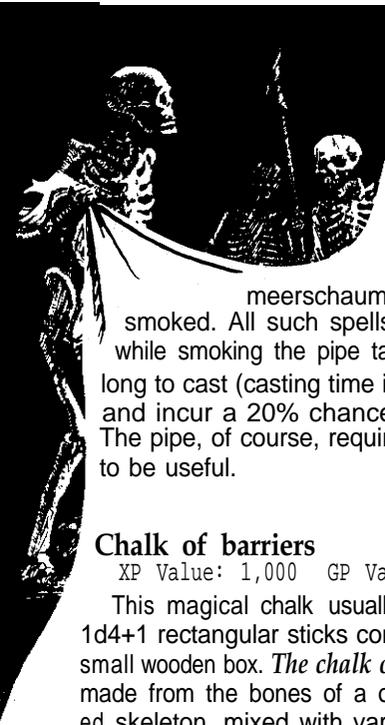
This large smoking pipe is carved in the likeness of an aged, wizened dwarf. It is very old, so the *meerschaum* has browned, giving the old dwarfs face great character and an almost-living appearance. The stem of the pipe is carved ebony, and its shine has dulled with age. The mouthpiece still has a few toothmarks from its original owner.

The pipe was created by a wizard-sage named Reinhoff who wanted to study and interview the undead without succumbing to stark terror or domination. Reinhoff was a bit overzealous in his work, and the pipe did not protect him from the traps he encountered in a long-dead pharaoh's tomb. The *meerschaum* was recovered by his henchmen, who sold it to a group of explorers. The pipe has been lost to history since then and has probably found its way into the hands of one who has no idea of its powers.

Whoever lights the pipe and smokes it gains great resistance to the fear auras and charm abilities of the undead, as well as increased protection from their attacks. As long as the pipe is lit, the smoker gains 90% resistance to any charm, sleep, or fear-related power used by any form of undead, barring spells actually cast. Thus, the resistance is effective against a vampire's charm, or a death knight's aura of fear, but it is useless against a *charm person* spell cast by a lich. The smoker also gains a +4 to all saving throws made against special undead attack forms that allow a save, such as a ghoul's paralyzation ability. In addition, the smoker gains a save of 15 against special attacks that don't normally allow a save, such as a vampire's energy drain or mummy rot. Again, this is effective only against the natural attacks of the undead, not against spells.

As the pipe was made for scholarly purposes, it does not lend itself well to a pitched battle against the forces of darkness. To be effective, the pipe must be smoked continuously, with periodic removal from the mouth to speak or exhale. If the pipe is out of the smoker's mouth for more than one round at a time, the magic fades until the pipe is re-lit. The pipe cannot be smoked during melee combat. In addition, any spellcasting requiring verbal components is





difficult to perform while the large, unwieldy

meerschaum is being smoked. All such spells attempted while smoking the pipe take twice as long to cast (casting time is doubled) and incur a 20% chance of failing. The pipe, of course, requires tobacco to be useful.

Chalk of barriers

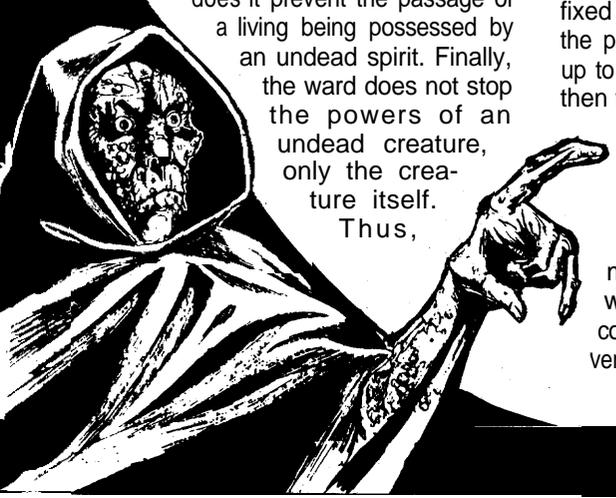
XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 5,000

This magical chalk usually comes in 1d4+1 rectangular sticks contained in a small wooden box. *The chalk of barriers* is made from the bones of a once-animated skeleton, mixed with various minerals. *The chalk* is dull yellow and leaves a large amount of dust. The secret of the *chalk's* creation is known mostly to alchemists or necromancers, but its origins are unclear.

The chalk is a powerful warding tool against all types of undead and can be used to seal any doorway or passage from intrusion by these monsters. The chalk must be used to draw a straight line between two fixed objects, such as two walls, pillars, trees, or large rocks. When the line is completed, then no undead creature of any type can physically cross it. Instead, the monsters are met with an invisible barrier that they cannot break. The weakest undead, skeletons and zombies, actually explode upon contact with this barrier. Ghosts and other noncorporeal undead cannot cross the line, even in astral form, for the line exists on both planes.

There are several limitations to the *chalk's* power. If the line is broken or swept away by any means, the magic of the barrier fades. Also, the barrier does not prevent the passage of creatures besides undead, nor does it prevent the passage of a living being possessed by an undead spirit. Finally, the ward does not stop the powers of an undead creature, only the creature itself.

Thus,



a lich's spells can pass over the line, and a vampire can freely charm those on the other side.

The chalk line must be straight, and must be connecting two fixed, material objects. Thus, a chalk circle cannot be drawn for any effect, nor can a curving line, nor a line in the middle of a floor that doesn't connect any objects. The fixed objects need not be parallel to each other, so one corner of a room may be blocked off. In addition, the fixed points need not rest on the ground, so it is possible to ward a window this way. *The chalk* functions only on the Prime Material Plane, and there must be a noticeable "down" direction, so the line cannot be drawn on the ceiling. It must be drawn on the floor or on the lowest point of a portal, such as a windowsill.

Finally, the two objects the chalk line connects are not warded. Thus, while some spirits are stopped by a line drawn on a door's threshold, they still may be able to go through the walls on either side. Thus, it is wise to draw a chalk line along the base of all four walls of a room, to afford maximum protection.

If two chalk lines are crossed, only the most recently drawn line holds power. The line crossed over is rendered inert.

Each stick of *chalk* is considered to have 30 "charges." For every foot of line drawn, a single "charge" worth of *chalk* is ground from the stick. Besides the warding power, the lines are otherwise normal for chalk dust, so water or scuffing easily removes the line. Undead creatures cannot physically touch the line of *chalk*, but they may use other means or living servants to get rid of the pesky ward.

Chalk lines cannot be drawn upon a damp floor, soil, or grass. However, the sticks of chalk may be crushed and the dust used to lay a warding line on grass or soil, at a cost of two charges per foot. In addition, the height of the "wall" created by the chalk line is as tall as the fixed objects used as anchor points. If the points are walls, then the ward goes up to the ceiling. If the anchors are trees, then the ward extends to the treetops.

Urn of bound souls

XP Value: 1,500 GP Value: 7,500

This is a heavy container that must be made with a special clay which must be made with a special clay with an interior lining of pure lead, covered by another lining of pure silver. The *urn* must possess a cork large

enough to close its opening tightly, but it must remain uncorked until used. The *urn* may be used only once.

The *urn* of *bound souls* may can entrap a bodiless spirit, such as noncorporeal undead or a vampire in mist form. The *urn* must be brought within 10' of the creature and the command word spoken loudly. The spirit must then save vs. spell. Failure means the creature has been drawn into the *urn*, which must be corked immediately and sealed with a mixture of candle wax and blood.

If a priest successfully turns the spirit in the same round the urn is used, the creature gains no saving throw to avoid imprisonment. Once the creature is inside the *urn of bound souls*, its captors have one turn to seal the cork properly before the captive may escape. The *urn* must remain sealed (and the seal must remain unbroken) for all time, lest the spirit be freed.

The *urn of bound souls* is 1' tall and 6" wide. The metal used in its creation makes it heavy for its size, and it cannot be carried easily. If it contains an imprisoned spirit, anyone standing closer than 5' from the *urn* hears moans and wails of anguish from it. The wailing has a dangerous effect on the weak-minded. If any intelligent creature with a Wisdom of 7 or less touches the *urn* while it holds a spirit, that creature must save vs. spell or be struck with a powerful desire to free the wretched spirit trapped within.

Any creature trapped in the *urn* is considered to be in suspended animation and is only dimly aware of the outside world. It can sense the presence of intelligent beings up to five feet from the *urn* but cannot glean any other information whatsoever. However, it is aware if some fool has been charmed by the *urn's* moaning.

The origins of the *urn* can be traced to a practitioner of white necromancy named Jarazed Al-Tajir, who created it to capture a powerful spirit that haunted a large oasis. However, it was reported stolen from Al-Tajir by a group of bandits and has not been heard of since. Neither have the bandits, for that matter.

Eye of the hunter's wisdom

XP Value: 3,000 GP Value: 15,000

This is a golden amulet about 3" in diameter. The amulet is circular, sculpted to resemble the sun, with eight "rays" shooting out from the center. At the base of each ray is carved a cats eye. In the center of the amulet is mounted a oval-

shaped tiger's eye agate. If one stares too long into the stone's depths, he begins to feel as if the stone is watching him.

The eye of the hunter's wisdom is a magical receptacle of knowledge accumulated by generations of undead hunters. It functions as a portable "memory" of information about the undead, as perceived by those hunters in their living days.

Whenever anyone wears the amulet in full view and is faced with a puzzle or enigma concerning undead of any type, the DM secretly rolls a Wisdom check for the wearer with a penalty equal to the Hit Dice of the undead in question, up to a maximum of -10. If this check succeeds, the amulet reveals to the wearer some knowledge about that form of undead. The gained knowledge always appears subtly. Thus, the information may appear in a dream or in a hunch that the character himself must figure out. Sometimes the knowledge may implant itself as a riddle or cryptic poem in the wearer's head. Perhaps the spirit of the dead hunter appears to the character as a ghost and imparts the information.

If the Wisdom check is successful, the knowledge gained is truthful and is based on the experiences of an undead hunter. Typical information gained includes: weaknesses of the undead form, special attacks or powers, diet, ability to procreate, etc. Only one fact about the undead type can be gained, and the amulet bestows knowledge only once a day. The wearer does not decide what information will be gained, the DM must decide based on the needs of the wearer.

If the Wisdom check is failed, the information gained is from a long-dead hunter's misconception, error, or personal bias. Thus, the information gained is exaggerated, incomplete, or just plain wrong.

Finally, the amulet is most useful in imparting wisdom about generalities of undead. The amulet may give information about a specific creature, but at an additional -4 penalty. This ability works only with undead that are capable of possessing distinct personalities, such as ghosts, vampires, and lichs.

It should be noted that the amulet also records all experiences with the undead had by the amulet's wearer. When the wearer dies, the amulet finds its way into the hands of another like-minded individual by means of a series

of remarkable coincidences. Thus, if a vampire slays the wearer, the amulet might fall from his neck and become lost in the mud. Later, the amulet may be found by a farmer, who trades it to a merchant for some fee. The merchant might then throw the amulet in to cement a deal with a traveler. This traveler may happen to be a ranger whose sister was taken by a vampire when he was a boy, perhaps by the same vampire that killed the previous hunter years earlier!

It is said that the eye is one of the few surviving remnants of an ancient order of men and women who hunted down and destroyed the undead. This order, known only as the Twilight Gathering, existed for thousands of years, but it seems to have disappeared about a century or so ago, for obscure reasons. However, the Gathering was a hereditary profession, and there are probably descendants of the original hunters who live in ignorance of their ancestry.

Harbingers of darkness

Sixth-Level Wizard spell

(Enchantment)

Range: 30 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 7 days, 7 nights

Casting Time: 1 turn

Area of Effect: Flock of birds

Saving Throw: Nil

One of the more obscure heroines of the elven folk was a mage-druid named Aevara Tearsong. Aevara had dedicated her life to the destruction of the undead and served as the main foe of a drow vampire who sought to turn all the elves of Aevara's homeland into her twisted servants. This spell was created by Aevara and ultimately aided her in the destruction of this vampire and her minions. Since then, she has passed the spell along to other noble folk who also crusade against the walking dead.

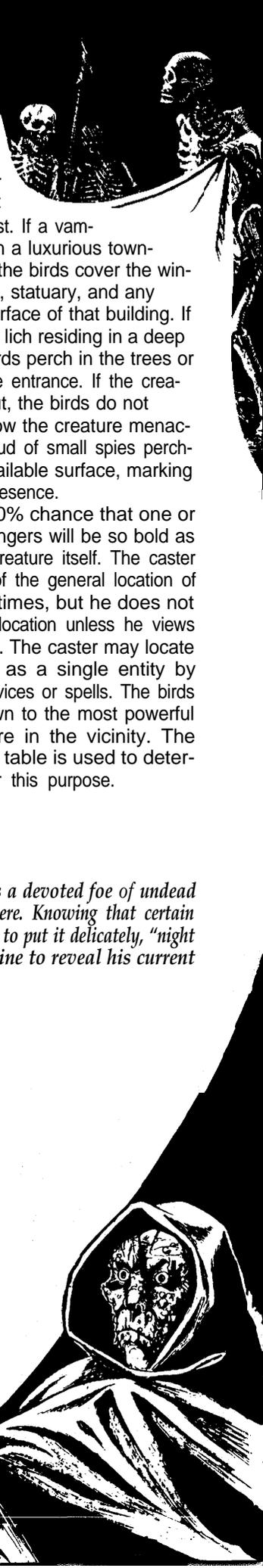
A large group of communal birds must be found before casting this spell. The birds may be of any type but must travel in large groups. Ravens, crows, sea gulls, even pigeons may be used. The caster then enchants the birds by speaking the words of the spell and then hurling a handful of seed into the air. The birds devour the seed, then fly off en masse. Over the next seven days, the birds roost upon any place or structure near which a powerful undead creature hides. The

birds find any such place within one mile per level of the caster from the spot

the spell was cast. If a vampire has laired in a luxurious townhouse in a city, the birds cover the windowsills, rooftop, statuary, and any other outside surface of that building. If the creature is a lich residing in a deep dungeon, the birds perch in the trees or rocks next to the entrance. If the creature ventures out, the birds do not attack it but follow the creature menacingly, a dark cloud of small spies perching on every available surface, marking the creature's presence.

There is a 30% chance that one or two of the harbingers will be so bold as to land on the creature itself. The caster remains aware of the general location of the birds at all times, but he does not know the exact location unless he views the birds herself. The caster may locate the harbingers as a single entity by using scrying devices or spells. The birds are always drawn to the most powerful undead creature in the vicinity. The undead turning table is used to determine "power" for this purpose.

Jay Knioum is a devoted foe of undead creatures everywhere. Knowing that certain of our readers are, to put it delicately, "night people," we decline to reveal his current location.





THE DRACONOMICON

The lesser evils of the draconian undead

by Jamie Nossal

illustrated by James Holloway

Most adventurers know that the Cult of the Dragon has successfully created dracoliches in recent years. What remains unclear, however, is whether the Cult can create other types of undead dragons. Some sages reason that if the Cult had labored at traditional trial-and-error research, it is inconceivable that they could create the ultimate undead dragon, the dracolich, without first experimenting with a variety of lesser undead dragon types. They therefore postulate that the creation of the first Cult dracolich followed the discovery of some ancient text, a draconic *Book of the Dead*, that explained the process in enough detail that they need not start from scratch. Presumably, additional writings exist that would enable a necromancer to create other types of undead dragons. Elminster and others assume that the Cult is already searching for these missing texts. Alternatively, it is possible, as half-jokingly suggested by an anonymous Waterdhavian mage, that perhaps the few who have encountered these lesser-known undead dragons did not live long enough to tell their tale.

This is not to say that undead dragons are found solely on Faerûn. Krynnish legends tell of the undead servitors of Takhisis, Queen of Evil Dragons. Ancient maps of Oerth locate the lair of "Dragotha, the undead dragon" somewhere to the north of the lich Keraptis's haven within White Plume Mountain (see *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #134 for more on Dragotha). Most sages who are aware of the many worlds and planes would argue that the undead dragons' most likely point of origin and the probable repository of any lost tomes detailing their creation may lie somewhere within the demi-plane of Ravenloft. In any case, these horrors can be encountered in any dark, hidden ruin favored by the DM and frequented by player characters. Would-be heroes beware.

Creating an undead dragon

Creation of an undead dragon is a difficult, expensive, and time-consuming task. The necromancer must have access to the *animate dead* spell as well as a fragment of the appropriate undead creature as an additional material component. The creation of a ghoulish dragon, therefore, requires a bit of ghoulish flesh, a spectre dragon requires a sample of spectre essence, etc. Finally, the project requires a reasonably intact dragon corpse, the exact condition of which depends upon the type of undead dragon to be created. Any true dragon species may be used, including dragon turtles. Dragonets and other creatures superficially resembling dragons, like wyverns and dragonettes, are unsuitable.

Once the required components are assembled, the necromancer must prepare the corpse so that it may receive the recalled spirit or — in the case of the non-corporeal undead types — serve as a link and guide to the departed spirit upon its return to the Prime Material Plane. The time and cost of this preparation are noted below for each undead type.

The process is not foolproof. As befits their powerful and magical nature, dragon spirits are extremely willful and difficult to control. Animation of the lesser undead types might require only a weak spirit or a small portion of the stronger one, but a necromancer seeking to create any of the intelligent undead types must summon the spirit of a comparatively powerful dragon and bend it to his own will — an arduous task for even an experienced mage. Once he has made his preparations and cast the necessary spells, the necromancer must then make a successful saving throw vs. spell (adjusted for Wisdom only), or the entire attempt has failed with a complete loss of time and money spent. This saving throw may require further adjustment depending upon the alignment, Hit Dice and personality of the original dragon. It is particularly difficult, for example, to force the lawful good spirit of a gold dragon into the form of a chaotic evil vampire dragon; apply a saving throw penalty of -1 for every degree of alignment difference between the undead type being created and the original dragon. Similarly, the intelligent undead tend to have certain personality traits in common (gluttonous ghouls and vengeful ghosts, for example); dragon species with the appropriate nature are noted in the individual descriptions below. Sympathetic traits allow the caster a +4 bonus to his save when attempting to create that type of undead dragon.

Attempts to create one of the more powerful undead dragon types are more likely to result in failure. The necromancer must not only summon and control increasingly powerful spirits but also allow the spirit a fair amount of self-will even as he strives to infuse it with power drawn from the Negative Material Plane. This bit of tricky magecraft incurs a further penalty to the saving throw for success determined by the undead type to be created. These penalties are noted in Table 1: Saving throw modifier summary. Likewise, older dragons possess stronger wills; therefore, a -1 saving throw penalty should be applied for every age category of the dragon beyond the adult stage, to a maximum of -6 in the case of a great wyrm.

By making his saving throw, the necromancer has successfully created an undead dragon under his direct control. Though this



Table 1: Saving throw modifier summary

Condition	Modifier
Wisdom bonus of creator	-4 to +4
Dragon species and undead type are different alignment	-1 to -4
Dragon species is a "preferred" type	+4
Dragon is a mature adult or older	-1 to -6
Undead type being created	see undead dragon summary

Example: A 9th-level necromancer (Wisdom 15) attempts to create a mummy dragon from an adult brass dragon of chaotic neutral alignment. His unmodified save vs. spell is 10, adjusted by +1 for Wisdom, -3 for three degrees of alignment difference (CN vs. LE), +4 for a preferred type, and -5 for a mummy dragon. A d20 roll of 13 grants success, a roll of 5–12 means failure, and a roll of 4 or lower means total failure and the spirit can never be recalled.

control could be temporarily suspended by clerical turning or a **control undead** spell, it is otherwise permanent.

If the saving throw fails, however, the necromancer has lost the battle of wills and must rest for a number of days equal to the difference between the saving throw rolled and the number required for success. If the saving throw roll would have failed even had no negative modifiers been applied, the dragon spirit has passed beyond reach and can never be recalled from the Outer Planes by that caster or any other. If the failed saving throw would have succeeded in the absence of any negative modifiers, however, the caster may try again at a later date when these modifiers have improved, either by attempting to create a more suitable undead type or when he has gained enough experience levels to improve his saving throw vs. spell.

General characteristics

Most undead dragons retain the general appearance of their living form, though certain details will differ. They have the same Armor Class, movement, Hit Dice, number of attacks, combat modifier, magic resistance, and fear aura as a living dragon unless noted otherwise.

Like living dragons, undead dragons can divide attacks among opponents, detect invisible creatures, and use clairaudience within their lairs. They may employ the usual combat options (kicks, tail slaps, etc.) available to a dragon of their size and age, although the flightless undead types cannot employ the snatch and stall options. They save as priests instead of fighters due to their undead nature.

Undead dragons retain all of the immunities possessed in normal life whether as a result of species or age.

Dragons that were of old or older status when they joined the ranks of the undead are immune to normal missiles, undead dragons created from red dragons are immune to fire, and so forth.

Undead dragons have the standard undead immunities to **charm**, **sleep**, and **hold** spells and are unaffected by poison or paralyzation. Clerical turning ability and spells that specifically target the undead also affect undead dragons; those with 12 or more Hit Dice should be considered special undead. Holy water inflicts 2d4 hp damage regardless of the undead dragon type. A **protection from evil** spell is ineffective against any but ghouls and ghastrons, but a **dragonbane** spell wards against any of the undead dragon types.

A dragon's innate spell-like abilities can be used by its undead counterpart in most cases. True spellcasting ability, however, is usually lost in the creation of the weaker undead types. Undead dragons assume the alignment of the appropriate type of undead creature. Intelligent undead dragons can speak if they could do so in life. The lesser types recall little of their existence among the living, but the more powerful and intelligent undead dragons retain all of their memories.

A few undead dragons possess the power to create half-strength undead under their control. These half-strength undead gain one Hit Die for every level that they energy drain until they possess the usual number of Hit Dice for their type. These controlled undead do the bidding of the undead dragon; the master of the undead dragon, if one exists, has no power over these undead at any time. The controlled undead become free-willed should their undead creator be destroyed.

Dragon zombies

A relatively intact dragon corpse (i.e., one with no missing limbs) is all that is required to create this type of undead dragon. Dragon zombies are often created from young or small dragons — or following a failed attempt to create one of the intelligent undead types. Because a spirit other than that of the actual dragon corpse animates the dragon zombie, modifiers for alignment and species are not necessary, and all saves are made at +4. Repeated attempts at creating a dragon zombie are possible should the necromancer fail on his first attempt, though he must repeat the preparation time and purchase new materials.

A dragon zombie superficially resembles a dracolich, but it lacks the latter's glowing eyes, and the dragon zombie is a ponderous creature that always strikes last in any round. When created, the dragon zombie has one more Hit Die than the dragon had in life, though this additional Hit Die has no effect on the age-related abilities of the creature. The mindless dragon zombie can follow only the simplest commands.

Dragon skeletons

An intact dragon skeleton is not necessary for creation of this undead type; the skull, spine and claws of the dragon are the only pieces that are absolutely required. The bones of some other large creature may be substituted for any other part that is missing from the dragon skeleton. Dragon skeletons may be created from any dragon species but are usually created from young or small dragons that are unsuitable for the creation of a more powerful undead type. As with dragon zombies, any available spirit can serve to animate the skeleton, and modifiers for alignment and species are unnecessary. Repeated attempts at creating a skeleton dragon are possible if the necromancer does not succeed on his first attempt.

Skeleton dragons suffer only half-damage from edged or piercing weapons and are immune to cold-based attacks. They are mindless and can follow only relatively simple commands.

Ghoul and ghastrons

Ghoul and ghastrons may be created from the intact corpse of any dragon of young age or older. Evil and greedy dragons make the most suitable ghouls and ghastrons. The preferred types

Table 2: Lesser undead dragon types

	Zombie	Skeleton	Ghoul	Ghast	Wight
Intelligence	Non-	Non-	Low	Very	Average
Speech	no	same	same	same	same
Armor Class	same	same	same	same	same
Movement	half	same	same	same	same
Flight	no	no	yes	yes	half
Maneuverability Class	n/a	n/a	same	same	B
Hit Dice	same +1	same	same	same	same
Damage/Attack	same	same	same + paralyze	same + paralyze	same + drain
fear Aura	no	no	same	same	same
Breath Weapon	no	no	same	same	no
Innate magical abilities	no	no	same	same	same
Spellcasting	no	no	no	no	same
Preparation	1 day	3 days	6 days	10 days	2 weeks
Cost	500 gp	1,000 gp	2,000 gp	5,000 gp	7,500 gp
Saving throw modifier	+4	+4	+2	none	1
Minimum Age	young	young	young	young	young adult

are red, white, black, topaz, deep, shadow, yellow, and brown dragons.

In combat, any physical blow by the dragon can cause paralysis in the same manner as a normal ghoul or ghast. Ghast dragons likewise exude the typical ghast stench, but in a 20' radius due to their larger size. A *protection from evil* spell prevents physical attacks but does not stop a ghoul or ghast dragon from using its breath weapon.

Ghoul and ghast dragons would be indistinguishable from living dragons if they were not for their thick, charnel odor, scabbed hide showing beneath the odd missing scale, and the dull eyes, teeth, and scales. They consume carrion in order to fuel their breath weapons. Ghoul dragons retain a glimmer of evil intelligence and can cope with a wider variety of instructions and situations than the unintelligent skeletons and zombies, while the more intelligent ghast dragons possess a keen cunning that makes them even more dangerous.

Wight dragons

A wight dragon spirit must inhabit an intact dragon corpse; however, the time required to prepare the body generally means that the animated body is in a state of advanced decomposition. Most are similar in appearance to a dragon zombie, except that they have glowing eyes (and could be mistaken for dracoliches). The dragon that supplies the corpse must have been at least of young adult age when it died; wight dragons are best created from especially vicious or territorial evil dragons. The black, red, white, topaz, and brown dragon species make excellent candidates.

The tattered wings of a wight dragon allow flight at maneuverability class E. These creatures are harmed only by magical weapons and are immune to cold.

Wight dragons inflict normal claw and bite damage, but they also drain one energy level on any successful claw or bite attack. Multiple hits on an opponent in the same round do not drain multiple energy levels. An intelligent living creature completely drained of life levels by a wight dragon becomes a normal half-strength wight under the control of the wight dragon.

Wight dragons have some memory of their prior existence and a few (25%) retain their spell-casting ability. They dislike bright light and avoid it, though it does them no actual harm.

Wraith dragons

To create a wraith dragon, a complete adult dragon corpse is necessary, though it may be 'in any condition, even skeletal. The more cunning and intelligent dragon species are most suitable for the creation of a wraith dragon: blue, green, emerald, sapphire, and cloud dragons.

The ethereal wraith dragon is easily mistaken for a shadow dragon with glowing red eyes. Because wraith dragons are non-corporeal, they have flying maneuverability class B regardless of their original ability. If the dragon type from which the wraith dragon was created could not fly, that wraith dragon has a flying speed of 24.

Wraith dragons possess the same abilities as a wight dragon, but instead of draining energy levels on a successful

hit, they employ a black, crackling breath attack of negative energy that conforms to the same area of effect as their normal (living) breath weapon. The breath weapon drains one energy level from all opponents caught in it with no saving throw applicable. Wraith dragons may employ their level-draining breath weapon every other round, three times per day. An intelligent living creature completely drained of life levels in this manner becomes a normal half-strength wraith under the control of the wraith dragon.

Wraith dragons retain their intelligence, memories and spell-ability, if any, and are immune to cold and nonmagical weapons. Powerless in sunlight, they hide their lairs deep within cavern systems or ruins. They prefer to avoid bright light, such as that from a *continual light* spell, but they are not actually harmed by such.

Mummy dragons

The method by which the mummy dragon is created is ancient, probably among the first methods known and used by early necromancers and cultists. Desert-dwelling dragons of adult age or older are most commonly made into mummy dragons; this includes blue, yellow, brass, sapphire, and brown dragons.

Creating this type of undead dragon is a long, labor-intensive process. The dragon corpse must be intact and relatively fresh and is prepared for mummification with surgery, wrapping, and treatment with preservatives. The body must then be desiccated, either by entombment in a dry environment (requiring another 3d6 weeks of creation time) or magically

Table 3: Greater undead dragon types

	Wraith	Mummy	Spectre	Ghost	Vampire
Intelligence	same	same	same	same	same
Speech	same	same	same	same	same
Armor Class	same	same	same	same	same
Movement	same	same	same	same	same
Flight	same (24)	no	same (24)	same	same
Maneuverability class	B	n/a	B	same	B
Hit Dice	same	same	same	same	same
Damage/attack	same, drain	same +3, rot	same, drain	same, age	same +2, drain
Fear aura	same	special	same	same	same
Breath weapon	level drain	rot	spectral	age	same, drain
Innate magical abilities	same	same	same	same	same
Spellcasting	same	same	same	same	same
Preparation time	3 weeks	6 weeks+	4 weeks	6 weeks	8 weeks
Cost	10,000 gp	20,000 gp	12,000 gp	15,000 gp	18,000 gp
Saving throw modifier	- 2	- 5	- 6	- 6	8
Minimum age	adult	adult	old	adult	old

(with applications of *dust of dryness*, *destroy water spells*, etc.).

The product is a skeletal dragon held together by withered flesh that is both extremely strong and damage-resistant. Though the mummification process tends to cause the dragon's scales to flake off, mummy dragons retain their original AC, are immune to normal weapons, and suffer only half damage from magical weapons. Mummy dragons are difficult to recognize, as the signature wrappings and bandages are usually removed once the creation process is complete. They do, however, smell strongly — though not necessarily unpleasantly — of the expensive spices and unguents used to preserve their flesh.

The physically powerful mummy dragon gains a +3 damage bonus to all physical attacks, and its supernaturally potent fear aura forces any creature sighting a mummy dragon to save vs. spell or be afflicted with paralyzing fear, unable to take any action for 1d4 rounds. Their touch inflicts the same rotting disease as does a normal mummy.

Though they are immune to cold, the dried flesh of a mummy dragon is predictably vulnerable to fire. Normal and magical flame inflicts +1 damage per die on a mummy dragon and causes the creature to avoid any encounter that would result in its suffering a significant amount of such damage. If a mummy dragon was originally immune to fire, it retains this immunity with respect to normal fires but is still subject to unmodified damage from magical fire. Their withered wings prohibit flight.

The breath weapon of a mummy dragon is a horrid, charnel gust with an

area of effect equal to that of a green dragon's. The attack inflicts instantaneous rotting damage on its victims equal to that which would be inflicted by their normal breath weapon (save for ½ damage). Immunity to disease, including possession of a *peript of health*, reduces damage by half, but any creature that dies as a result of suffering 50% or more of its full hit point total in rotting damage instantly disintegrates into dust and cannot be *raised* (though *resurrection* is still a possibility).

Spectre dragons

Exceptionally evil and cunning dragons of old age or older can become spectre dragons. Preferred species are blue, green, sapphire, deep, and shadow dragons. A spectre dragon appears to be a transparent, non-corporeal image of the dragon as it appeared in life.

Spectre dragons fly at the same speed as living dragons, but their lack of a physical body grants them maneuverability class B. Spectre dragons that could not fly in life have a flying movement rate of 24. They retain their intelligence, memories, and spell-casting ability, and they are immune to cold.

Like the wight dragon, a spectre dragon drains an energy level on a successful claw or bite attack. It also retains its original breath weapon; however, this attack is spectral rather than physical, and it draws its power directly from the Negative Material Plane. Such spectral breath weapons can affect creatures that would normally be fully or partially immune to the physical effects of such an attack. For example, a *protection from lightning* spell offers no protection from

the breath weapon of a blue spectre dragon. Safety from this attack can be gained only from spells such as *Negative Plane protection* (negating all damage from a single attack if a save vs. death magic is made by the protected creature) or an item like a *scarab of protection* (which makes the holder immune to the spectral attack at a cost of one charge if the holder makes his saving throw vs. the breath attack, two charges if he fails). Intelligent living creatures slain by a spectre dragon's breath weapon arise as normal half-strength spectres upon the following sunset.

Ghost dragons

Generally created to serve as guardians of powerful magic, only the most powerful and evil dragons can become ghost dragons. Blue, green, and sapphire dragons of adult age or above are usual. A ghost dragon retains its original appearance, though it is non-corporeal and transparent, and it possesses a terrifying aspect that overwhelms the normal dragon fear aura. Ghost dragons tend to be hateful, envious, and jealous.

Unlike other undead dragons, the ghost dragon is confined to a limited domain. These guardians haunt a particular area, usually the lair they occupied when alive, although occasionally their creator might prepare a more convenient location. Ghost dragons can magic jar as do ordinary ghosts, and they may cross the borders of their domain while in possession of another body, although this would be unusual as the greedy nature of a ghost dragon compels it to guard its lair and treasure at every moment.

Like normal ghosts, the ghost dragon is an ethereal creature and is subject to attack only by other ethereal creatures unless it materializes on the Prime Plane, where it is vulnerable to attack by magical weapons. The sight of a ghost dragon is so terrifying that all who view it instantly age 10-40 years.

A semi-materialized ghost dragon may use any of the combat tactics that it was allowed as a living dragon; however, any physical blow ages the recipient 10 years in addition to the normal damage. As with a spectre dragon, the breath weapon of a ghost dragon draws its power from the Negative Material Plane, but its effects can be mitigated by protections from aging in addition to protections from Negative Planar attacks. A *phylactery of long years* reduces damage by 25% while the *youthful creature* spell (from the *Tome of Magic*) restores all damage lost to this breath attack. Similar items or spells act as a cure light wounds spell if used on a creature which has suffered a breath attack from a ghost dragon. The breath weapon otherwise conforms to the breath weapon of a living dragon with respect to area of effect and damage.

Any living creature killed by a ghost dragon is completely drained of life essence and is forever dead. *Raise dead* and *resurrection* spells are useless, though a *wish* spell might work.

Vampire dragons

With the exception of the dracolich, no undead dragon is feared more than a vampire dragon. They are best created from the most evil, chaotic, and powerful dragon species available; red, white, deep, shadow, and yellow dragons of old age or older are the most viable stock.

The appearance of a vampire dragon is identical to that of a living dragon, and the monster's true nature is often revealed only when its special powers are employed. Though these dragon species are already known for their arrogance, cruelty, and overbearing ego, those traits are even more exaggerated in vampire dragons, who are well aware of the measure of their power. Due to their might and overwhelming desire to dominate those around them, vampire dragons are difficult to control and are very rarely created even by the most practiced of necromancers.

Vampire dragons possess all of the normal powers of their particular dragon type, including breath weapon and spell-casting ability. They are very strong,

however, and gain a +2 bonus to damage inflicted by a physical attack. The vampire dragon consumes living victims in order to power its normal breath weapon.

Vampire dragons can be hit only by magical weapons, suffer half-damage from cold and lightning and regenerate 3 hit points per round. They can assume gaseous form and spider climb at will. The mesmerizing gaze of a vampire dragon charms the unwary (-2 saving throw) and is effective on any living creature.

Vampire dragons draw much of their power directly from the Negative Material Plane. Any successful hit drains an energy level (with only one level drain possible per round in the event of multiple hits), and they possess a special breath attack in addition to their normal breath weapon. Usable three times per day, every other round, this special attack conforms to the area of effect and general shape of the ordinary breath weapon, but it is dead black and reeks of old blood. The attack drains victims of an energy level with no saving throw applicable, though the various protections noted previously may be effective.

Fortunately, vampire dragons have the same vulnerabilities as normal vampires, including being repelled by symbols of lawful good, the inability to cross moving water, and destruction by direct sunlight. Reducing a vampire dragon to 0 hp forces it into gaseous form, and it must return to its treasure hoard in order to reform a physical body. Like a vampire's coffin, a vampire dragon's hoard will be strongly guarded and carefully hidden, as a dragon whose hoard has been stolen would face destruction should it be forced into gaseous form.

Vampire dragons often enslave humans, demihumans, humanoids, or even monstrous creatures with their charm ability. The more powerful the slave the better, as the vampire dragon manipulates these catspaws to spread evil and chaos while increasing its own power and wealth.

Undead dragons and the campaign

Three basic methods serve for introduction of undead dragons to a campaign. The first method assumes that the knowledge required to create these nightmares has been forever lost but that a few of these undying creatures still lurk among ancient ruins or in deep caverns. Character parties, to their credit or

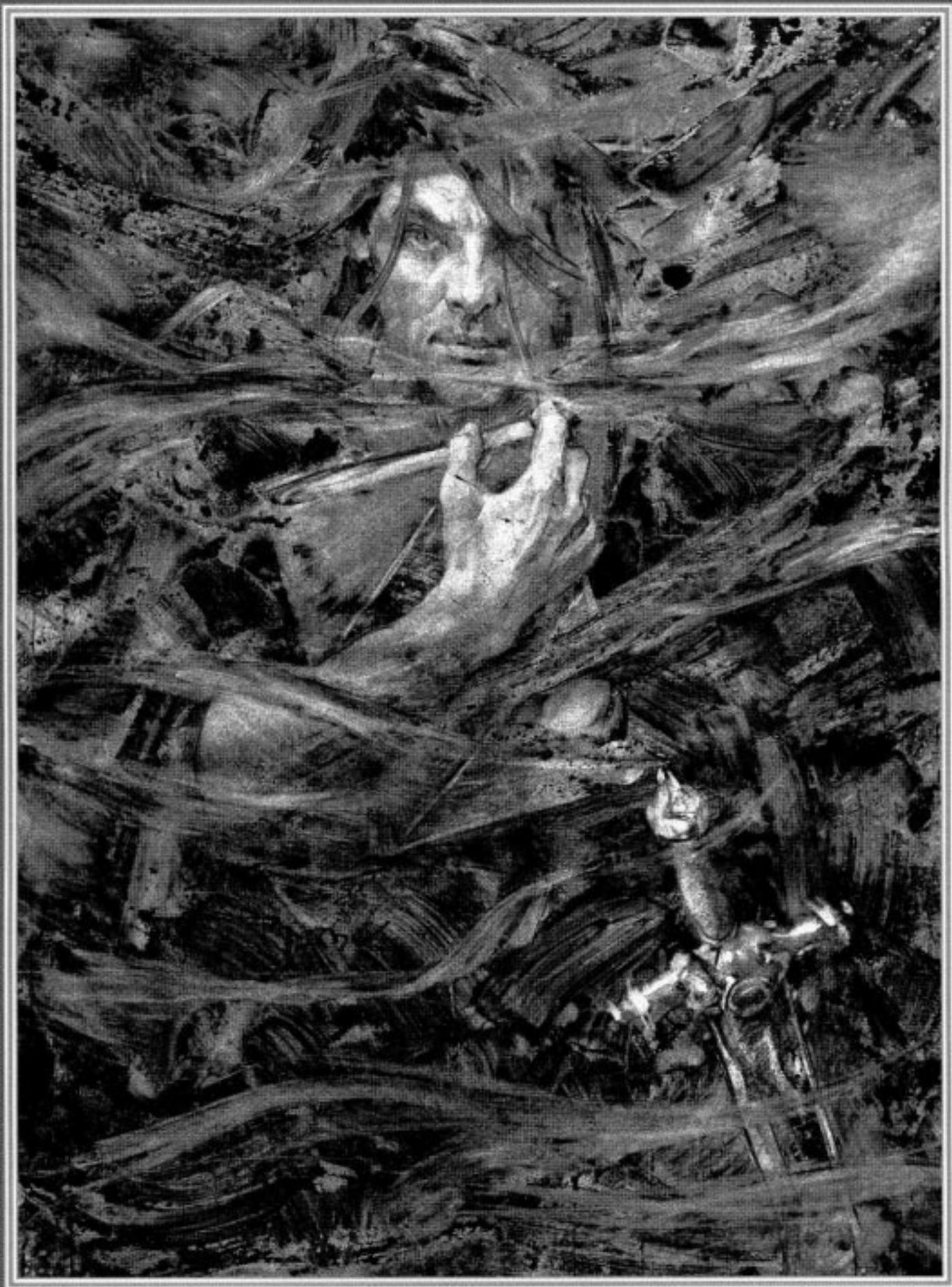
chagrin, might discover these oddities rather unexpectedly. This might be a once-in-a-career event, or a campaign could be built around the premise whereby the party comes into possession of a faded tome that hints as to the location and general nature of other undead dragons that were created at the behest of an evil order of necromancers or an extinct religious cult. Some of the lairs, once they are found, might contain nothing but an odd trap or two among the moldering bones and dust. Others will likely have their guardians still in residence, along with whatever treasures, magical or mundane, that their creators thought worth guarding. The more powerful undead dragons have the ability to create undead servitors, and these would certainly complicate the situation.

An opposing school of thought assumes that the science of animating undead dragons is relatively new, but with the field being steadily advanced by a secret society like the Cult of the dragon. New types of undead dragons would slowly begin to appear on the campaign, plaguing institutions dear to the PCs, who must discover the abilities and weaknesses of an increasing variety of undead dragon types. Eventually, the evil genius(es) responsible for setting loose these abominations must be found and neutralized; their records must be destroyed or put in safekeeping so that none may repeat their unholy experimentation.

A DM may also desire a mix of the two options, with the PCs' enemies having discovered and gained control of a number of undead dragons that have survived the ages since the practice of their creation was more common. Not only must the PCs battle these foes and their new-found undead allies, they may rest assured that these necromancers or priests are working to rediscover the lost art of undead dragon creation through current researches and by seeking out the ancient tomes that detail these ghastly practices. The PCs might travel near and far in a race to obtain this lost lore before it falls into the proverbial wrong hands. And should they fail, well, the AD&D® game does have a nice combat system.



Since spending last summer working at an obscure archeological dig, Jamie Nossal nightly haunts the city morgue, seeking the proper materials.



the BOOK OF SOULS

by Robert S. Mullin

illustrated by Scott Burdick

It was midwinter, and the moon sat beguiling in the sky, hovering in its full dreadful glory like some great eye through which the gods could peer down upon the world. Chill winds rustled shriveled leaves that refused to release their grip on dark, obscenely twisted trees.

Midnight was approaching when I urged my gelding into that ramshackle town. The place seemed deserted save for the occasional candle flame flickering through the cracks of shuttered windows. I pushed my steed through streets of frozen mud, past icy puddles in the track's labyrinth of ruts and fissures. For the hundredth time I promised the horse a drink, but my purpose for being here required my immediate attention.

When I reached the trail I sought, a path nearly concealed by a screen of tangled creepers, I reigned in my horse and dismounted. My passage provoked a cloud of night birds from a nearby stand of frees. A wolf's cry echoed between the rumblings of the coming storm.

In my heart, I yearned to turn back then, but the urgency of my mission beckoned me toward an unforeseen doom. Onward I pressed, stalking the trail on panther's feet, making my way to a decrepit tower of weather-scarred stone and crumbling mortar. It was here that I would find answers, here that I would find some inkling of my prize — the Book of Souls.

Appearance

The *Book of Souls* is large, roughly 30" long, 20" wide, and 6" thick. No designs appear on its covers or spine, and it is bound entirely in an alien, unidentifiable hide so black that it seems to devour light. It is as if a piece of darkness from between the stars of a night sky were removed and wrapped about the tome. The *Book's* pages are similarly dark, but the calligraphic inscriptions set down upon them burn with a silvery radiance.

The *Book* radiates a constant chill that produces cold vapors (akin to dry ice) when exposed to warm climates. This chill is not strong enough to inflict damage to one who holds it, but it is quite evident if touched with bare flesh.

History

It is said that the Dark Powers do not seek out individuals of sinister disposition and offer them power in exchange for wicked deeds. Rather, they watch and wait, and when such a being performs an evil act on its own, the Dark Powers toss it scraps of power to draw it further into the abyss. The Dark Powers created the *Book of Souls* to serve as a lure to evil creatures, but it fulfills its promise with unexpected rewards.

The Dark Powers formed the *Book of Souls* from the Mists, coalescing and solidifying the vapor until it became physical substance. It appeared within the Misty Border, and there it floated like its own little island domain, waiting to be found by an unwary traveler. The wait was not long.

Throughout its existence, the *Book of Souls* has exchanged hands countless times, and history has found it difficult to keep track. Certainly

the best known "owner" of the *Book* was one Gwillam Dartram, who is said to have possessed it for more than a decade. During the majority of that time, he even managed to resist its malevolent influence. In the end, however, Gwillam's conviction was broken by the *Book*, and he was transformed into what has become known as the Dark Pawn.

Surprisingly, the manifestation of the Dark Pawn has occurred only once since the *Book of Souls* came into being. Ironically, it happened in and around the time of the Grand Conjunction. Despite this, however, there is no evidence to suggest that the Dark Pawn was in any way involved in bringing about the Grand Conjunction or causing its collapse. Yet, the Dark Pawn may have been involved in the reshaping of the Land of the Mists after that event, for it is rumored that just before the Grand Conjunction sundered the demiplane, the Dark Pawn visited every island of terror and core domain that did not reform when the Grand Conjunction collapsed. Coincidence? Unlikely. But was the Dark Pawn responsible for the disappearance of so many domains? That is a question only the Dark Powers can answer, and they are not known for their willingness to reveal their motives.

Upon the reformation of the demiplane, the Dark Pawn vanished, its purpose apparently served, though no one has yet determined what that purpose may have been. With its departure went the *Book of Souls*, but reports of this or that mageling wielding a "light-drinking tome" have begun to surface throughout the domains. If these reports do in fact indicate the return of the *Book of Souls*, then it is only a matter of time before the Dark Pawn returns as well, and only the Dark Powers know what purpose it will serve this time.

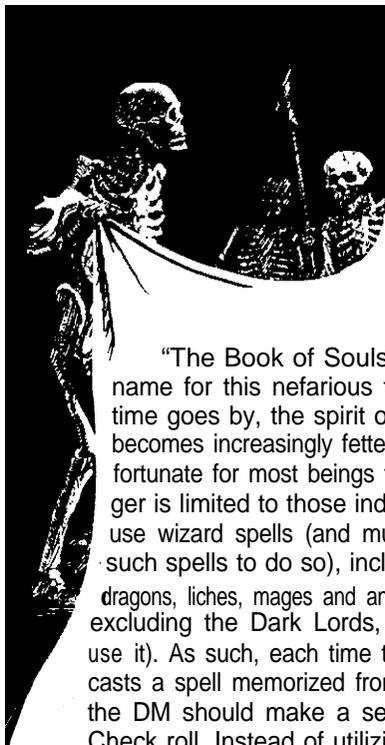
Contents

The *Book of Souls* contains an extensive selection of wizard spells, copied therein by previous wizards who possessed it. When a new spell is to be entered into the *Book*, blank pages magically appear, though the *Book* never seems to grow thicker. DMs must determine which spells are contained in the *Book*, as appropriate to their own campaigns. It is suggested that DMs be liberal with the exact number, as there have been many "owners" throughout the tome's history. However, DMs should refrain from including those spells that are extremely rare (i.e., rare in the sense that few spellcasters use or even know about them). A small handful of such rare spells aren't excessively taxing on a campaign, but overindulgence should be avoided at all costs.

In any case, the spells contained within the *Book of Souls* cannot be recopied into another spell book or written in scroll form, as they have been altered by, and tied to, the *Book* itself.

This restriction does not mean that spellcasters cannot devise similar versions of the *Book's* spells, assuming they have witnessed the





effects of any given spell cast from the book.

The Curse

"The Book of Souls" is a fitting name for this nefarious tome, for as time goes by, the spirit of its "owner" becomes increasingly fettered to it. It is fortunate for most beings that this danger is limited to those individuals who use wizard spells (and must memorize such spells to do so), including bards, dragons, liches, mages and and so forth (but excluding the Dark Lords, who cannot use it). As such, each time the spell-user casts a spell memorized from the *Book*, the DM should make a secret Powers Check roll. Instead of utilizing the standard tables for a failed powers check (as provided in the RAVENLOFT® boxed set), the DM should apply the following results each time a powers check related to the *Book* fails, and they should be implemented cumulatively in the order given below:

❖ When a powers check is failed the first time, the spell-user becomes "linked" to the *Book of Souls* and loathes being away from it for any length of time. In order to leave the *Book* behind, the possessor must make a successful Wisdom check. For each full day away from the *Book*, the spell-user must make another Wisdom check, but with a cumulative -1 penalty per day. Thus, the check is at -1 after one day, -2 after two days, -3 after three, and so forth. This continues until a Wisdom check is failed, at which time, the subject abandons whatever he is doing and immediately returns to the *Book* by the quickest route available. If others attempt to prevent the subject from returning, he resorts to violent action in order to do so. The spell-user is not yet lost to the *Book of Souls*, however, and a simple dispel magic spell can break the thread that binds him to the tome.

❖ When a second powers check is failed, the link between the victim and the *Book* grows stronger. The subject does not leave the *Book* behind under any circumstances and fights to the death, if necessary, in order to keep it on his person. Furthermore, when the subject learns a new spell, or finds other spells contained in other books or scrolls, he opts to copy them into the *Book of Souls* instead of his own spell

books. At this point, a *dispel magic* spell can no longer suffice to break the link. A *remove curse* followed by a *dispel magic*, or some other, more powerful form of magic is required.

❖ When a third powers check is failed, the spell-user begins copying the spells from his own spell books into the *Book of Souls*, as he "realizes" that keeping all of his spells in one place is easier to manage. When all of his spells have been added to the *Book*, he disposes of his own spell books and uses the *Book of Souls* exclusively when he must memorize spells. The subject also becomes increasingly covetous of the *Book*, refusing to allow it to be seen by anyone he does not know. At this stage in the curse process, the evil power that binds the victim to the *Book* can be severed only with a *limited wish* or a more powerful spell.

❖ When the fourth powers check is failed, the victim begins to believe that there are forces at large who wish to seize the *Book* for themselves. Whether this notion is real or imagined, the victim produces the *Book* only in the company of close friends. However, he is particularly suspicious of other beings who can use the *Book*, even friends and family. At this stage, only a full wish can break the coils that the *Book* has wound about its victim.

❖ When the fifth and final powers check is failed, the subject is irrevocably bound to the *Book of Souls*, and he is transformed into the Dark Pawn (see below). If the victim is a PC, the character becomes an NPC under the DM's control, as any actions the character takes will be at the direction of the Dark Powers. At this point, only three conditions can break the link between the *Book* and its victim, wishes notwithstanding.

The first requires the victim to escape the demiplane of Dread. This is not likely, of course, since the Dark Powers are in direct control of the victim and would compel him to avoid any exits. (Or they would simply close such exits).

The second condition is for the Dark Powers themselves to relinquish their control over the victim, but again, this is not likely (as described in "The Dark Pawn").

The final and most accessible way to sever the bond that secures the victim to the *Book of Souls* is to destroy the *Book* itself, though this is not easily accomplished. Guidelines for destroying the *Book of Souls* are given below.

Note, however, that if the link is severed at any stage leading up to and including the victim's transformation into the Dark Pawn, the special powers checks detailed above start over from the beginning, should the victim continue to use the tome.

Destroying the Book of Souls

The *Book of Souls* has a direct link to the demiplane itself, which in turn, extends to the Dark Powers. Like the Lords of the Domains, the *Book* is a tool of the Dark Powers, an agent through which they can directly influence the demiplane yet remain behind the scenes as is their usual wont. As with all of their tools, the Dark Powers aren't quick to let the *Book* escape their grasp, nor allow it to be destroyed easily.

Those who discover the *Book* usually don't know this, however. To them, the *Book* can be destroyed just like any other spell book, whether the method is by immolation, shredding, or whatever. The Dark Powers know differently, of course, and have imposed their own terms, detailed as follows:

❖ If a nonmagical attack form successfully destroys the *Book*, it reforms exactly one day later, appearing at a random location within the demiplane. Often, the Dark Powers causes the *Book* to reform in a place where those who destroyed it are almost certain to find it, such as in the being's sleeping quarters, campsite, or, as was the case with one sorceress, on her dinner plate as she sat down for her evening meal. This latter is a rare occurrence, however, as the Dark Powers usually reserve such a demonstration for those who display arrogance in their "victory."

❖ If destroyed by a magical effect, the *Book* reforms as above, but the reformation takes a number of weeks equal to the level of ability of the effect used against it. Thus, if the *Book* is destroyed by a fireball from a *wand of fireballs*, it reforms in six weeks, as such a wand functions at the 6th level of ability. But if destroyed by a *fireball* spell cast by a 10th-level wizard, it does not reform until 10 weeks have passed.

Destroying the *Book of Souls* is not a simple matter, and to convey this difficulty, the *Book* receives a +5 bonus on saving throws against all attack forms used against it. If the *Book* is subjected to an attack form that usually does not allow a saving throw, a save of 10 is allowed anyway (though the +5 save bonus does not apply in such cases).

Of course, it should be obvious that the *Book of Souls* cannot be permanently destroyed by standard methods. Due to the eldritch, tripartite link that connects the Book, the demiplane, and the *Dark Powers*, the *Book of Souls* can be truly destroyed only if all three are destroyed — and this is something that no PC or group of PCs should ever be able to accomplish, regardless of their personal might or players' arguments to the contrary. However, even temporary destruction of the *Book* severs any bond it may have formed with a victim through the victim's failure of the special powers checks detailed above.

The Dark Pawn

The Dark Pawn is the “unspoken” name given to one who has succumbed to all five powers checks related to the *Book of Souls*. It serves as a sort of herald for the Dark Powers, an operative charged with fulfilling their desires. And since the Dark Powers are the true intelligence at work, the Dark Pawn is merely a catalyst through which they can influence the demiplane.

The Dark Pawn also serves as the protector and guardian of the *Book of Souls* and must bring the *Book* along in all of its travels. It does everything in its power to keep the *Book* safe, for the *Book* is more important to the Dark Powers. In their eyes, the Pawn is expendable, for if it is destroyed, the *Book* can always “create” a new Dark Pawn from a different host. But if the *Book* is hidden away so that it cannot be used, or temporarily destroyed (an extremely powerful effect can prevent the *Book* from reforming for months), the Dark Powers lose the potential for a powerful agent in the Dark Pawn. Therefore, the Dark Powers are fully capable of sacrificing the Dark Pawn in order to save the *Book*.

Due to the influence of the Dark Powers, the Dark Pawn retains little of its former self, becoming an entirely new personality, but its physical appearance remains mostly unchanged. Any changes to the victim's appearance are of a more intangible sort, such as a malevolent gleam in its eyes, a sinister twist to its smile, a smooth but foreboding grace in its movements, and so forth.

In game terms, the Dark Pawn has the the same abilities as its former self. Its ability scores, hit points, Armor Class, saving throws, and so forth do not change with the transformation, except as noted below:

- ❖ The Dark Pawn may cast any spell contained within the *Book of Souls*, regardless of the Intelligence, level, race, or class of its former self. Furthermore, these spells are cast at will and as often as desired (but no more than one spell may be cast at a time). The Dark Pawn's spell-casting ability is increased to the 20th level (if normally of a lower level), for purposes of a spell's range, damage, area of effect, etc.

- ❖ The Dark Pawn does not require sleep or nourishment, as it is sustained by its link with the *Book of Souls*.

- ❖ The Dark Pawn is immune to all toxins and diseases.

- ❖ The Dark Pawn is immune to the effects of normal, climate-based forms of heat and cold, such as the chill of the arctic or the sweltering heat of the desert. Magical cold and heat affect the Dark Pawn normally.

- ❖ The Dark Pawn ceases all aging. (At the DM's option, this can be expanded to include immunity to magical effects which increase or decrease one's age, such as a potion of longevity or a ghosts aging attack.)

- ❖ The Dark Pawn can instantly recognize the Dark Lords, regardless of any disguises they may wear (including shape-shifting spells or natural powers). However, the Dark Lords recognize the Pawn just as readily, though their reactions toward it depend on the circumstances of the encounter. This recognition ability is due to the link with the demiplane and the Dark Powers that the Lords and the Pawn share. (At the DM's discretion innate recognition may extend to other creatures or beings who have a similar connection to the demiplane and/or the Dark Powers, such as fiends, powerful and intelligent undead figures, and so forth.)

- ❖ The Dark Pawn can dissolve into a gaseous state which is identical in appearance to the Mists, then reform elsewhere in the demiplane. This method of travel throughout the demiplane is more reliable than *teleport* and similar spells, as it allows the Dark Pawn to pass through a Lord's closed borders, and the transit from one place to the next is instantaneous.

Despite the enormous power at the Dark Pawn's disposal, DMs should refrain from using this being as an ultimate killing machine. It uses whatever force is necessary to ensure its continued survival, but the role of the Dark Pawn is not that of a “great destroyer” or merely another super-monster to throw

against increasingly powerful PCs. It does not revel in causing death and destruction as does a fiend. It does not lay waste to villages or conquer nations. No, the Dark Pawn delights in corrupting the righteous, smashing the hopes of the innocent, humiliating the proud, and demoralizing the brave and heroic. The Dark Pawn wanders the demiplane of Dread, enforcing the will of the Dark Powers, testing the worthiness of the Lords and the resolve of those who oppose them, and stamps out direct threats to the existence of the demiplane and, by extension, to the Dark Powers themselves. In short, DMs should regard the Dark Pawn in a manner not unlike that of a Darklord: a mysterious, powerful force not easily defeated or destroyed.

Final Notes

The *Book of Souls* is irrevocably tied to the Dark Powers and the Realm of Terror, and under no circumstances can it leave the demiplane. If the possessor of the *Book* finds a way out of the Land of the Mists, the *Book* remains behind, teleported by the Dark Powers to a random location within the demiplane. As mentioned previously, such an occurrence will sever the link between the *Book* and the “owner,” though the Dark Powers will not allow a Dark Pawn to escape. If such a host is forcibly removed from the demiplane, the link is severed, though the Dark Powers would rather see the host slain than free of their influence. But then again, the Dark Powers are patient, and they never forget. Perhaps there will come a time when their former thrall is alone in presumed safety, or walking a secluded trail on a moonless night, and an ominous, chilling mist rolls in off the sea or billows up from the earth. Who is to say that when those constricting vapors of palpable dread close in, the *Book of Souls* will not be on the other side, waiting to reclaim its own?



Library officials in Perkasié, PA contacted us to inquire about author Robert S. Mullin. Their inquiries as to the disposition of a certain volume missing from their private collection were persistent. We daren't speculate as to their motives.

Two ghastly new Ranger kits

CRYPT RANGERS AND DEFENDERS

by Ross Allen Clifton

illustrated by Larry Smith

The *Complete Ranger's Handbook (CRH)* introduced a number of character kits that a player may choose for his ranger character, as well as listing several others for the player or DM to develop. One of these, the Crypt Ranger, caught my attention, but the description of his traits and abilities struck me as wrong. Cemeteries are his terrain? Non-evil undead are his followers? How could this be? In many campaigns, the ranger is recognized as a naturalist second only to the druid, and a ranger's love of life in all of its forms is legendary. To suggest that a ranger roamed with a pack of undead seemed to be in complete opposition to the basic concept of the class.

The idea of a Crypt Ranger was still intriguing enough to deserve a full kit description, if not the one suggested by the *CRH*. Here then are the Crypt Ranger and the Crypt Defender.

This article refers to the abilities, skills, and restrictions of the ranger class as a whole. For more details, see both the *PHB* and the *CRH*. Other books that may prove helpful for further examination of the undead and their capabilities include *The Complete Book of Necromancers*, the various Van Richten guides, many of the *RAVENLOFT*® modules, and the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ *tome* and *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*® volumes.

The Crypt Ranger

Perrin paused for a moment, crouching on the soft undergrowth near the path. The quiet sounds of the moonlit night drifted in to him as he caught his breath. Tracking his quarry had taken its toll on the young ranger, but Perrin was determined to put an end to the creature's rampage. He looked up as his dog made a low growl. He moved forward to see what Bloodfang was staring at so fiercely. A small scrap of dirty white rag hung caught on the branch of a bush. He removed it and examined it carefully. The weave was similar. A quick sniff told him all he needed to know. Images of the desert and ancient burial tombs appeared in his head. Perrin smiled and patted his dog on the head.

"Let's go, Bloodfang. We're on the track of the mummy."

Description: In the darkest night, as the undead things creep forth to terrorize the unsuspecting populace, who rises to protect the commoner and noble alike from the vile monsters? Clerics and fighters are good enough when they have a present threat to fight, but when you need to hunt down and eradicate undead, there is only one person to consider: the Crypt Ranger.

Requirements: In addition to the normal requirements for a ranger, Crypt Rangers



must have an Intelligence score of at least 14.

Primary terrain: A Crypt Ranger can pick any land as a primary terrain. Certain terrain types, such as the arctic tundra, are less likely to harbor undead, but with enough imagination, even the arctic could be the basis for a Crypt Ranger campaign.

Role: The Crypt Ranger is the defender of all living things from the threat of the undead. He lives to hunt down and eradicate undead, as they are a perversion of the natural flow of life. He travels from place to place within (and, if need be, outside) his chosen territory, protecting his charges from attacks as well as investigating rumors of any mysterious events that may provide a clue as to the location of his next hunt. Crypt Rangers tend to be highly motivated, energetic warriors who rely on their wits as well as their brawn. The undead are in many cases intelligent and unforgiving, and one wrong slip could lead to death . . . or worse. The Crypt Ranger is usually driven and brave. He devotes his life to tracking and eliminating creatures that cause many to quake in fear. In this, he is matched only by the Deathslayer (see *The Complete Book of Necromancers*) and his paladin counterpart, the Ghosthunter (from *The Complete Paladin's Handbook*).

Secondary skills: Forester, scribe, trader/barterer, weaponsmith.

Weapon proficiency: Crypt Rangers may choose from any of the weapons that the ranger class can use. Crypt Rangers must take one weapon proficiency in a bludgeoning weapon, but there are no other restrictions. Because of their profession and quarry, magical versions of normal weapons are highly prized by Crypt Rangers.

Non-weapon proficiency: Bonus: Ancient history. Recommended: Alertness, blind-fighting endurance, hunting, persuasion, reading/writing. Many of the proficiencies that a Crypt Ranger chooses seem unusual for a warrior, but much of his time is spent hunting down clues and stories, both from books and people. Other proficiencies should be chosen with this in mind.

Armor/equipment: Crypt Rangers must travel quickly. They prefer light armor, but they can use any armor or equipment if the situation requires.

Species enemy: Crypt Rangers choose any undead type for their species enemy. Normally, these would be undead such as ghouls, skeletons,

zombies, or the like, but in certain cases can include liches, vampires, or ghosts. Crypt Rangers may also choose as a species enemy a related opponent such as lycanthropes. Many reserve a special hatred toward necromancers as the guiding force behind much of the evil the undead perform.

Followers: As per normal rangers.

Special benefits: *Protection from evil.* This is a special form of the 1st-level wizard spell. It gives a Crypt Ranger's undead opponents with a -2 to any attack rolls, as well as providing a +1 to all of the ranger's saving throws. This represents the uncommon good luck that Crypt Rangers enjoy, as well as their training for combat with the undead.

Immunity to fear and scare effects. Many undead radiate auras that cause the normal adventurer or commoner to flee in horror or fright. The Crypt Ranger is immune to this effect generated by creatures of the same level/hit dice or lower.

Detect Undead. Crypt Rangers have the ability to *detect undead* as the 1st-level wizard spell with a base 50' radius. This increases at a rate of 5' per level. One round of concentration is required to activate this ability. The ranger can determine direction and distance to the undead, but not the exact type of undead. The effect lasts for one round, and three attempts per day can be made.

Special hindrances: While greatly appreciated by the populace they serve, Crypt Rangers are also regarded with extreme caution and fear. The mere sight of a known Crypt Ranger can cause a panic in people as they wonder what foul creature brings him to their community. For this reason, Crypt Rangers suffer a -3 to reaction rolls from O-level NPCs who know of their profession.

The special attack forms of many undead are another concern for Crypt Rangers. Aging 10 years, losing levels of experience, and the chance to wind up as one of the undead are all occupational hazards for this kit. The penalty for failure or carelessness requires those choosing this kit to have a strong motivation.

Crypt Rangers are also subject to a great deal of harassment from the enemies they make. To have a necromancer, lich, or vampire lord as an enemy is to sleep very lightly. Crypt Rangers try to counter this problem by being very good at what they do and leaving none to become a future enemy. This doesn't mean they become twisted assassins, but it means Crypt Rangers must become very good at tying up loose ends.



Role in the campaign: Crypt Rangers tend to be highly motivated fighters who deal on a daily basis with things that causes others to flee into the night. They are highly prized members of the community when their services are needed, yet they engender a great deal of fear when their presence is known. A lonely figure, the Crypt Ranger



takes great satisfaction in eliminating a menace who refused to die.

Crypt Rangers enjoy life to the fullest, knowing there are those out there jealous of any semblance of the living's happiness. Crypt Rangers tend to be on good terms with paladins and clerics, who have similar interests. Their skills and experiences tend to make them a part of a small brotherhood of professional monster hunters, and they enjoy the thrill of the hunt as much as the destruction of the undead.

The idea of the professional undead hunter can be found everywhere. Just pick up a copy of Dracula or watch a good horror movie, and the ideas and potential for adventures should be evident.

Picture the isolated small village under siege at night from some ghouls that have taken up residence nearby. Imagine a Crypt Ranger finding out that a necromancer had taken up residence in his area. The scenarios are endless and a whole campaign can be built around professional undead hunters, especially if the other players are partial to paladins, clerics, or tomb-robbing thieves.

As an NPC, a Crypt Ranger could become an excellent foil to the PCs, stealing away contracts to kill undead or cleaning out a tomb before the PCs could reach it. The PCs may also want to hire a Crypt Ranger to accompany them on a particularly dangerous mission or just to consult with one and draw from his knowledge.

Crypt Defender

Paelor didn't need Crystalhawk's shrill cry in the cool night air as a warning. He heard the drunken group stumbling down the road toward Overbarrows ten minutes ago. He moved silently down the small gully toward the road and slipped into a narrow dry tunnel he had built himself. The tunnel carried him squarely under the middle of the road. Paelor reached his cramped cubbyhole and found his equipment. He smeared a sweet-smelling concoction from a jar onto his face and found a pile of ripped, light colored cloth and pulled it

over his head. Waiting until he could feel the vibrations of their movement, Paelor grasped the handles of the trapdoor above him. With a heave, Paelor sprung up from the roadbed, dirt and rocks exploding outward. As he howled at the top of his lungs and flailed his arms, the strips of cloth billowed, and his face glowed with an eerie luminescence in the moonlight. Screams ripped through the night as his acting had its desired effect. Paelor laughed grimly as the frightened teenagers fled back down the road as fast as they could. They were idiots out to prove their manhood by stealing rocks and souvenirs from the tombs of Overbarrow. He could imagine the stories that would circulate among the pubs tomorrow. The ghost of Overbarrows attacks local youths. He sighed as he started resetting his trap. If only it were this easy with adventurers!

Description: In an era when powerful necromancers raise the dead and a primary source of income for adventurers comes from looting tombs ancient as well as new, who protects burial sites from desecration? Who scares off the curious and fights the grave robbers and ghouls? As a kit of the ranger class, the Crypt Defender fills this role admirably.

Requirements: Crypt Defenders have the same basic requirements as the ranger class.

Special terrain: Crypt Defenders must choose a single locale as their special terrain. The only exception is a defender in service to a ruler, who is assigned to different locales as needed. Defenders usually don't travel much, regarding their obligations to their site paramount above all else. Their special terrain is normally a large tomb complex (such as pyramids or a barrow), a large battlefield with mass grave sites, or a large cemetery or catacombs.

Role: One of the primary sources of income for many adventurers is the exploration and looting of dungeon complexes and burial areas. But what do you do if you don't want an area to be desecrated by a group of adventuring tomb robbers? Who does a king set to guard his final resting place? And who prevents looters from scavenging a battlefield or digging up mass graves? This is where the Crypt Defender steps in.

As a ranger, the Crypt Defender devotes himself to learning the area he guards. In the open glade of a battlefield, he knows every fold in the earth. In a dungeon tomb, he knows every pitfall and monster (and probably feeds a few as extra insurance, too!). The Crypt Defender is posted to a locale either out of a sense

of duty or because a high ranking individual requests it. Once he assumes the responsibility for an area, he defends it vigorously. For curiosity seekers or teens on a lark, the defender gives them a good scare or a friendly warning. For determined adventurers, a stern warning is in order. Looters and others who seek to disturb the defenders charge are in for a running battle of amazing proportions, as the ranger pulls out every trick he knows to eliminate the threat.

Secondary skill: Farmer, fisher, limner/painter, mason, trapper/furrier.

Weapon proficiency: Crypt Defenders can use any weapon, with two provisions. A defender can utilize only weapons of a size appropriate to their locale. For instance, a defender of a pyramid complex would be unable to use any weapon of large (L) size, such as a pole arm, in the narrow confines of his locale. Meanwhile, the defender of a battlefield would be able to use any weapon and would probably use several missile weapons to take advantage of the range capabilities.

A defender must also allocate one weapon proficiency slot to a weapon linked to a site. A pyramid defender would choose a kopesh, for example, while a defender of the catacombs of an abbey would be required to pick the cleric's favorite weapon, probably a quarterstaff or mace.

Non-weapon proficiency: Bonus: Local history. Recommended: Ancient history, blind-fighting endurance, etiquette, hunting, persuasion, reading/writing.

Armor/equipment: Crypt Defenders have no restrictions on the amount of equipment they can possess, although most adopt the spartan ways of their brethren and donate any gifts or excess equipment. For armor, a Crypt Defender adopts the ceremonial armor of the site he protects. Some defenders use this to their advantage, creating the impression that their locale is haunted by the ghosts of the deceased.

Species enemy: Crypt Defenders do not choose a species enemy as do other rangers, and they do not enjoy the same attack bonus or reaction penalty.

Followers: Crypt Defenders receive only one follower at the appropriate level. This follower becomes the next defender of the site whenever the Crypt Defender retires or moves on. If the site is not a permanent one, the follower leaves with the Crypt Ranger as an apprentice.

Special benefits: *Reaction bonus.* Crypt Defenders receive a great deal of respect from everyone, as they are

defenders of the dead. They are honored by periodic visits from priests and noblemen. Visitors to their sites often leave a gift ranging from money or artwork to a simple home cooked meal. If the defender makes a reasonable request, chances are it will be granted. Crypt Defenders gain +2 to reaction rolls with those who know their station.

Alertness and area knowledge. Crypt Defenders come to know their sites so well that anything out of the ordinary puts them on their guard. In the catacombs, for instance, a Crypt Defender uses air currents, smells, and sounds to determine what is normal and what is amiss. He shifts into a defensive mode immediately. This translates into a +2 on reaction rolls.

Speak with dead. Once per week, a Crypt Ranger can attempt to *speak with dead* at his locale in a manner similar to the 3rd-level priest spell of the same name. The ranger can ask one complex, two moderate, or three simple questions of the dead, but the answers, while truthful, may be very ambiguous. The length of time since the death of the petitioned soul is irrelevant, since this ability is tied directly to the site the Crypt Defender serves.

Special hindrances: Crypt Defenders lead an extremely solitary life. Even for the ranger, this life is lonely and has few physical rewards. Adventuring is a rare occurrence for the Crypt Defender, and few choose this kit. But for that rare individual, being a defender can be a fulfilling and even religious role in life.

Defending a huge or well-known site can be extremely tiring and dangerous, as wave after wave of adventurers, looters, or curiosity seekers swarm to the area. For this reason, most defenders employ numerous animal companions and traps to assist them in their task.

Training is also a solitary pursuit for a Crypt Defender. Except in the rarest of cases, defenders are required to train themselves as per the rules for self training in the *DMG*.

Role in the campaign: Crypt Defenders are a loosely organized branch of the ranger class. They have no recognized leaders, preferring to follow their own council. Some are retainers to kings and as such are sent to various locales to defend for differing lengths of time. Others are people with an obligation to a certain site or person and they choose to pay that obligation by becoming a defender. Many simply feel a calling to protect a certain site.

Defenders employ many of the ranger's special skills to their mission. Animal companions become trusted guards and friends. Hunting abilities translate into guerrilla tactics against much larger parties. Much like cornering an animal in its lair, it can be a dangerous thing to disturb a site protected by a Crypt Defender.

As a kit for a solo campaign, defenders make great PCs. Their independence and solitary nature make them ideal for campaigns where a DM could test the player's inventiveness with a storyline based around a series of threats to the rangers site. How do you scare off or kill the normal adventuring party that comes to loot your tomb? What happens when a vampire decides he wants your barrow as a base of operations?

If a player wants to run a Crypt Defender as a member of an adventuring party, there are a number of ways it can be worked into the story line. As a beginning character, the Crypt Defender's site is robbed. It is up to the defender to track down and recover all of the missing treasure (with some help or hindrance from the voices of the suitably annoyed dead). His superiors might become concerned that the defender is not as dedicated to protecting his site as he should be, sending him on a quest to prove his commitment. This quest would be something relevant to the character's duties such as discovering a piece of lost history or locating a lost relative.

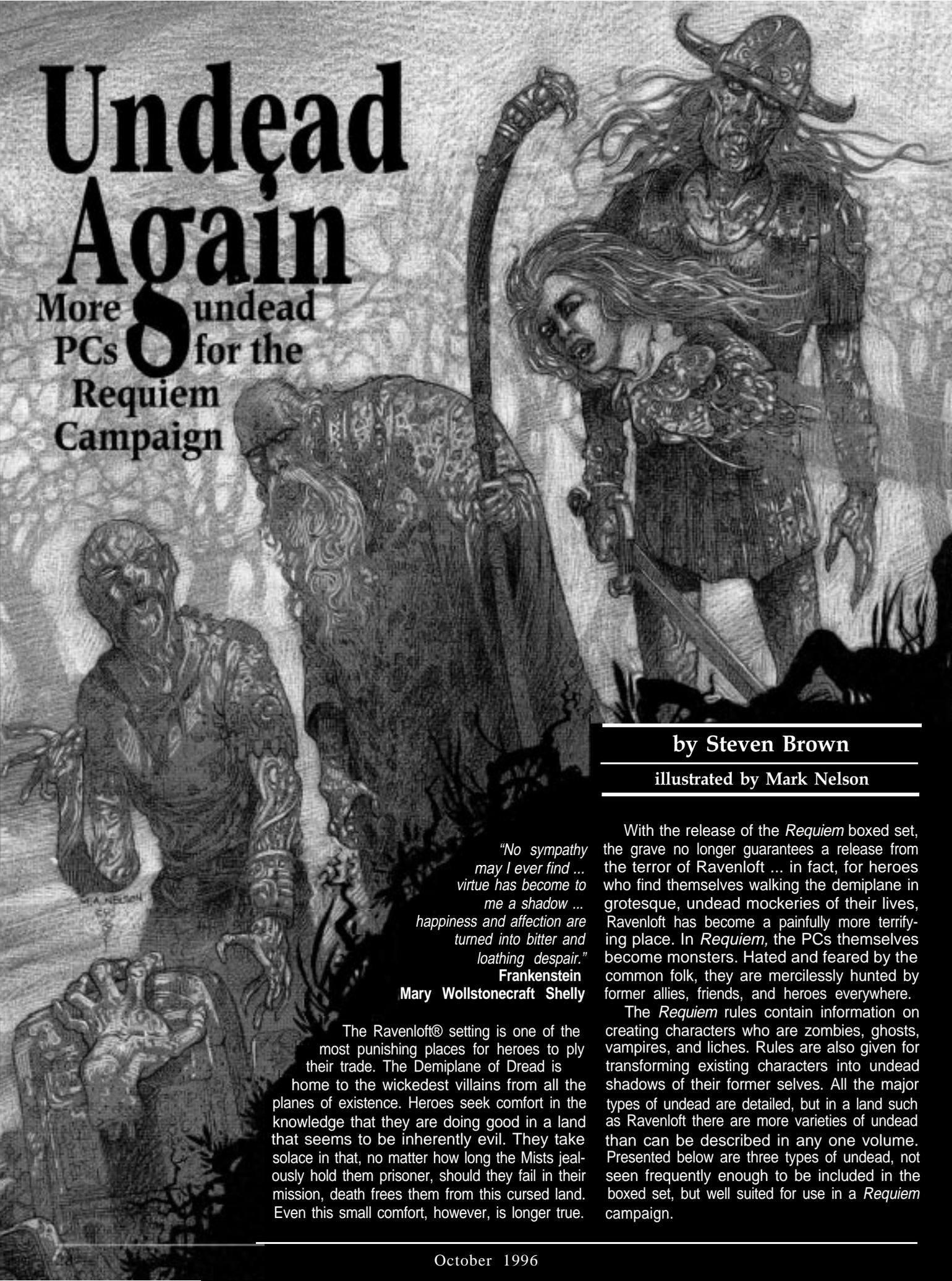
As an NPC, the defender is invaluable. Perhaps the defender needs help to repel a drow invasion that has broken through into the bottom level of his mausoleum complex. Maybe the PCs need assistance finding their way through the haunted battlefield without disturbing one of the many ghosts in the area. An adventuring party could easily run afoul of a Crypt Defender in the course of their travels.



While his own modesty prevents him from saying so, since Ross Allen Clifton has lived in his town, the cemeteries have never been vandalized. Or haunted.

Undead Again

More **8** undead
PCs **8** for the
Requiem
Campaign



by Steven Brown

illustrated by Mark Nelson

*"No sympathy
may I ever find ...
virtue has become to
me a shadow ...
happiness and affection are
turned into bitter and
loathing despair."*

Frankenstein
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly

The Ravenloft® setting is one of the most punishing places for heroes to ply their trade. The Demiplane of Dread is home to the wickedest villains from all the planes of existence. Heroes seek comfort in the knowledge that they are doing good in a land that seems to be inherently evil. They take solace in that, no matter how long the Mists jealously hold them prisoner, should they fail in their mission, death frees them from this cursed land. Even this small comfort, however, is longer true.

With the release of the *Requiem* boxed set, the grave no longer guarantees a release from the terror of Ravenloft ... in fact, for heroes who find themselves walking the demiplane in grotesque, undead mockeries of their lives, Ravenloft has become a painfully more terrifying place. In *Requiem*, the PCs themselves become monsters. Hated and feared by the common folk, they are mercilessly hunted by former allies, friends, and heroes everywhere.

The *Requiem* rules contain information on creating characters who are zombies, ghosts, vampires, and liches. Rules are also given for transforming existing characters into undead shadows of their former selves. All the major types of undead are detailed, but in a land such as Ravenloft there are more varieties of undead than can be described in any one volume. Presented below are three types of undead, not seen frequently enough to be included in the boxed set, but well suited for use in a *Requiem* campaign.

Boneless

General Information

Ability Score Requirements: Constitution 12+

Prime Requisite: Constitution

Advance As: Rogue

Combat Information

Exceptional Strength? Yes

Exceptional Constitution? Yes

Hit Dice: 1d6

Attack As: Rogue

Save As: Rogue

Proficiencies

Weapon Proficiencies: 5

Additional Slot: 2

Nonweapon Proficiencies: 2

Additional Slot: 5

Available Categories: Common

Racial

Corporeal

Bonus Proficiencies: Constriction †

Required Proficiencies: Weapon Resistance (Blunt)

†|Constriction is a new proficiency not presented in the Requiem boxed set. See below for details.

Overview

Often ignored as merely the left-over ingredients from the creation of a skeleton, boneless are among the most versatile undead species known. They are strong, flexible, and able to perform almost all the activities they did in life. Living creatures find the boneless to be unsettlingly grotesque, even more than other, more deteriorated undead such as zombies.

Description

Boneless are the animated shells of humanoid creatures that have had their skeletons removed (generally for some nefarious purpose). Their skin is translucent reddish-brown and severely wrinkled, folded, and puckered. More often than not, boneless must stitch their clothing directly to their bodies in order to keep it from sliding off. Their heads are shrunken, withered parodies of what they were in life (boneless are rarely recognizable even to close relatives) that sit on highly flexible, stretched out necks. Boneless limbs are distended and agile, able to slip through the smallest of openings. They do not, however, support the body well, and boneless can often be seen walking about on all fours for added stability.

Role playing

Although they are usually mindless automatons, boneless are assumed to retain most of their Intelligence. As with zombies and other forms of undead described in the Requiem boxed set, this can give a player character boneless a distinct advantage over living opponents, who will expect simple, uncoordinated melee attacks. Imagine their surprise when the boneless character springs a cunning trap.

Boneless are generally sad, lonely creatures. They feel the pain of their new situation more keenly than many of the other animated undead, because the only thing that separates them from their original appearance is, quite literally, a backbone. Of all the corporeal undead, they are the physically the closest to "normal" but are paradoxically also among the most horribly disfigured.



Advantages

Along with the advantages common to all undead, boneless also find that their unusually flexible bodies provide them with protection from blunt weapons. (They suffer only half damage from these.) They are also able to squeeze into incredibly small spaces, which can be quite handy when trying to hide from would-be monster slayers. Their unique physique likewise provides boneless characters with an unusual form of attack, constriction.

Constriction

Certain undead avoid using melee weapons in favor of grappling their victims and literally squeezing the life from them. Instead of making a normal attack, the creature rolls one attack die for each hand. Success means that the hand has been wrapped around the victim and may now begin squeezing. Each hand that successfully grapples the victim causes 1d4 hp damage per round until the victim breaks free. While in the grasp of a constriction attack, a victim may not cast spells requiring somatic components, make any sort of physical attack, or initiate any action other than trying to free himself. To escape, the victim must make a successful bend bars/lift gates roll. There is a 40% chance that anyone attempting to attack the constricting character will instead hit the victim.

DMs who wish to make the constriction proficiency available to all undead characters should add it to the Rare Proficiencies list in the Requiem rules book.

Disadvantages

Because of his highly flexible body, a boneless PC finds it difficult to move about normally. His movement rate is halved when he walks upright. When he moves about on all fours, however, his ability to observe his surroundings is severely impaired and he suffers a -2 penalty to all surprise rolls.



Crawling Claw

General Information

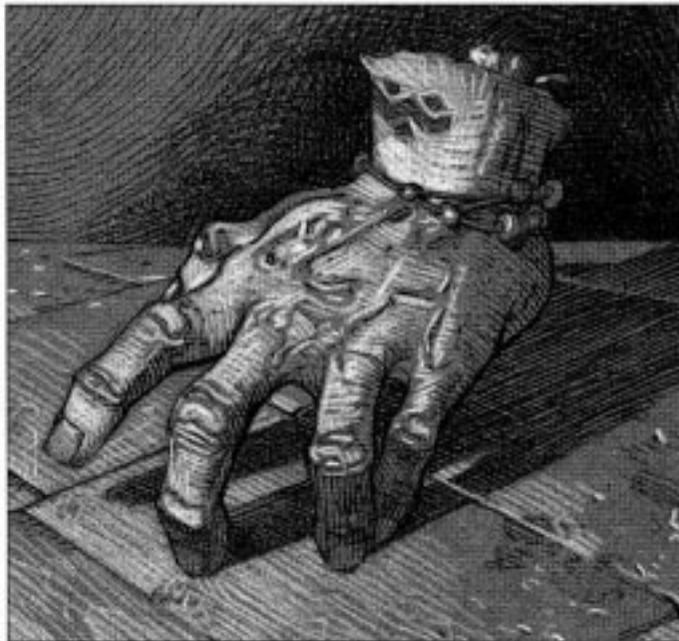
Ability Score Requirements: None
Prime Requisite: Dexterity
Advance As: Rogue

Combat Information

Exceptional Strength? Yes
Exceptional Constitution? No
Hit Dice: 1d4
Attack As: Rogue
Save As: Rogue

Proficiencies

Weapon Proficiencies: 2
Additional Slot: 5
Nonweapon Proficiencies: 5
Additional Slot: 2
Available Categories: Common
Racial
Corporeal
Bonus Proficiencies: Dexterity Bonus +1
Required Proficiencies: Weapon Resistance (Edged)



on those they like while scratching, poking, and even choking those they don't. Characters are never in doubt about how a crawling claw feels about them; it becomes painfully obvious.

Advantages

Being separated from the rest of its body during transformation into undeath has done nothing to affect a crawling claw's strength and, in fact, acts to increase his agility. This combination makes it possible for these creatures to move in bursts of incredible speed. When doing nothing but running, a crawling claw can move at triple his normal movement rate, as opposed to double the normal rate attained by most creatures.

Crawling claws, being both extremely dexterous and extraordinarily stealthy, often excel at clandestine activities. As a result, the jobs of scouting, removing opponents' property, and gaining entrance to locked buildings, rooms, and items usually falls to them. To reflect this expertise, crawling claw characters receive a +2 bonus to any attempts to use the climb walls, find/remove traps, hide in shadows, move silently, open locks, or pick pockets proficiencies.

Disadvantages

The primary disadvantage all crawling claws face is, of course, communication. Until a claw has spent a minimum of two weeks with a new group, its companions must make successful Intelligence checks in order to understand the meaning of the claw's sign language (groups that were together prior to their transformation to unlife can communicate normally from the start). After that, they become adjusted to the claw's mannerisms and the limited telepathic ability of the claw begins to manifest itself.

Other than the practical communications problems, crawling claws find their inability to speak severely hampers their capability to cast spells. Crawling claw spellcasters find any spell with a verbal component to be challenging, having to substitute sign language for spoken words, and they have extreme difficulty with spells that have both verbal and somatic components. They suffer a -1 penalty to any proficiency check made to cast a spell with a verbal component and a -2 penalty to any attempt to cast spells with both verbal and somatic components.

Overview

Although greatly restricted in many aspects, crawling claws are one of the most unsettling types of undead. With their tiny size and phenomenal agility, they can move unnoticed as rats through the homes and cities of the living. Perfect for scouting missions and gaining entrance to locked buildings, crawling claws make invaluable additions to undead PC groups.

Description

Crawling claws are made from the severed hands or paws of living creatures (although the creatures are killed in the process). They come in as many forms and sizes as do the living. Claws move by scuttling along the floor or leaping up to 15' per "hop." They are extraordinarily agile and, despite having no musculature above the wrist, quite strong. Generally good climbers, crawling claws can scramble up surfaces with only the most meager purchase. They often lie in wait for their prey atop large pieces of furniture or hiding among the rafters.

Role playing

Crawling claws are often considered the "poor relation" of corporeal undead. While they have material forms, they unquestionably lack most of what might physically tie them to the living world. They are completely unrecognizable, even to people who knew them intimately in life, unless they have a particularly distinguishing feature (a tattoo or birthmark).

Crawling claws are uncommonly stealthy and, by their nature, make excellent scouts. Because they spend so much of their time attempting to climb walls, hide in shadows, and move silently, crawling claw PCs usually fill as many of their nonweapon proficiency slots as possible with "thief skills."

Communication is perennially a problem for crawling claws. Although they have no mouths, they are quite skilled at communicating their feelings through hand signals and also have a limited form of telepathy with all other claws made in the same batch. This telepathy often extends to any group a claw stays with long enough to form a bond.

Since claws are not great communicators, they usually let their actions speak for them. They act out their emotions in overly demonstrative ways, rubbing against, petting, and resting

Penanggalan

General Information

Ability Score Requirements: Strength 12+
Intelligence 14+
Wisdom 12+
Prime Requisite: Intelligence
Advance As: Warrior

Combat Information

Exceptional Strength? Yes
Exceptional Constitution? Yes
Hit Dice: 1d12
Attack As: Warrior
Save As: Rogue

Proficiencies

Weapon Proficiencies: 3
Additional Slot: 4
Nonweapon Proficiencies: 4
Additional Slot: 3
Available Categories: Common
Racial
Corporeal
Bonus Proficiencies: Charm Gaze
Required Proficiencies: Drain Constitution

Overview

One of the stranger variant types of vampires, penanggalan are among the few undead who can move about freely both night and day. Otherwise, they have advantages and weaknesses similar to those of other vampires, although their nocturnal form is much more unusual. Players looking to play an unconventional type of vampire will find penanggalan an interesting challenge.

Description

Originally thought to exist only as human females, the penanggalan (like so many creatures) are found in a greater variety of forms in the Demiplane of Dread and may be either a male or female of any race. By day penanggalan appear as normal members of their race, although they have trouble interacting with the living in a "normal" manner. At night, however, their heads separate from their bodies and fly off in search of prey. Attached to the base of the head is a 3' long, slimy black tail, which tapers to a point at the end. In the dark, a penanggalan's eyes emit a faint, red glow.

Role playing

Penanggalan, even in their "human" forms, cannot act suave and charming, like most other types of vampires. They are aloof, haughty, and generally insensitive to the feelings of living beings. Penanggalan feed only on sleeping victims and use their hypnotic gaze to render likely subjects unconscious. They prefer victims of their own sex and race, particularly ones with high Charisma scores, and they spend most of a night looking for one. If no such victims can be found, they feed off any sentient, living creature they can find.

They are generally solitary creatures, but they band together with other undead (preferably other penanggalan or, at worst, other vampires) for mutual protection.

Advantages

A penanggalan's tail is prehensile. It can be used to whip, grasp, or choke a victim (with a Strength score equal to that of



the penanggalan's body), and causes 1d4 hp damage on a successful attack roll.

The body of a penanggalan has the same number of hit points it did in life (provided other abilities gained in undeath haven't changed this number). However, the head and tail, when separated from the body, also have an equal number of hit points. Each evening when a penanggalan assumes its hunting form, it has its full complement of hit points regardless of any damage the body has taken during the day.

Since penanggalan are incapable of seducing victims, and since they only feed off unconscious beings, they have the power of hypnosis (which works according to the same rules as the charm gaze proficiency) to help them lull potential victims to sleep.

Disadvantages

As stated above, penanggalan interact poorly with the living. To represent this failing, any character turned into one of these creatures suffers an automatic -1 reduction to his Charisma score.

Penanggalan all have lairs in which they store their possessions and leave their bodies after nightfall. A penanggalan character may have 1d6 lairs set up at any time, but they must all be within a 25 square mile area. Player character penanggalan must be at one of their lairs in order to transform into their nocturnal forms. If they are caught outside one of their lairs after daybreak, penanggalan heads are paralyzed by the rays of the sun and fall helplessly to the ground until nightfall. If the head and body are not reunited within seven hours, both begins to decay rapidly, losing 2d10 hp per hour until the two are rejoined.

Finally, a penanggalan's body can be a disadvantage in itself if any living creature discovers its lair. The headless body appears to be merely a decapitated corpse, although close examination reveals that the internal organs are shrivelled and mummified. The head knows if anyone touches the body. When attached to its body, a penanggalan is immune to holy symbols, holy water, and all other vampiric banes; however, it also loses the ability to drain victims' Constitution with a bite.



WYRMS of the NORTH™

FORGOTTEN REALMS

SETTING



by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

“The Creeping Doom”

The prying of Volo (polished somewhat by Elminster, whose eyebrows rose on more than one occasion while reading them) bring us this time to something the Old Mage had intended to omit from this survey of powerful dragons of the North: a dracolich. So you’re now reading something even Elminster decided to leave out of a book!

Why would one of the most powerful wizards in all Toril break his own rules now? Well, this undead wyrm bears watching. Not only is his influence quickly spreading, but the dracolich Daurgothoth is attempting to gain some abilities of other dragon types (he was originally a black wyrm) and to “come back to life” sufficiently to breed true and found his own new dragon species.

The twin obsessions of achieving personal supremacy and fathering a new race have kept Daurgothoth busy for over a century, improving his abilities however he can, and seeking a suitable mate — or planning how to construct one, much as he’s been modified in undeath.

The implications of Daurgothoth’s fascinating endeavor are dark indeed. The only reason hordes of adventurers haven’t descended on the dracolich, seeking his destruction, is that they don’t know about him. Plenty of wild rumors are, however, spreading....

Both Tolgar Anuvien and Malchor Harpell are (independently) beginning to uncover the location and activities of the undead wyrm, but the only folk who know the broad truth about the nature and aims of Daurgothoth are the Chosen of Mystra, powerful figures such as Elminster, Khelben, Laeral, and Alustriel. These archmages will not act or speak out against him, because the magical experimentation and advances Daurgothoth is making are precisely the sort of thing Divine Mystra encourages, so that magic will continue to grow.

Daurgothoth is under no such restrictions and energetically seeks to slaughter any being who learns of his endeavors or who stumbles upon his lair. He has already slain no fewer than three bands

of hired adventurers who were working for him in Waterdeep — but whom he judged had begun to suspect too much about him. His spells allow him to speak with such underlings by means of projected (human-seeming) images and to spy upon them from afar. When doing so, Daurgothoth customarily poses as some sort of renegade, deliberately mysterious mage.

In such roles, this dracolich has begun to play an increasingly active role in the shadier businesses of the cities of Waterdeep, Baldur’s Gate, Neverwinter, and Secomber. At first, he pursued the acquisition of spells, magical items, and substances that might serve as magical components, but this drew the attention of too many alarmed mages and authorities (one of whom dubbed the unknown cause of the thefts “the Creeping Doom,” a title Daurgothoth gleefully adopted), so he’s taken to cloaking his activities behind a web of often unwitting thieving bands and sharp-dealing gray market merchants.

Once a great wyrm of considerable size, with a distinctive gouge in his left flank (an old, nearly mortal wound), Daurgothoth was transformed into a dracolich by the crazed Cult mage Huulukharn. He promptly slew the wizard and vanished from the knowledge and influence of the Cult.

Today, the Creeping Doom possesses all of the normal powers of a dracolich and a great black wyrm, plus a tail sting that lashes out once per round for up to 36' at his normal THAC0 of 1 to slash for 2d6+12 hp damage, or to stab for 4d4+12 hp damage. As his breath weapon, Daurgothoth can choose to employ (once in every three rounds) any one of the following effects:

- ❖ The original breath weapon of his black dragon form: a stream of acid 5' wide and 60' long in a straight line, dealing 4d4+12 hp damage.

- ❖ A bolt of lightning akin to that of a blue dragon, but slightly less potent: this 5' wide breath attack extends 70' and deals only 4d8+6 hp damage.

- ❖ A cone of fire 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 30' and dealing 7d10+7 hp damage.

- ❖ A cone of frost 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 30' and dealing 8d6+8 hp damage.

- ❖ A bone spray (cone of whirling bone shards) 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 20' and dealing 12d4 hp piercing and slashing damage. If Daurgothoth so chooses, this attack can cause only half damage, but the bones then gather together to form skeletons, rising 6 rounds later as 1d4+4 undead human skeletons under the absolute control of the dracolich. If a "1" is rolled for the number of skeletons, that one skeleton is a giant skeleton (see "Skeleton, Giant" in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome).

- ❖ An "undeath gout" that takes effect in a cone 40' long, flaring from 5' wide to 20' and affecting only dead creatures in this area, animating them as zombies that rise in 1d3 rounds or skeletons that rise in 1d2 rounds, in either case under Daurgothoth's absolute command. Note that this breath weapon can transform partial skeletal remains (of any body parts) into crawling claws and make snakes or flying creatures of any sort into deathfangs (detailed in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set, on the "Flying Fang" monster sheet). Living creatures touched by an undeath gout are chilled for 1d10 hp damage (no saving throw).

- ❖ A "banish undeath" breath weapon effect that forms a cone 40' long, flaring

from 5' wide to 20' and remaining effective for 1 round. All undead coming into contact with any part of it are affected as follows:

- ❖ Undead of 5 hit dice or fewer (such as ghouls, wights, shadows, ghouls, zombies, and skeletons) are instantly rendered into inanimate dead. Depending on their natures, this destroys them or leaves them as remains that could be raised to life or made into undead again by subsequent magics (note that Daurgothoth can readily cause hostile lesser undead to fall and then rise again — by use of his undeath gout — as undead under his command).

- ❖ Undead of 6-8 HD (wraiths, mummies, and spectres) are allowed a saving throw vs. breath weapon to escape the instant termination of their undeath.

- ❖ More powerful undead can't be stripped of their undeath by this breath weapon. They do, however (along with lesser undead) suffer 4d4 hp damage from contact with a banish undeath breath effect.

Daurgothoth is known to be developing other breath weapon attacks — in particular seeking to modify certain of his spells into this attack form. The full range and power of his spells far outstrip those of normal dracoliches or dragons of any sort, and they seem to be on a par with those of an archmage of 25th level. Rather than the normal spell roster for a black dragon, and the "once per day" nature of dracolich magic, Daurgothoth now wields a roster of five memorized spells of each level that individually return to him 24 hours after being cast. To change a memorized spell, Daurgothoth must undertake study as a human mage does. He casts spells and makes saving throws as a 25th level wizard, retaining the 45% magic resistance he had as a living great black wyrm.

He is also known to have modified his undead body to achieve immunity to the following spells: imprisonment; power word, kill; reverse gravity; sink; temporal stasis; and time stop.

Daurgothoth's host (see "Dracolich" in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome for the function of a dracolich's host) is rumored to be a black opal of insignificant size, hidden in a huge heap of gems of all types and sizes that nearly fills a cavern that also holds the skeletal bodies of six lesser dragons that could serve him as a succession of replacement bodies. This cave is walled away behind tumbled rock somewhere under the gem-filled

cavern of Daurgothoth's main lair. (The rock to be dug aside to reach it may well underlie the dracolich's bonepile itself.)

Daurgothoth is a brilliant crafter of magic, an eternally inquisitive being, and a practiced observer with an impressive memory. He is governed by a wary paranoia that keeps him always on the lookout for lurking foes and possible attacks, and that makes him work constantly to better his personal powers and defenses. This is one wyrm who will never be found with most or all of his spells exhausted. If he ever reaches such a state (in the heat of protracted battle), he swiftly departs, to hide away until his magic is again strong. He is patient in his dealings and calm in battle; none can successfully goad him, and pride never leads him into overconfidence in battle, or any stubborn refusal to retreat. For an immortal dracolich who takes care to safeguard himself from destruction, there will always be another day for fighting — or for seeking revenge.

Daurgothoth is known to have a cruel sense of humor and to enjoy anticipating tactics ahead in any struggle. He craves music and company from time to time, but he never lets these needs compromise the security of his lair. Beautiful lady bards who acquire mysterious lone male human audiences at their campfires in the North are warned that they could be entertaining simple travelers, lycanthropes or dopplegangers, Harpers — or the Creeping Doom. Daurgothoth seldom molests or devours good singers.

Daurgothoth's lair

The Creeping Doom lairs in the abandoned gnome city of Dolblunde north and east of Waterdeep. Known entrances to this subterranean labyrinth include the "Bandit Tunnels" in nearby Maiden's Tomb Tor, certain passages in the vast dungeon complex of Undermountain, and a flooded tunnel leading from the muddy bottom of the River Dessarin itself. This latter, largest route is the one most often used by Daurgothoth, though the dracolich does employ *teleport* spells on occasion.

Daurgothoth's spells have hollowed out many large caverns for his convenience, forming an ever-growing chain that is tunneling slowly northwest, to a planned emergence shaft in the mountains north of Waterdeep.

To discourage intruders, the undead wyrm has placed many traps in the smaller gnomish passages surrounding the great caverns of his lair. There are a

few teeter-block pitfalls, but most of these perils are stone spikefall traps (sharpened stones on dangle-chains, that typically fall for 5d4 hp damage).

These mechanical hazards are assisted by unswervingly loyal undead servitors: deathfangs and a new sort of monster created by the Creeping Doom — bone lurkers.

These undead creatures appear as portcullises or gridwork-curtains of interlaced human and beast bones. They function just as living lurkers, except that their initial attack is a piercer-like fall from above to thrust into foes for 4d6 hp damage.

Bone lurkers have a Morale of 20 and share all the usual spell immunities of undead (suffering only half damage from edged weapons, as skeletons). After its first plummeting attack, a bone lurker tries to wrap itself around foes, as do living lurkers, dealing entangled opponents 3d4 hp piercing damage per round. It moves by flying (as a lurker) and fights foes it hasn't enfolded by slapping them once per round for 1d6 hp damage. Bone lurkers never retreat from foes except by Daurgothoth's command. A bone lurker has an XP Value of 4,000 — but some have been encountered that unleash one of the Creeping Doom's spells upon foes with such effects as paralyzation, weakness, magical fear, or blindness; these are thought to be magics cast into the lurkers and somehow held for passing on to living targets. These spell-holding bone lurkers are worth 5,000 XP.

Certain passages in Daurgothoth's lair also boast what can only be the wyrm's salvaged early attempts at creating a tail-sting: great snakelike assemblies of bone that are fixed to the wall, ceiling, or floor at one end, but they can coil and lash out from that anchor point, to slash or stab foes with a bone "sword-spike" as long as some men stand tall. This fearsome edged weapon pierces for 3d8 hp damage or slashes for 2d6 hp damage.

These bony "stings" range in length from 70' to 30' (although they can retract into a compact stack as short as 20'). Although they are unintelligent constructs (unaffected by spells designed to control the mind or deceive the senses), they seem able to sense all living beings within their reaches. They attack all such targets, and each has 4 to 8 HD and an AC of 7. A sting has one stab and one slash attack in a round, at the THACO appropriate for its hit dice,

and it is subject to spells that control undead or that influence bones. If one is severed from its base or separated into its component parts, all of their animation is lost; shards from shattered "sting bones have no properties beyond that of any other (dead, not undead) bony material.

At the heart of Daurgothoth's chain of caverns is a side passage large enough for a dragon to fly down. It is guarded by a wall of monster skeletons (the remains of a tribe of mountain giants, still armed with their clubs) who have orders to attack all beings in the tunnel who aren't Daurgothoth himself. Above them hangs a death tyrant (undead beholder, its precious surviving eyestalk powers unknown) with similar orders.

Beyond these guardians, the tunnel leads to a closed stone door that is itself a stone golem that attacks anyone trying to open it and reflects all spells used against it 100% back at their source. The door opens into a vast, ravaged cavern almost half a mile in length, its walls scorched and scarred, and its floor heaped with broken stone. This is the dracolich's spellcasting chamber, where he experiments with magics.

A smaller tunnel leads off of one side of this cave, doubling back on itself several times, to reach the gem-filled cave where Daurgothoth sleeps and broods upon a huge pile of bones. Aside from the rumored secret, walled-away chamber that holds his host, two lesser caverns are known to branch away from the main one: a treasure vault crammed with all manner of magic, statuettes, coins, and the like; and a storage room where the dragon keeps his spellbooks, the magical items he knows enough about to feel safe in using (just what these are remains a mystery), and a smooth-walled prison pit into which he drops living creatures he wants to keep for later. This pit is a smooth-walled (the stone walls fused into an almost glassy state by many applications of fiery breath and certain spells) shaft 30' across and 100' deep. The pit floor is damp sand, and lost in it is a *staff of the magi* (unknown to Daurgothoth). The dragon typically loops a rope around prisoners and tosses them down the shaft, securing the upper end of their pull-rope under a "lid" consisting of a huge, four-ton slab of stone that covers the top of the shaft. Dangerous prisoners (such as spellcasting adventurers) are encased in a set of **iron bands of Bilarro**

first; this sphere lies ready in a hollow beside the shaft. Much of the rest of this storage cavern is filled with a vast collection of odd substances that might serve as material components, including the pickled corpses of such large monsters as dragon turtles, purple worms, and remorhaz (and, of course, several sorts of dragons).

In his main lair, Daurgothoth's massive bonepile affords him raw material for his bone-related attacks. He has the ability to teleport all non-enchanted, non-undead bare bones within 40' into himself (they fly at MV 7, MC: D and cause no harm upon entering his skeletal form), to breathe forth as necessary. If away from his bonepile, he can transport bones from it over any distance on Toril to his innards.

Daurgothoth's domain

From Dolblunde, Daurgothoth keeps watch over traffic on the High Road, the Long Road and on the River Dessarin, as well as overland from the walls of Goldenfields south along the west bank of the Dessarin to Zundbridge, and north from there along the coast roughly as far as Mount Sar. He lacks the time to spy much in Waterdeep but employs a modified, long-range wizard eye spell for hours at a time to peer at things in the City of Splendors when he's interested in something (when word is abroad in the city about a wizardly duel, for instance, or the Watchful Order is gathering to discuss something important). Daurgothoth is interested in all things magical and in news of dragons and their doings. He's not, however, interested in being identified and located by nosy priests or mages, and he seldom acts openly in his "territory."

One day, when his lair reaches to the surface somewhere in the mountains, he may fly forth each night to destroy any who dare to question his authority — once his traps are ready to deal with the archmages who will inevitably try to destroy him. Soon, perhaps...

In the meantime, Daurgothoth prefers to employ various unscrupulous minor mages (including, notably, several Zhentarim magelings who fled the fall of Zhentil Keep) and adventuring bands. He keeps these forces believing they're working for a Waterdhavian noble who uses magic to conceal his identity and tries to keep each group of his agents ignorant of the existence of the others. Sometimes he tests their loyalty and mettle by sending various agents after the

same thing, to see who prevails, how, and what they report to him about it.

These agents serve to seize various magical items, spells, and substances that could serve in spellcasting. Daurgothoth often employs such aliases as “the Masked Master” or “Onalibar” when dealing with his underlings (the latter name is a private joke: it once belonged to a Cult mage who tried to enslave the dracolich soon after his initial rebellion — and who was promptly eaten for his pains). He rewards the mages with useful spells from his collection, steering them into stealing or developing other magics for him in return.

The deeds of Daurgothoth

Freed of the need to hunt or consume any sort of food, Daurgothoth can pursue ever-greater magical achievements more or less constantly.

Daurgothoth tries to hide from other dracoliches and living dragons as much as possible, as well as from the annoyingly energetic members of the Cult of the Dragon. He has decided that if the latter organization proves to be too much of an annoyance, he will attempt to take over its leadership (concealing his true nature) and put it to work for him, in his quest for the finding or making of a perfect mate.

Daurgothoth is especially wary of, and yet fascinated by, amethyst dragons and faerie dragons. He judges that their skills make them unpredictable and therefore dangerous, yet he also considers them possible sources for something that could be bred or modified into his mate. He is also interested in fire lizards and fire drakes as possible “raw material” breeding stock, so he follows news of their movements. Studying the activities of the Cult of the Dragon and of mages in general (while keeping well away from strongly organized groupings of mages such as the Red Wizards of Thay or the archwizards of Halruaa) makes up much of his daily work. He’s always considering schemes to improve the powers of any underlings or constructed servitor creatures to “snatch” newly developed magics from such sources undetected — or at least in such a way that they can’t reliably be followed. Often he ponders how he might mind-control a scholar of Candlekeep well enough to learn things mind-to-mind and direct what books the individual read, while at the same time eluding the efforts of anyone searching for such a mind-link (which those in

power in Candlekeep do regularly, as such infiltrations have been attempted so often in the recent past).

Daurgothoth’s current activities include trying to infiltrate temples of Lathander to gain magic related to the creation of life (for his own breeding plans) and personally trying to develop a breath weapon that will act as a *Mordenkainen’s disjunction* on everyone’s magic but his. (Thus far, he can breathe out a *dispel magic* conical effect, but he resists using it in battle, because it tends to spin wild magic away from its verges, sometimes doing him more harm than good.)

Daurgothoth’s magic

The Creeping Doom commands almost as wide an array of personally-modified spells as do the Seven Sisters, or such mighty mages as Elminster and Khelben Arunsun. This magazine could be filled several times over with them, but one deadly magic deserves mention because it is so spectacular:

Bonemelt

(Necromancy)

Level: 8

Range: 10 yds. + 10 yds./level

Components: V

Duration: 1 day/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Special

This spell transforms the bones of a living mammalian creature to jelly, causing the victim to collapse (at the end of the next round) into a helpless, amoeba-like slithering blob. Breathing and movement (by creeping, at MV 4) is possible, but climbing, flying, wielding items, and the like becomes impossible. Death won’t directly occur from this alteration but it often results from the lack of swift mobility the spell causes. Daurgothoth can reverse the effect at will (usually so that the victim can be slain and then made into a servitor undead), but it otherwise lasts for 25 days when he casts it.

“Boneless” creatures do not need to eat, sleep, drink, or breathe, but they suffer 4d4 hp damage per day if subjected to full sunlight for more than seven continuous hours. A full day after the spell affects them (24 hours, or 144 turns), they are allowed a Constitution check. If the save succeeds, the victim changes in 1 turn to the same state as if he had saved against the spell originally (see below).

If a target of this spell successfully saves against the *bonemelt* attack, only one limb is affected (determine randomly between arms and legs; heads and tails — if any — are not targeted by the magic). It turns to a dangling, jelly-like mass lacking the strength to hold or carry things. If the limb is used for locomotion, the creature’s movement rate drops by three-quarters (round up), and spellcasting or activities requiring careful balance or deft manipulations typically become impossible. Worn or held items may or may not be dropped, depending on the situation and the actions of the victim.

Daurgothoth’s fate

The Creeping Doom is so ambitious that his schemes seem destined to failure. Even Daurgothoth himself is aware that spawning a race of descendants having powers akin to his own could well be bringing on his own eventual doom (at their hands). Still, even if he never mates, his continual growth in power is a matter of grave concern for folk all over Faerûn, both draconic and human.

This dracolich will stop at nothing, and Mystra seems content to let him build himself into the greatest creature of magic in all Toril if he can achieve this aim. At the same time, his lonely search for a mate opens him to attack from wily foes, and if his seizures of magic grow more successful, he’ll soon have no shortage of those.



Ed Greenwood is an overweight, bespectacled, hirsute rogue who loves crawling through caves and swinging swords at imaginary foes. What he did to the armorer at the local museum last year was purely a misunderstanding.



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Network NEWS

by Robert Wiese

The RPGA Network staff just returned from the GEN CON® Game Fair, and we all had a wonderful time. The Network runs role-playing games in the old sports arena, across the street from the main part of the convention, connected by a skybridge. We need a space that size because we run a lot of games . . . and I mean a *lot* of games. This year we ran close to 900 tables of role-playing events over a three-and-a-half-day period — that's more than we have run in years, and maybe more than we have ever run. At our peak, there were more than 90 tables playing at the same time.

On Friday morning, the Network ran its first Free-For-All, a carnival-like event showing off various Network programs in "characteristic" booths. Over 400 people attended. About 600 players showed up for the huge LIVING CITY™ interactive game on Saturday afternoon, and a series of seminars that were comparatively intimate filled out the Networks events for the weekend. Our charity auction and other events raised more than \$7,000 for the American Cancer Society and almost \$4,000 for Children's Hospital of Milwaukee. Garret Wang (Ensign Kim of *Star Trek: Voyager*), one of

The RPGA® Network supports conventions all over the world with tournaments designed for many different game systems. The Network also publishes Polyhedron® Newszine, which members receive monthly.

For more information about the Network's programs, write to: RPGA Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or send e-mail to: rpgahq@aol.com.

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

the convention's special guests, acted as Master of Ceremonies for our Sunday awards ceremony.

All of the people I passed were playing games and having a good time. That's the essence of a convention experience: to have fun playing games with old friends or new ones. The dealers, the *anime*, the seminars — they are all icing on the cake.

Conventions are held in many places and come in a wide variety of sizes, but they all revolve around this central theme: the fun of gaming. No matter where a con is held nor how many people attend, gaming is the reason people attend.

The GEN CON Game Fair is the largest gaming convention in the western hemisphere, but it falls into a category I call "Convention Center Cons." The members of this group are the really huge shows such as the GEN CON Game Fair, Origins and Dragon*Con.

The second size category I call the "Hotel Con," because, of course, they take place entirely within a hotel. Attendance for these smaller shows is generally 400 to 1,600 people. Hotel Cons offer many of the same experiences that the Game Fair offers, but on a smaller scale. There are dealer rooms, sometimes seminars, and always lots of gaming. Frequently there are a good number of Network games, as the Network is now supporting more conventions than ever before.

On a more local scale are "School Cons." These events are held in a high school or on a college campus, usually with an attendance of 100 to 400 people. These events offer local gaming at its best, occasionally a dealer room, and sometimes other activities that allow

attendees to have a great time without spending the money necessary to attend a Hotel Con. Many School Cons also offer Network games, much more now than ever.

The smallest convention-like experience out there is the "Game Day," an event run wherever the organizer can find space. Churches, schools, and even the organizer's house are likely sites, but any community center might offer space for a Game Day. The local game store often obliges, if it has gaming space. This type of event usually offers only gaming, but that's what the attendees want. Network tournaments appear even at Game Days. Many Network clubs are starting to hold monthly Game Days, and anyone can do it. Having a club is helpful but not necessary for organizing such an event.

What's the point of this classification of gaming conventions? I sit in my office surrounded by tournaments that are crying out to be sent to more events. I want to see the tournament program become more useful to players and judges who do not or cannot travel to many Hotel Cons in a year. A convention of any size can provide excellent gaming. While hotels and long weekends provide an exceptional vacation atmosphere, they aren't necessary for good gaming; a day at the local YMCA can be just as fun.

Acquiring Network events for a convention is easy. The convention organizer submits a request for the events desired at least four months in advance (six months when requesting first-run events). There is a \$10 fee for each tournament round (and a late fee for those who do not plan in advance), but we at the Network try to be flexible in granting requests. Request forms and more information on this process are available from Network Headquarters.

The GEN CON Game Fair is an experience that every gamer should have, but the quality of gaming doesn't depend on the size of the show. The best game you ever play could be waiting for you at a local Game Day just down the street.

Robert Wiese is the tournament coordinator for the RPGA Network. Before joining that rag-fag bands of rebels and iconoclasts, he earned much experience by helping to organize conventions in Illinois.



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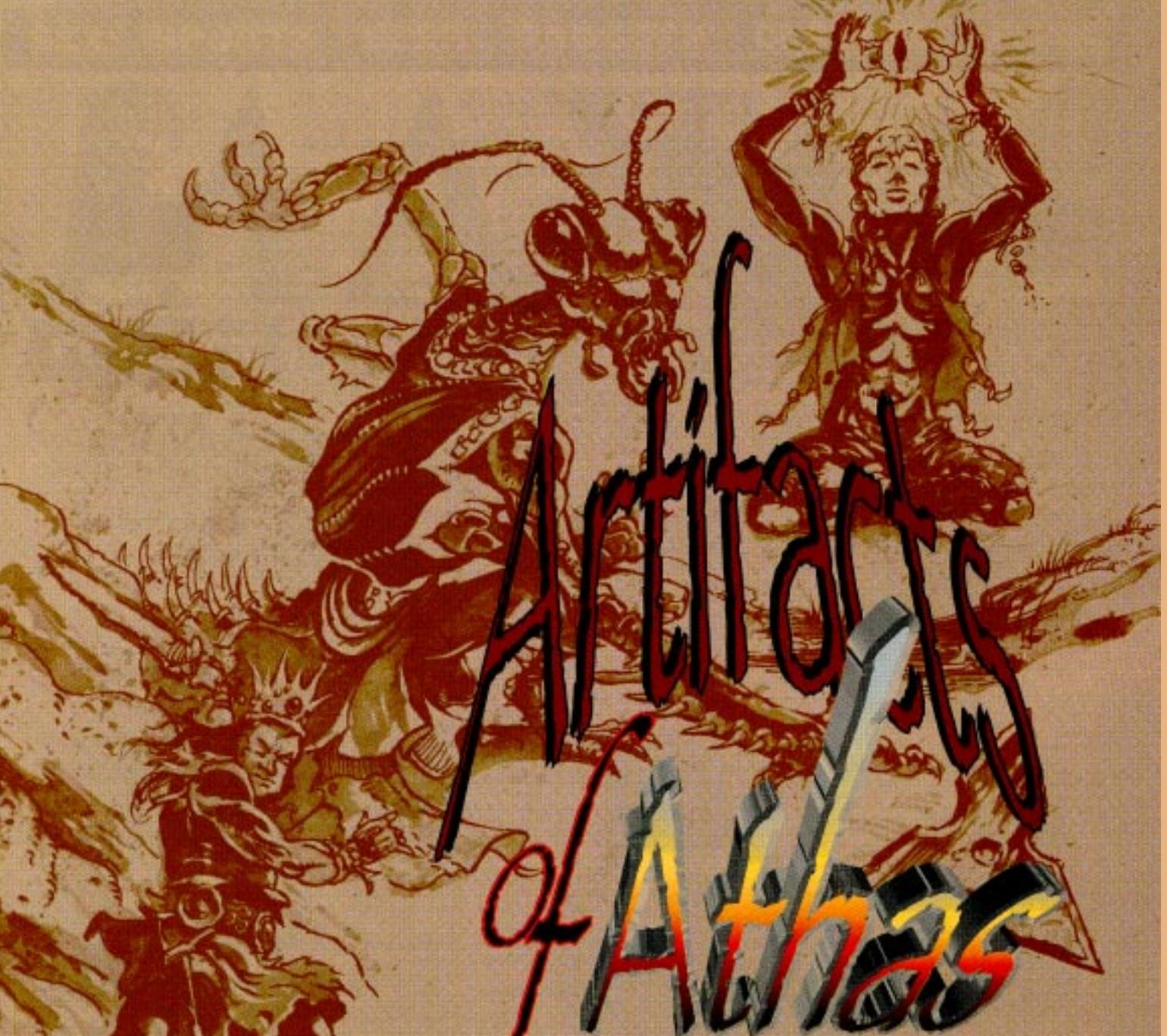
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Artifacts of Athas

Powerful relics for the Dark Sun[®] setting

by Kevin Melka

illustrated by John Dollar

The savage world of the Dark Sun setting has many powerful artifacts that have come into being throughout its merciless history. Some of these relics are the stuff of heroic legends, while others are malicious items with terrible power and purpose. All are potent devices that can bring about the defeat of an evil foe or spell doom for adventurers under the crimson sun.

The artifacts presented here supplement those from the *Psionic Artifacts of Athas*, which contains many of the famous artifacts from the Prism Pentad novels by Troy Denning. As with artifacts presented there, should the DM deem the powers of these devices inappropriate, choose new powers (and curses) from the artifact random powers chart.

Chatkcha of the Great One

This artifact of the thri-kreen appears at first glance to be a regular dasl chatkcha (produced from crystalline kreen venom secretions), though it glistens like polished metal. The relic is silver colored, but its crude edges give it a dull appearance. Surrounding the hole in the center are cryptic runes, and the edges of the item appear razor sharp.

History

A memory of the Great One is present in every member of the kreen race, a recollection triggered by the sight of various images. One such image is the *chak'sa*, the huge thri-kreen head carved from white stone that rests in the Hinterlands. Another is the appearance of an avangion. The third is the weapon known as the Chatkcha of the Great One.

The racial history of the kreen is sketchy at best, and much of the knowledge regarding the Great One is left to interpretation by individual kreen. However, in regards to the Chatkcha, all tales and legends are the same. It is said that before he disappeared from Athas, the Great One gave his greatest student, a kreen named Ka'Cha, a chatkcha of great power. A warning came with the weapon, decreeing that if it were ever used for a corrupt purpose, the item would shatter, and memory of the Great One would vanish from the land.

In the thousand years since its first appearance, the Chatkcha of the Great One has passed through the hands of generations of thri-kreen who followed the teachings of Ka'Cha. The Chatkcha was last seen in the lands of a kreen named T'katk, who took it to the *chak'sa* to see if his vision of the Great One would become clearer. He was never seen again.

Campaign use

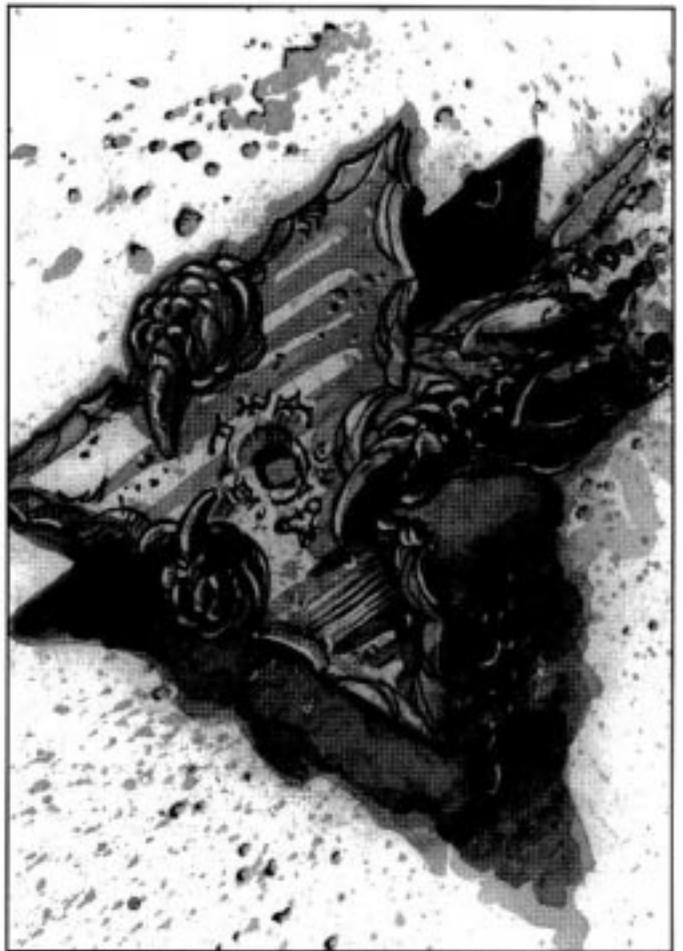
The Chatkcha of the Great One is the only artifact specifically designed for the kreen race, and it is an important part of their history. A quest for the Chatkcha could be a grand adventure for a group of PC kreen. Should word of the Chatkcha's return surface, kreen from across the Tablelands and beyond would seek out the possessor. Some would seek knowledge of the Great One, while others would wish to possess the Chatkcha for its famed power.

Since the Chatkcha of the Great One was last known to be in the vicinity of the Hinterlands, it is quite possible the last possessor took the item into the unexplored territory of the Crimson Savannah, far beyond the Jagged Cliffs.

If the possessor of this artifact is not kreen, any kreen they encounter instantly asks for the item. If the owner does not comply, the kreen attack. If the possessor kills the kreen, he has committed an evil act and is struck dead by the item.

Powers

Constant Powers — The Chatkcha of the Great One has a magical +5 bonus on attack and damage rolls, and it ignores all non-magical armor on an opponent. The weapon is also



indestructible, immune to physical, magical, and psionic powers. Anyone with a Dexterity greater than 20 who is specialized in chatkcha can throw the weapon one additional time per round.

When wielded by a member of the kreen race, on a natural roll of 20 the chatkcha acts as a vorpal weapon and severs the head of the victim — or causes triple damage if the target has no head. Thri-kreen wielders also ignore all modifiers for weapon speed when used in combat.

Invoked Powers — Once per month, a thri-kreen possessing this artifact can raise the chatkcha above its head and summon all kreen in a five-mile radius to its location. As long as the summoned kreen are not of a diametrically opposed alignment to the wielder, they follow the possessor for a number of hours equal to its Charisma, performing any task that would benefit (or at the very least not harm) the kreen race.

Curse — The possessor of the chatkcha is driven to the same goals of Ka'cha — peace, prosperity, and harmony. For every day the weapon is in his possession, there is a cumulative 1 % chance per day for the possessor to throw away his weapons and travel across Athas to preach the message of Ka'cha. No power short of a full *wish* can remove this effect.

Suggested means of destruction

The Chatkcha of the Great One can be broken only if it is used by a kreen for an evil purpose. In this event, the artifact shatters irreparably.

Crown of the Dwarven Kings

The points of this crown are ragged and uneven. Otherwise, the crown boasts some of the finest workmanship to come out of the Green Age. It is studded with precious gems of all kinds, with a large diamond at the front. Its body consists of a type of metal that has not been identifiable since the Cleansing Wars. This artifact fits a head roughly the size of a dwarf, so it does not fit half-giants, thri-kreen, or halflings.

History

From the Green Age to the conclusion of the Cleansing Wars people of great strength and insight have ruled the dwarven people. Since the time of King Thoren Andiron, second king of the Dwarves, rulers of this stouthearted race have done so with the Crown of Dwarven Kings upon their brow. The crown was created by Thoren's wife, a powerful psionist, to help her husband protect the dwarven race. Upon his death the crown was passed to his son, and generations of Andiron to rule over Kemalok for 12,000 years.

With the coming of First Sorcerer and the Cleansing Wars, the dwarven race was faced with extinction by Borys of Ebe, thirteenth Champion of Rajaat. Led by Rkard Andiron the dwarves fought the forces of Borys — the Crown of Dwarven Kings displayed for all to see.

For nearly a century Rkard led his people against the enemy, but it was not enough. In the end Rkard and Borys became locked in a battle to the death, one in which the Champion of Rajaat emerged victorious. However, through force of will Rkard dealt Borys a terrible blow, and he was carried from the field before being able to claim the crown from the dwarf's body. Afterward, the body of Rkard and the Crown of Dwarven Kings, along with Borys's weapon, the Scourge, were sealed in the ruins of Kemalok until another king of the dwarven people could be found.

Recently, following the rise to power of Tithian, the Crown of Dwarven Kings was stolen from Kemalok by agents of the new king of Tyr. Later the crown resurfaced in the hands of a young mul named Rkard, son to the human gladiator Neeva and the dwarf sun cleric Caelum. Rkard was given the crown by the dwarven banshees Jo'orsh and Sa'ram, who told him he would succeed where the king Rkard failed and kill Borys of Ebe. Afterward, the crown was returned to the tomb of Rkard Andiron.

Campaign use

The Crown of Dwarven Kings has remained in Rkard's tomb in the buried city of Kemalok, awaiting the time when the dwarves of Athas are again united under one king. Only then will the banshee of Rkard bestow his crown to the next king of the dwarves.

Powers

Constant powers — The Crown of Dwarven Kings bestows formidable psionic upon its wearer. When worn, the crown



increases the MAC (Mental Armor Class) of the wearer by four points, six if the wearer is a dwarf or mul.

Any dwarf viewing the Crown of Dwarven Kings recognizes the relic from legend, and if worn by a dwarf or mul, no dwarf can initiate violent actions against the wearer. When worn by a nondwarf all encounter reactions with dwarves or muls begin as friendly (see Chapter 11 of the *DMG*).

Invoked powers — Twice per day the wearer of the crown can choose to ignore one psionic power used against him, regardless of discipline or whether it is a science or devotion.

When worn by a dwarf who is a true king of his race, the wearer can call a conclave of dwarves. This sends waves of psionic force across Athas, calling dwarves to his location for a great gathering. Dwarves of similar alignment to the king (either same ethics or morals) cannot defy it, while dwarves of diametrically opposed alignments are allowed a saving throw vs. spell to resist or travel immediately to his location. This power can only be used once by any one dwarven king possessing the crown.

Curse — Should the wearer of the crown intentionally cause physical harm to any dwarf, the crown immediately reduces his Intelligence and Wisdom scores to 3.

Suggested Means of Destruction

Legend tells that the crown will explode in a tremendous fireball should all dwarves on Athas be slain.

Dragonskin

This artifact is a breastplate of armor sized to fit a human, half-elf, mul, or elf. The armor is a dull light gray, with a jagged texture and small spikes protruding along the front and back. There are no seams on the armor, and the wearer has to crawl into it to put it on. Those touching the armor experience a creepy feeling, as of insects crawling across the flesh.

History

Who created the Dragonskin or where it came from is a mystery, but one thing is for certain — it is literally the hide of a dragon. The Dragonskin has been around for at least 2,000 years, and by process of elimination it cannot be the hide of King Kalak or Borys of Ebe. That leaves only the sorcerer-queen of Yaramuke who was killed by Hamanu of Urik long ago, or the ruler of Kalidnay, Kalid-Ma. The body of Kalid-Ma was said to have disappeared following his rampages. In both instances Hamanu of Urik was present, and if anyone knows the truth it's the Lion of Urik. Another theory is that a sorcerer-king may have given a copy of his defiler metamorphosis spell to someone, then slew the victim for his carcass.

Whoever created the armor likely lost possession of it long ago, for tales of great warriors wearing the Dragonskin have surfaced over the years across the Tablelands. Whether worn by great heroes or terrible villains, accounts of these warriors commonly become legend. Each story ends the same, with the wearer being slain in one fashion or another and the armor disappearing for another hundred years.

The Dragonskin was last reported in the hands of an elf lord named Ke'oosh, who raided dozens of caravans across the Ivory Triangle before he and his entire tribe disappeared in Free Year 8 of the Tyr calendar,

Campaign use

The Dragonskin is a potent artifact for warriors. Should a character with this artifact become well known, others covetous of the Dragonskin's power will surely come in search of the item. Should they know the item's weakness, it would be a simple matter to claim it for their own.

The wearer might think himself invincible enough to confront a sorcerer-king, a conflict that would surely lead to the wearer's death.

Powers

Constant powers — Anyone wearing the fabled Dragonskin has a base AC 4 vs., all physical attacks. Adjustments for Dexterity and other bonuses are added to this number. The wearer also suffers half damage from all fire, electrical, and cold-based attacks, saving for no damage where applicable.

The wearer of the Dragonskin is under the constant effect of a *ring of coolness* and requires half the normal water requirements each day. The possessor also has 70% magic resistance vs. all priestly magic, 40% vs. wizardry magic, and 20% vs. effects produced by magical and other items. The Dragonskin also prevents the wearer from losing Constitution points as a result of being exposed to the Gray, the endless space where Athasians go when they die.



Invoked powers — Once per day the wearer of the Dragonskin can become ethereal, as per *plate mail of ethereality* for up to one hour. This ability cannot be negated by using a *phase door* spell.

Once per day the wearer can also choose to have 100% magic resistance to one specific spell or effect. The exact nature of the spell must be known by the wearer before this effect can be invoked. For instance, the wearer can make himself completely immune to a *fireball* spell, if he knows his enemy is about to cast one at him.

Curse — While wearing the Dragonskin, the possessor's mind is considered to be "open" versus psionic attack regardless of any defenses. His MAC (Mental Armor Class) is considered 10, and he can use no psionic powers of any kind (even wild talents).

Suggested means of destruction

Bathed in the light of an avangion for 24 hours, the Dragonskin crumbles into ash. For each two hours of exposure the Dragonskin loses one armor class rating until reaching AC 8, when it is destroyed.

Continued on page 46



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Eye of Psurlon

This artifact is a four-inch diameter globe resembling the slit pupil of a large cat's eye. The pupil of the eye floats in a gelatinous yellow substance, and the artifact is always warm to the touch. The Eye of Psurlon is heavier than it appears, weighing slightly more than 15 pounds.

History

The Eye of Psurlon is not native to the world of Athas. The worm-like psurlons, who are also not from the Prime Material world of Athas, brought the artifact from their dying world to the Astral Plane thousands of years ago. The Eye of Psurlon has always been entrusted to the care of the most powerful psurlon adept, who was usually the leader of the community. The adept typically used the relic to help the psurlons survive on the unyielding Astral Planes, as many of them perished with the destruction of their world.

When members of the psionic community discovered the existence of psurlons two centuries ago, some of the more corrupt psionists took to summoning them to Athas to harness their psionic knowledge. One of the first psurlons summoned in such a manner was the adept possessing the Eye of Psurlon. The psionist was not fully prepared for the might of the psurlon adept, and in the end the psionist was slain. The psurlon adept then took to exploring this new world of Athas.

The adept traveled the Tablelands for years, and after which decided to move the surviving psurlons to Athas where they would be supreme. Before the adept could do so he was attacked, slain, and devoured by an Athasian roc. To this day the Eye of Psurlon rests in the mountain lair of one of the largest creatures on Athas, somewhere in the Ringing Mountains.

Campaign use

The Eye of Psurlon has many psionic and non-psionic powers, and is a dangerous artifact to possess if the owner is not psurlon. Very few people know of the existence of the Eye of Psurlon, since it never left the possession of the adept from the time it came to Athas until its death. Finding the Eye of Psurlon would likely be an accident on the part of characters.

Any characters finding the Eye of Psurlon are sought after by some of the few psurlons living on Athas. These creatures do anything to possess the Eye of Psurlon, since it is considered to be an icon and savior of the psurlon race.

Powers

Constant powers — Possession of the Eye of Psurlon greatly increases the owner's psionic powers in the areas of Psychometabolic and Clairsentience. If the possessor is a psionist, he can use powers of either of these disciplines at 20% of the normal PSP cost (to initiate and maintain), and the range of the power is doubled. Psionists who do not possess one or both of the above disciplines can now learn sciences or devotion from them but lose said powers if the Eye is later lost. Wild talents who possess the artifact can choose one Psychometabolic or Clairsentience devotion to add to whatever powers they already have.



Psurlons who come into the possession of the Eye of Psurlon are able to use all powers from both the Psychometabolic and Clairsentience disciplines.

Invoked powers — Once per week the owner of the Eye of Psurlon can conjure an area one mile in diameter that is "dead" to both psionic and magical powers for one hour. This area is stationary, and only the possessor of the Eye of Psurlon can use psionics or magic in this area. No psionic or magical powers function here, and any permanent enchantments are nullified for the effect's duration. Only the superior might of Champions of Rajaat are able to ignore this power.

If the possessor is psurlon this power can be used instead to remove psionic and magical power from one target. There is no saving throw for this effect which lasts for 2d10 days.

Curse — Non-psurlon possessing this artifact slowly lose their sight, becoming completely blind in one month. Possessors are forced to rely on the Clairsentience powers of the Eye to supplement their senses. Psurlons who possess the eye lose all personal ambition, concerning themselves with only the survival of their race. Psurlons aware of this curse are loath to touch the Eye, caring less for the race as a whole than for their own desires.

Suggested means of destruction

Conflicting legends suggest that the bite of a roc or exposure to the ethereal plane can destroy the Eye of Psurlon.

Rvk'choel

Creature/Rhul-tal: AC 0, HD 10

The rvk'choel (pronounced rak—coal) is a “living artifact, a parasite that attaches itself to a living host. The Rvk'choel is a thick necklace — like a collar with a large talisman section containing a dreadful eye. The skin of the living artifact is a dark, scaly gray whose surface slowly pulses with life. The eye appears as an ebony pupil amidst a swirling green mass. The portion of the collar that encircles the wearer's neck does not connect in the back, but instead burrows into the skin at the collar bone.

History

The Rvk'choel is the last of its kind. Created by the nature-benders of the Blue Age, the Rvk'choel were intelligent, corrupt creatures that fed off the evil thoughts and emotions of their hosts. The Rvk'choel was created by the nature-benders for use in their war against the nature masters 14,000 years ago — a war the nature-benders lost. Only a handful of the Rvk'choel survived the conflict, and over the millennia fewer have survived the rigors of the various ages. Only one Rvk'choel has survived to see the Age of Mortals.

The last Rvk'choel has survived the years by carefully choosing its hosts. Until the 188th King's Age, the Rvk'choel has remained in the Ringing Mountains of the Forest Ridge, being passed down from generation to generation of the Ogo halfling tribe. When the halfling chief Urga-Zoltapl formed an alliance with Hamanu of Urik, the Rvk'choel traveled out into the Tablelands with Urga's eldest son Ykaa-Zoltapl.

Once away from the Forest Ridge the Rvk'choel realized the extent of evil capable by the Rebirth races, and at the soonest opportunity caused the death of Ykaa and disappeared into the Tablelands.

Campaign use

Like many other living artifacts, the Rvk'choel should not be haphazardly introduced into a campaign. Anyone possessing the Rvk'choel eventually turns to evil, and would then be considered an NPC under the control of the DM.

The Rvk'choel cannot be harmed or influenced with magic or psionics, existing long before the creation of both powers. It has the equivalent of 100 hit points, regenerating all damage sustained in one round when attached to a host. When separated from its host, it regenerates five hit points per round, even when taken below -10. The Rvk'choel has a movement rate of 21 when not attached to a host.

Powers

Constant powers — The host of the Rvk'choel has 100% magic resistance to any spell from the priest sphere of Plant. Carnivorous and other dangerous plant life that populates Athas completely ignores the possessor, even if they later attack the plant.

In addition, the possessor suffers no ill effects from any other rhul-thaun living item (except other living items considered to be artifacts) used against him. Living weapons cause no damage, and rhul-thaun creatures cannot detect the possessor



by any means. The Rvk'choel does not allow its host to have any other rhul-thaun items on its person.

Invoked powers — Once per day the Rvk'choel can regenerate up to 30 hp damage taken by its host. Also once per day the creature can cure any disease or other physical impairment (other than normal damage), such as restoring its host's sight or lost character ability points

Curse — The Rvk'choel is pure evil. While the wearer of the Rvk'choel sleeps, the vile artifact possesses his body and seeks to commit acts of great evil against the wearer's comrades or other innocent characters. When the wearer awakes, he has no knowledge of what occurred while he was sleeping, not even the vaguest dreams. Since only death can remove the Rvk'choel from its host, the wearer must take extreme measures to insure the safety of others while he sleeps — assuming he ever learns the nature of the curse.

Suggested means of destruction

If bathed in the waters of the Last Sea, the Rvk'choel dissolves like so much salt.

Held in the hands of an avangion for a week, the Rvk'choel loses all of its powers.

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I am writing in response to Nick Spear, who wrote about magic in the AD&D® game (*DRAGON Magazine* issue #229).

He wrote that magic is what makes AD&D fun, and I must disagree on that and some other parts of the letter. Magic is by no means essential for the game to be fun. In fact, the most enjoyable campaign I've played in was pretty much magic dead. There were mages and such, but all the magic we had in our party was a cleric who couldn't heal and a single *short sword* +1. There were many things that made this campaign better than most. For example, we had the added thrill of knowing that our characters might actually die for good. In most campaigns, death is a small problem taken care of in a few days, but here we really had to think about what our characters did. It was really great.

Roni Saari
Vantaa, Finland

I am Writing in response to Jamie Nossal's letter in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #230 in which he pointed out that thieves were, at least in respect of their

THAC0, better fighters than most other character classes and that this situation had to be changed by adding one point to their THAC0 from levels one through nine, which I think is unnecessary. One point for my opinion is that although thieves might be statistically better fighters at one level (namely level 3) than most other classes, they are ill suited for close combat.

First, a thief PC most probably has lower hit points than a priest of equal level. As every boxer can tell you, a successful fighter is not necessarily the one who can deal the best-placed punches, but the one who can also take a few hits himself.

The second point is that thieves are loners by nature, and a correctly played thief character will not fight well in groups, since he lacks the experience of fighting in any formation. In addition to that, most thief characters shun direct confrontation but can fight much more efficiently if attacking someone by backstabbing. If pressed, a thief will usually flee to return at a later time.

In general, thieves favor hit-and-fade tactics above all others. I don't think Jamie's opinion about adding one point to their beginning THAC0 is fair just because the *PHB* states that thieves are only little better suited for fighting than wizards and that all character classes start with an unmodified THAC0 of 20.

I think a beginning THAC0 of 20 at level one shows that all characters are, at least at the beginning of their careers, at the same level as an inexperienced swordsman, no matter which class they belong to.

Of course a DM is always free to change the standard rules if he or she thinks that his own homemade rules are better suited for his own campaign.

Jochen M. Kaiser
Germany

I have several opinions I'd like to voice over the views of Michael D. Bugg in issue #232.

First off, I agree with his views on the use of magic in a campaign. In my opinion, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS®* setting—with wizards like the Simbul and Elminster, Halaster, Khelben, and all the Chosen of Mystra — lacks a sense of wonder with regards to the art of spells and wizardry.

While I don't deny that the *FORGOTTEN REALMS* setting is a great place in which to adventure, this overbalance of magic somehow makes it less magical. Take for example the *Wheel of Time* series,

where Aes Sedai (magic-users) are rarer and regarded with awe. This is so much more satisfying than a scenario in which players yell, "Oh, another wizard. Let's waste 'im and grab the treasure!"

In my own campaigns, the wizard's class has several additional restrictions.

Wizards are required to be trained in a spell by one who already knows the spell. In addition, wizards must roll against their Intelligence every time they cast a spell. If it fails, they slowly become addicted to the power of magic, until they burn out their ability to cast spells.

While some of you may say that this is excessive, it has greatly reduced the number of encounters with wizards. Give a rationale for limiting magic, and make those magic users who survive be held in much more respect than those found in a magic-rich campaign.

I welcome any views on this idea.

Lucas Ashlar Lee
Malaysia

Recently I came up with an idea to represent the various axe weapons in a more realistic manner. For years I have enjoyed playing dwarves in the AD&D game, and the typical dwarf prefers an axe as a weapon. Unfortunately, the axe is possibly the most underpowered weapon in the game.

Recently, my DM and I came up with a great compromise. We use the damage of the long sword but reverse the large and small damage values. Since an axe is a cleaving weapon, it stands to reason that it causes more damage to small creatures than to large ones. (A large creature would suffer a slashing wound, while a small one would lose something.) So, according to our new method, the battle axe causes 1d12 hp damage vs. S-M and 1d8 hp damage vs. L. We're still trying to come up with an idea for a good two-handed battle axe.

Robert Armstrong
McMurray, PA

I have one gripe about the AD&D 2nd Edition game rules. I recently switched over from the original edition, and I think that the spellbooks as described now are absurdly small. If all of the kind readers out there would perform the following feat, it will be easy to illustrate my point: Hold the first one hundred pages of the magazine between your fingers. That is how thin your mage's spell book is! The *DMG* even reads, "... compare them to bulky coffee-table books of today or large

hefty dictionaries." Can you believe it? It makes one think that the pages are made of wood or something. (Maybe they are.) If they're not, then I suggest that you ask your DM to let you have spellbooks of at least 400 pages. (About the size of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome, which is about an inch thick.)

Ian Bloomsburg
Via e-mail

I've been role-playing now for about 12 years, DMing for about ten. Some things that have been discussed in "Forum" recently have touched on questions my gaming group has asked of the rules. The biggest help in our deciding

which a human fighter had an 18/00 Strength and specialization, and his magic-wielding buddies kept augmenting his strength for combat. One Sunday I had not completed writing the adventure, and so the party fought and thought its way through an old module, picking up a *long sword +2/+3 vs. giants* along the way. It was in the module, so they got it. That sword became the bane of my existence until it fortuitously failed a saving throw when breathed on by a black dragon. Since then I have not let any magical weapons with permanent pluses into my campaigns. As suggested by various *DRAGON Magazine* articles, I might give out weapons with charges,

Which is not to say there have not been problems with game balance. I also ran a solo campaign DMing for an elven ranger. As time progressed he accumulated magical weapons and armor, each thing with its own abilities. The problem was in that the player, Adie, worked out a number of tactics for his PC in which these various abilities complemented each other all too well. We gamed with this PC less and less often as the game balance deteriorated. It was fully my fault, as I had not thought things through when designing the magic (each piece was designed separately). Eventually Adie said that he didn't really want to play this character any more as it stood, but he had a suggestion. Adie's character was deeply religious, and he suggested that the adventures following from gaining the magic be a dream-sequence test in the corrupting influence of too much power, sent by Herne. We thrashed out the details and Amroth (the ranger) awoke with a start, five levels lower and considerably less encumbered by equipment. The rejection of the power meant the test had been passed, and Amroth earned Herne's favor. Three years on, Amroth has risen four of his lost five levels, and we still look back on the *Dallas* - style ending quite fondly.

Irresponsible giving out of magic has been the greatest destroyer of game balance in my campaigns. I'm just lucky with the players I have.

Martin Scutt
Nottingham, UK



"... we have happily discarded the few rules that do not suit our group, without the feeling that what we are playing is any less the AD&D game."

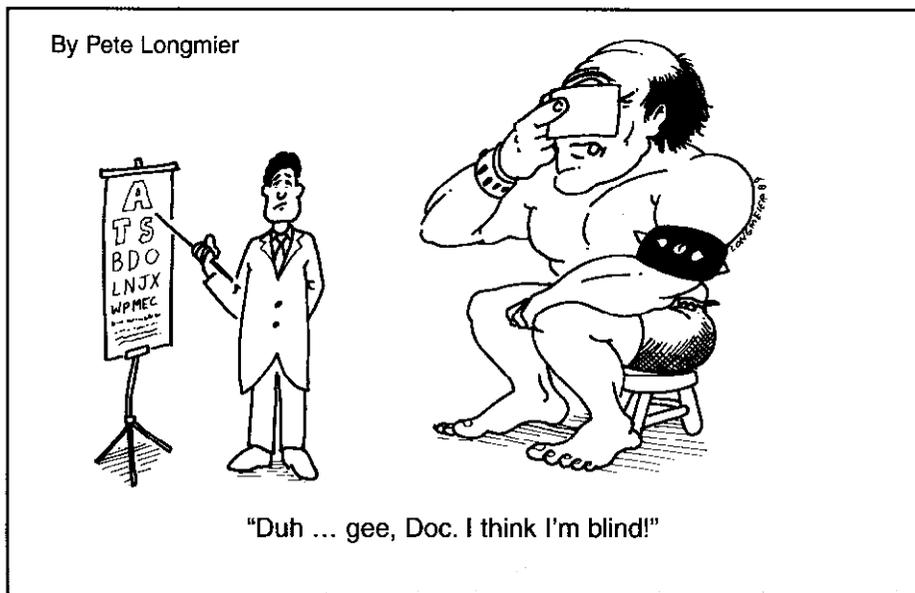
what to do about each case was the line at the front of the various rule books about each rule being optional and open to interpretation. With this advice we have happily discarded the few rules that do not suit our group, without the feeling that what we are playing is any less the AD&D game.

Over the last few months there have been several letters concerning the level limits of demihumans and the dual class/multiclassing system. I agree wholeheartedly with Christopher Myers's comments in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #225. In my own campaign, there are no dual-class characters. Our group cannot see any reason why humans cannot multiclass, so I allow this in my campaign. It has not affected game balance, and it makes for some happier players.

As far as level limits for demihumans go, I agree somewhat with Steven Shaffer (issue #231) but would go further in as much as we totally disregard this rule. Again there has been no adverse effect on game balance. More importantly, the gamers with human PCs have not felt themselves disadvantaged with respect to the demihuman PCs.

In issue #228, Rick Maffei mentions some of the problems associated with the muscle subability and high Strength damage bonuses in general. Several years ago I started DMing a campaign in

but most just have a number of different abilities of varying power. Every weapon is now an individual, or at most part of a set. The philosophy that magic is not about mass-production comes through in the magic item creation process; now no two weapons in my campaign are the same. The problem of facing creatures hit only by weapons of +X is solved by assigning the weapon a value based upon the number and power of the abilities it has. Using this system, I have not since encountered the same problems with game balance.



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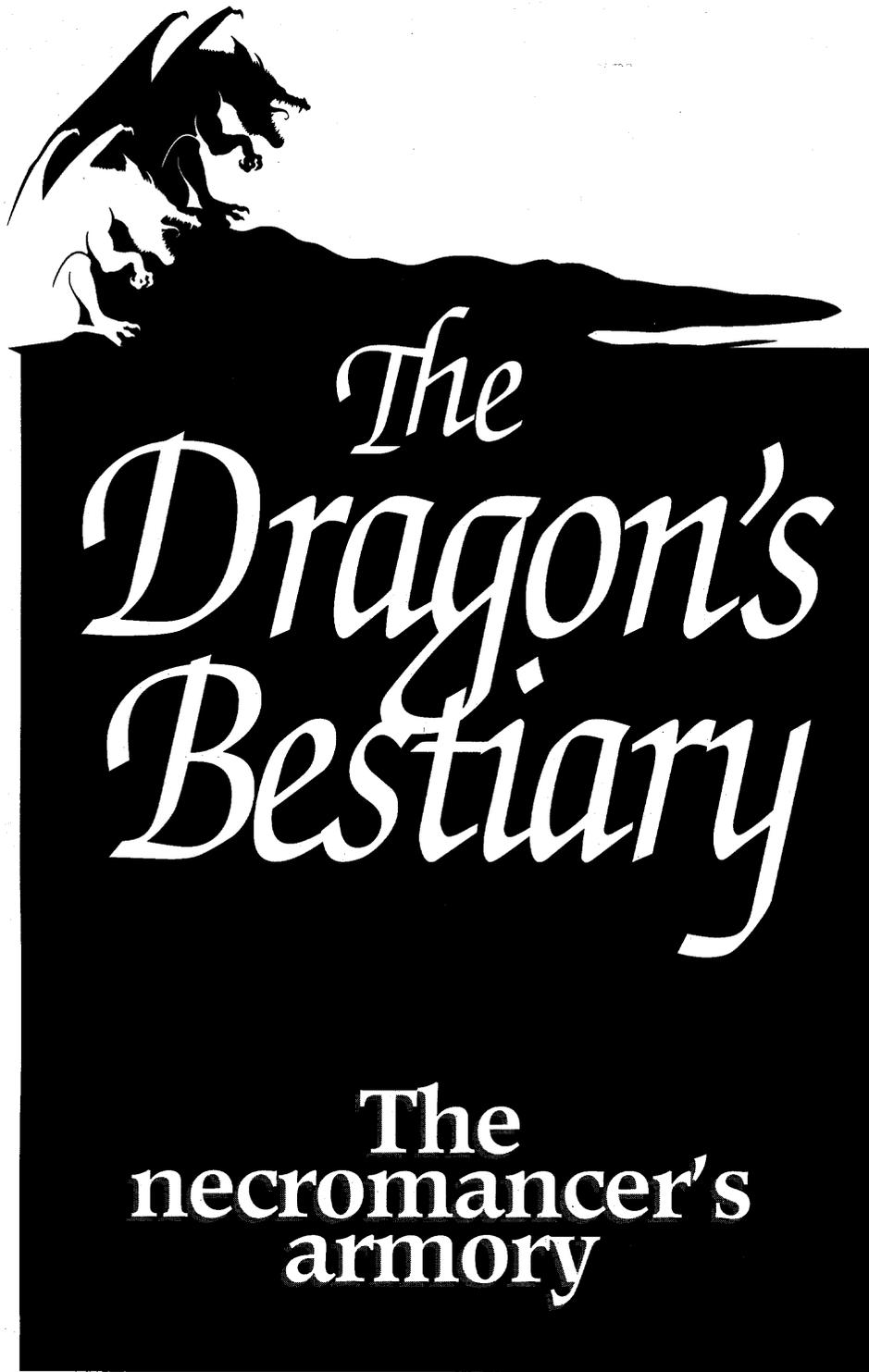
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Raymond Van Tilburg
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by Rudy Thauberger

illustrated by Ray VanTilburg

We saw the lich standing at the head of a legion of zombies and skeletons. They did not look anything like the hordes we had faced up to this point. We saw skeletons with weapons in place of their hands, zombies with four arms, and other monstrosities too strange to describe. The lich gazed upon us with his hollow eyes.

"The living tremble at the sight of the walking dead," he said, "but even the gods avert

their eyes when my legions take the field. I sculpt my soldiers, hone them, imbue them with dark magic. Each one is both a weapon and a work of art." With that, he vanished, and we were left facing a wall of dried bones and rotting flesh with forms and capabilities we had never seen before – and likely would never see again.

Skeletons and zombies are the foot soldiers of any undead army, yet very lit-

tle has been done over the years to improve their basic design. Human armies have specialists, men and women trained to perform specific tasks. Why wouldn't undead armies have specialists as well? Of course, since zombies and skeletons are non-intelligent, specialists must be created rather than trained. The question then is how necromancers would go about creating these specialized undead.

Skeletons and zombies are not really creatures to a necromancer; they are tools. As such, they can be modified and reconstructed, provided certain guidelines are followed.

Two basic kinds of modifications are possible: physical and magical. Making physical modifications means either substituting one material for another (replacing a hand, for example, with a mace) or adding new material (extra limbs, etc.). Magical modifications are special abilities derived from spells or materials, such as potions or scrolls, that are added to the flesh and bone basics.

To modify a skeleton or zombie physically, the right materials are necessary. Grafting a steel mace onto a skeleton's arm in place of its fist won't work, since the steel won't actually become a part of the skeleton once it is animated. It would fall off as the bones crack and splinter under the strain of combat. A bone mace, however, could be animated along with the rest of the skeleton, becoming a part of its body. Of course, the bone used to make the mace must be of the same type as the rest of the skeleton. Human bones must be used for a human skeleton. Mortar used to cement this new material into place must have as its major components such substances as ground bone, blood, and bone marrow. Finally, the 'new material must be infused with portions of the creature to be animated, perhaps by being coated with a paste made of ground bone. This way, the magic of the *animate dead* spell can affect the entire creature, modifications and all. Without this final step, any modifications suffer rejection, remaining inert even after the spell is cast.

Adding extra limbs becomes more problematic. Skeletons and zombies, by their very existence, break many natural laws. They do exist in a fantasy world and are restricted by that world's physical laws. A zombie with wings, therefore, can't necessarily fly. Extra arms on a skeleton can't just float in the air; they must be attached to shoulder joints,

which are in turn attached to the skeleton's spine. Furthermore, extra limbs don't guarantee special attacks, unless the necromancer includes additional materials and spells in the creation of the undead. For example, a necromancer who builds a scorpion tail for one of his skeletons might have to coat the bones in a mixture made of scorpion's blood. Otherwise, the tail just flails around uselessly.

Modifying a skeleton or zombie is more complex and time-consuming than simply performing physical modifications. First, the body must be prepared to accept the magic. This involves inscribing special glyphs and signs on the bodies to be animated. Gems, carved stones, and other small items might be required to hold the magic. A potion might have to be poured onto the body, or perhaps a scroll burned and the ashes placed in the body's mouth. Second, spells must be cast either immediately before or in conjunction with the *animate dead* spell. A special version of the spell might even be required, modified to take into account the spells being cast in conjunction with it. Acting as a

vessel for powerful magic might prove hazardous to the existence of a skeleton or zombie. Activating special abilities might forever destroy the creature.

Magical modification need not stop when the *animate dead* spell is cast. *The Complete Book of Necromancers* contains a list of spells that can be used to enhance, undead both before and after they have been created. (A favorite is *transmute bone to steel*.) Also useful is a spell from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* book called *imbue undead with spell ability*.

The process of creating specialized undead is basically the same as the process for creating a magic item. The best materials must be used. Bodies to be animated have to be in almost perfect condition, as well as tougher and more resilient than the average corpse found moldering in a graveyard. Preparation is lengthy and complex, creating additional strains on the raw material. As a result, specialized skeletons and zombies tend to have more hit dice and better combat capabilities than their regular counterparts, but they are also very rare.

Here are six examples of creatures that can be created by modifying the basic design of zombies and skeletons. Unless otherwise stated, the creatures described have all the normal characteristics of regular zombies and skeletons. All are non-intelligent, capable of following only basic commands. They are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, death magic, poison, and cold spells. Holy water inflicts 2-8 hp damage on them.

Skeletons still suffer only half damage from edged and piercing weapons, and zombies still attack last in the round. All creatures mentioned in this article are turned according to their hit dice. As specially created undead, none of these creatures has any habitat, society, or ecology to speak of. A list of suggested spells and special components appears in the description of each creature under the heading "Special ingredients."

Spike skeletons

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	3
THACO:	18
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-6
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	thorns, bonespray, blood bum
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	As skeleton
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	As skeleton
SIZE:	M (5'-6')
MORALE:	As skeleton
XP VALUE:	650

From a distance, spike skeletons look perfectly normal, except that they are unarmed. Closer inspection reveals that they are covered with bony thorns up to an inch long. Somewhat tougher than regular skeletons, these creatures are often used to demoralize enemy troops with their horrific and agonizing special abilities.

Combat: The bony thorns of these skeletons allow them to cause as much damage as a normal skeleton wielding a weapon. Furthermore, 1-3 (1d3) spikes explode each time the creature hits or is hit, inflicting 1-4 hp damage per spike in a 5' radius (save vs. breath weapon

Notice

In *DRAGON Magazine* #233, RPG International ran an advertisement offering the AD&D® CD-ROM Core Rules for \$48. The actual price from RPG International is \$72. RPG International regrets the error. RPG International has also mistakenly told customers that TSR recently raised its price for the AD&D CD-ROM Core Rules and that TSR's Suggested Retail Price for the product is \$89. TSR has not established a Suggested Retail Price for the product. TSR set the wholesale price for this product and notified all TSR distributors in February 1996. TSR and *DRAGON Magazine* assume no liability for incorrect prices printed in advertisements placed in *DRAGON Magazine*.

for half damage). The skeleton itself suffers 1 hp damage for each spike it loses this way. The purpose of the bonespray is to draw blood. Once this is done, the nearest creature to the skeleton is then subjected to a version of the 4th-level wizard spell *Belyn's burning blood* (from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures* book). The victim must save vs. spell at -3 or suffer 3d4 hp damage as all the blood from open wounds catches fire. A save must be made each round for three rounds. The moment a successful save is made, the damage stops. Each skeleton can cast this spell only once, and must be "re-charged" to cast it a. second time.

Special ingredients: The thorns must be specially carved from bones taken from the same type of creature that is to be animated (i. e. human bones for a human skeleton). A glyph is carved into each thorn before it is attached to the skeleton with a resin made with fresh bone marrow. During animation, a *shatter* spell is cast in conjunction with *animate dead*. After animation, the 6th-level necromancy spell *imbue undead with spell ability* is cast, along with *Belyn's burning blood*.

Acid zombies

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS:	8
MOVEMENT:	6
Hit Dice:	4
THACO:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-8/1-8 + special
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Bear hug, acid touch
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	As zombie
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	As zombie, plus immunity to acid
SIZE:	M (6')
MORALE:	Special
XP VALUE:	975

Acid zombies are almost pure white, all color having been bleached from their flesh by the acid oozing from their pores. Their skin glistens, as though sweating. When not fighting, the zombies moan softly, as though they are in constant pain. During combat, the moan becomes louder. Acid zombies tend to be created from taller creatures to take

advantage of their longer reach. They are generally used against individual fighters, rather than as massed troops.

Combat: As their name implies, acid zombies exude a powerful acid from their skin. In melee combat, this acid causes 1-4 hp damage in addition to any normal damage caused by the zombie's fists. Unlike regular zombies, acid zombies have two attacks per melee round. Both occur at the end of the round, but if both hit, the zombie is able to bear hug its victim, doing an additional 3-12 hp damage. A victim of this hug must make a Strength check to escape. Those who fail automatically suffer an additional 3-12 hp damage the next round. Anyone touching an acid zombie with bare flesh suffers 1-4 hp damage. No acid of any kind can harm an acid zombie.

Special ingredients: Before animation, each body must be coated in *oil of acid resistance*. The spell *Melf's acid arrow* must be cast in conjunction with *animate dead*. A mixture of bear's blood and snake scales must be poured into the body's mouth before animation to "teach" the creature how to bear hug.

Dust skeletons

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS:	10
MOVEMENT:	9
HIT DICE:	1-1
THACO:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1 point
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Choking cloud
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	As skeleton
SIZE:	M (5'-6')
MORALE:	Special
XP VALUE:	65

Although they look like normal skeletons, dust skeletons weigh about one-fifth as much, as their bones are dried almost to the point of disintegration. Wherever they walk, they leave a trail of blue-gray dust hanging in the air. This dust is poisonous, and anyone approaching within 10' feels mildly nauseous. Dust skeletons are used to break enemy formations by disabling large numbers of troops.



INFERNO

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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. Another Damned fine game by Global Games.

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Combat: Since they were created specifically to be destroyed, dust skeletons never carry weapons and cause very little damage in melee. Unlike regular skeletons, dust skeletons take full damage from edged and piercing weapons. When they are reduced to 0 hp, the skeletons shatter, spreading a cloud of dust in a 10' radius. Anyone breathing in the dust must make a save vs. poison or be paralyzed for 2-12 rounds. Those who make their saves spend one round coughing and choking, and are unable to attack or cast spells but are otherwise unaffected.

Special ingredients: Bones used to create dust skeletons must be specially dried to the point where they are ready to crumble. A special resin containing a paralyzing venom is then used to coat the bones. *Transmute water to dust* is used in conjunction with *animate dead* to dry the bones further.

Quick zombies

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)
TREASURE;	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	24
HIT DICE:	2
THACO:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Enhanced speed, first strike
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	As zombie
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	As zombie
SIZE:	M (5'-6')
MORALE:	Special
XP VALUE:	175

Quick zombies are thinner than regular zombies, and they constantly twitch and jerk, even when ordered to stand still. In combat, they run as swiftly as horses and are used as shock troops. Quick zombies decay very rapidly, lasting no more than a few months before crumbling into dust.

Combat: Quick zombies have two attacks per round and always strike first (as a sword of quickness).

Special Ingredients: A paste made from a *potion of speed* must be smeared on the bodies before animation. During animation, a *haste* spell must be cast.

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Absorbing zombies

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any
FREQUENCY: Very Rare
ORGANIZATION: Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES: Any
DIET: Nil
INTELLIGENCE: Non- (0)
TREASURE: Nil
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS: 8
MOVEMENT: 6
HIT DICE: 3
THACO: 18
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-8 + special
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Shocking grasp
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Absorb magical

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Special
SIZE: M (5'-6')
MORALE: Special
XP VALUE: 650

Absorbing zombies are the bane of wizards, as they are immune to spells that cause damage, actually absorbing their power. They appear to be regular zombies, except for their eyes, which glow with an unnatural silvery light. When charged with magical energy, small sparks are constantly emitted from their flesh.

Combat: These zombies suffer no damage from spells that would normally cause direct damage. Every 2 hp damage is converted into 1 hp electrical energy. This energy is stored up to a maximum of 24 hp total, then discharged the next time the zombie makes contact with a creature.

Special Ingredients: A *protection from magic* scroll must be burned and the ashes inserted into the mouth of the body before animation. *Shocking grasp* must be cast during animation.

Defiling skeletons

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Band
ACTIVITY CYCLES: Any
DIET: Nil
INTELLIGENCE: Non- (0)
TREASURE; Nil
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 2-20 (2d10)
ARMOR CLASS: 6
MOVEMENT: 12
HIT DICE: 4+4
THACO: 17
NO. OF ATTACKS: 2
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1d6/1d6 or by weapon

SPECIAL ATTACKS: None
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Defiling regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE: As skeleton
SIZE: M (5'-6')
MORALE: Special
XP VALUE: 975

Defiling skeletons are found only in the DARK SUN® campaign, where they are among the most feared and reviled of undead soldiers. An obsidian jewel is imbedded in each skeleton's forehead. Many of them have blackened bones, as though they've been burned. All carry weapons, usually swords or clubs.

Combat: Defiling skeletons absorb life energy in order to regenerate. When a defiling skeleton is reduced to 0 hp, it collapses and becomes inert for one round. The next round, it defiles an area equal to the casting of a 3rd-level spell. While this defiling takes place, the obsidian jewel in the skeleton's forehead glows brightly. The next round it rises up, restored to full hit points. Striking the skeleton while it is inert or regenerating has no effect, nor does it delay the regeneration. Only the destruction of the jewel embedded in its forehead or a successful *dispel magic* can stop the regeneration. The jewel is AC 4 and has 6 hp (which do not regenerate). During melee, it can be struck with a called shot. *Dispel magic* prevents regeneration for one round per level of the caster and causes the skeleton to collapse. During this time the jewel must be destroyed, or the regeneration starts again.

Special Ingredients: An obsidian jewel must be implanted in the skeleton's forehead. The jewel is inscribed with a special glyph. A second *animate dead* spell must be cast in conjunction with the first, along with *vampiric touch*.

Conclusion

The best thing about creating specialized undead is the element of surprise. Too often, players see battles against zombies and skeletons merely as a prelude to the real battle against their master. Adding a few specially modified skeletons and zombies to the mix lifts these battles against the most basic types of undead out of the ordinary.

Despite the rumors, we maintain that Rudy Thauberger's personal experiments are not the cause of the recent disappearance of neighborhood pets. Besides, it's all in the interest of science.



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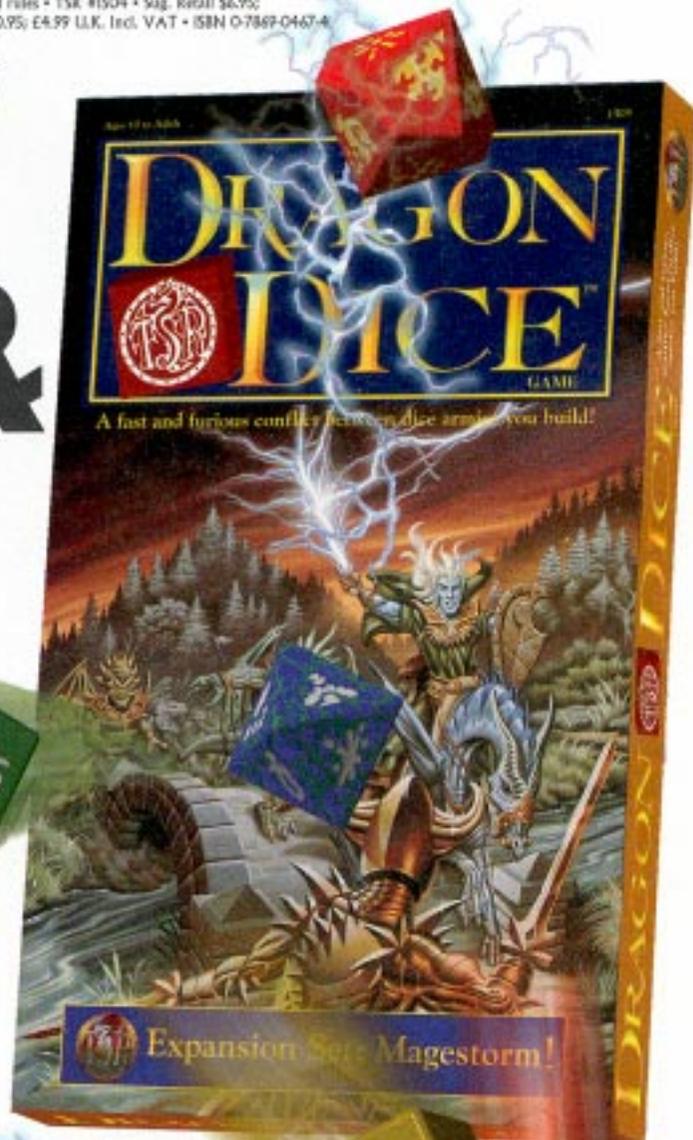
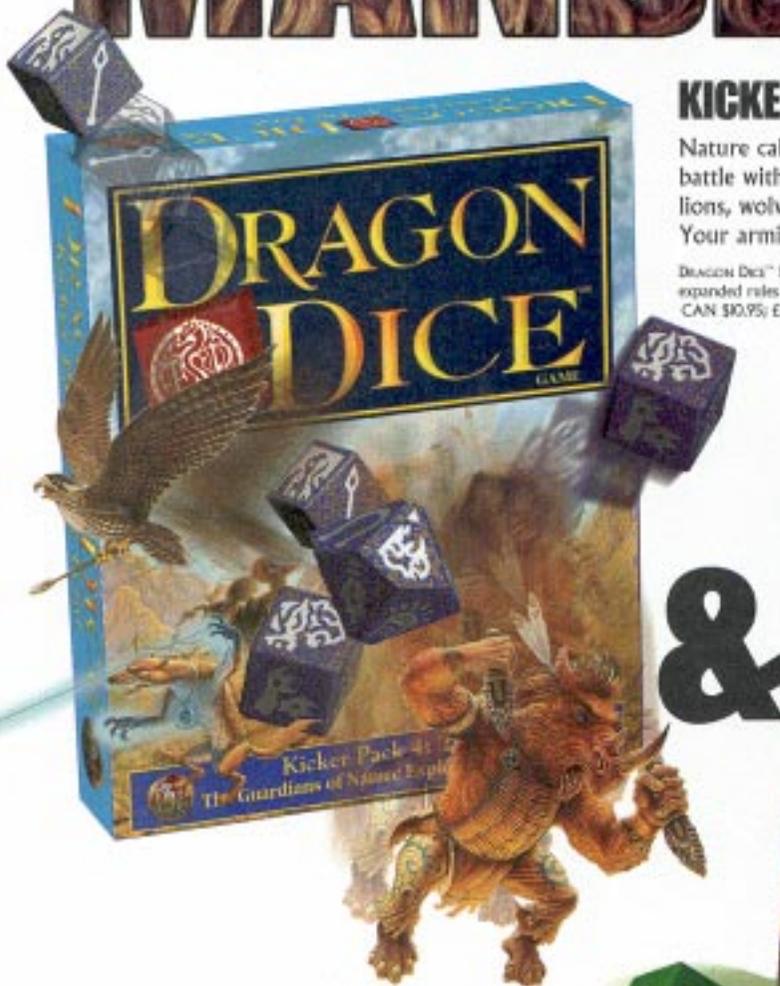


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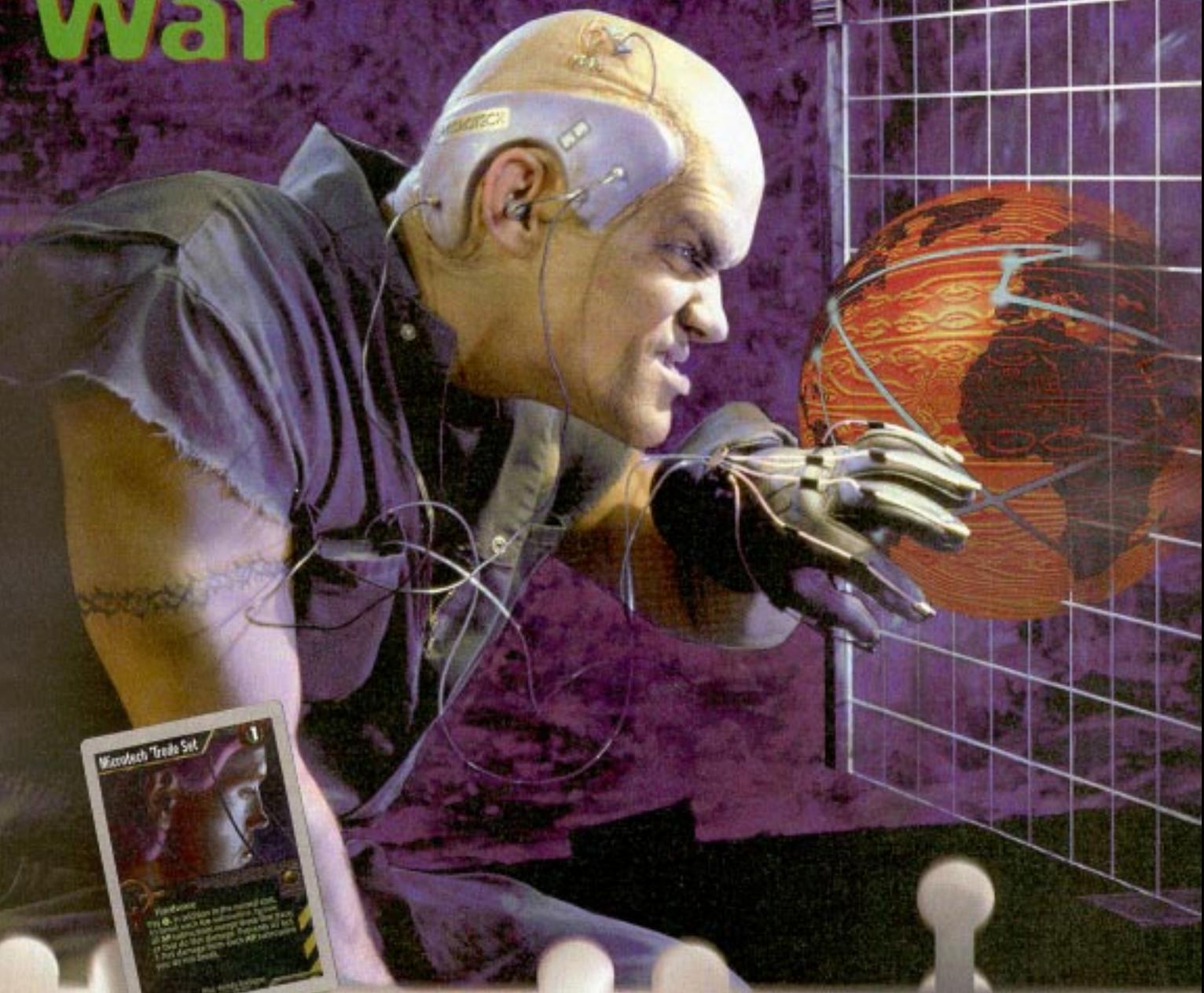
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Tales of the Fifth Age



Firstborn

by
Dave Gross

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

29 SC

The formidable *Rhellendros* was the first of the Great Dragons to discover the secret process of creating dragonspawn. He was also first to learn of the failures that could result....

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

In the breezy shadows of the manor's highest bedroom rest two figures. One reclines upon the bed, left hand in calm repose upon his belly, his right drooping lazily over the edge. His head leans toward his visitor, as if in rapt attention. The second figure slouches in a fine gilt chair drawn close to the side of the bed. A huge burlap robe drapes his heavy frame, making him look like one of the old Seeker priests so common before the brief return of the gods. His hands are gnarled and ugly in the poor light of a lone candle.

"I'll tell you my story," he says to the man in the bed. His voice is a deep, dry whisper.

"I want you to understand."

And so he continues, his low voice like an old wind's memory of thunder.



Warm light slanted in through the open window of the boarding house. As usual, I sat alone, near the window. The other tenants clustered in little groups, exchanging the latest gossip. Lord Khellendros was returning, they said. The name sounded familiar, but I so rarely listened to the city talk that I couldn't remember whether he was Knights of Takhisis. It didn't matter. This was to be my last supper in Palanthas.

I was weary of all the useless killing, the ruined towns, and the spoiled land around the once-great city of Palanthas. Even the weather joined in, raking dry storms across the plains, turning fertile fields into rough desert. And still men fought over it.

What was the point? None of them, not the Solamnics nor the draconians — and surely not my employers — none wanted anything but blood and ruin. For more than ten years I'd offered something better. Now I was exhausted.

My work paid well, and I lived modestly. Waiting in towns across Solamnia were my savings, small caches of gemstones I'd bought with my pay. None was a great fortune in itself, so I could stand to lose two or three to pillagers or lucky masons. Once I had traveled far away, I would build a business and hire someone to run it for me. There would be time for friends, time to court a wife and make a family. Time just to live.

They were trying to be careful, but I saw them as they moved down the street in what they thought were inconspicuous pairs and trios. Their eyes flicked toward the boarding house. The younger ones couldn't keep their hands from their sword hilts. There was only one thing they would want here, and that was me.

Maybe I was just too tired to run, or maybe all my strength fled when I saw their blue cloaks and black armor: Knights of Takhisis. Regular soldiers were reasonable enough. They would bargain, and I could probably bribe my way free. These Dark Knights were something else, even more fanatical than the Solamnics. They would never stoop to employing an assassin themselves. They'd rather raze an entire county than kill its rebellious governor and install one more amenable to their demands. They lived for killing. They were insane.

The Knights entered the room with keen efficiency, no doors bursting open, no furniture smashed. That would come later, after the arrest, if they chose to punish the owners for harboring me. Six of them made a neat line by the far wall, crossbows leveled at individual targets throughout the room. One bolt was trained directly on my eye.

The rest of the Knights spread out along the other walls, careful not to interfere with the bowmen, but also cautious not to stand close to any of the men sitting inside. One of them remained near the door, a device upon his breastplate suggesting higher rank.

"Vance," he said. Immediately, half the greasy fingers in the room pointed at me. The Knights' crossbows turned the way of the fingers.

"Out," commanded the officer. The other tenants vanished amid the faintest trembling of the furniture. The sword-bearing Knights began to pull the chairs and tables aside, clearing a path before me.

"Put it down," said the officer, staring grimly into my eyes. I stared back blankly for a second, then looked at the spoon in my hand. Laughter overtakes us in the most inappropriate moments, but I wrestled mine into a smile that I hoped didn't look as mad as it felt. Since I was likely to die soon anyway, I licked the wooden spoon clean before laying it back in its bowl.

"Stand up," he said. "Slowly." He tried to control his voice, but he sounded as nervous as if I were pointing a weapon at him. The fear with which soldiers treat assassins still puzzles me. We murderers are rarely warriors. I obeyed his order, rising to stand away from the table.

Two of the other Knights stepped in to grasp my arms and bend them behind me. Their grips were strong, but they took care not to twist my arms painfully. Soon I was bound in manacles at wrists and biceps, but my captors stood carefully away from me.

"Search him." They did, finding nothing more dangerous than the canvas pouch in which I kept my coins.

"Nothing, sir," reported one of the younger Knights. He had patted me down with arms stretched as long as he could make them, as if he feared an attack from me at any moment. Beaded sweat made a pox on his face.

"Look again." They did, found nothing, and said so.

"Into the street."

They didn't drag me, as I'd expected. Even as I walked toward certain death, I took a secret delight in their fear. If only they knew how easy it is to strangle a sleeping governor, or to break the neck of a drunken council member, they wouldn't be so wary of me. On the other hand, if they left me with only one or two guards, and one of them turned his back for a moment . . . but they were too careful.

Out in the street stood a long wagon drawn by a team of four draft horses. An iron cage had been attached to its wooden bed, and within slumped a dozen people. Some were dirty street beggars; others looked like laborers, carpenters, or smiths. One fat fellow wore the fine clothes of a merchant.

"Get in," said one of my captors. I turned to glance at him, and though fear still lingered on his face, his jaw

was firm and resolute. I'd have to wait for a much better opportunity.

Climbing into the wagon, I felt the space open up around me as the other prisoners shrank against the wagon's side. Their eyes flicked away from mine as I looked at them. What did they know about me?

There was nothing to do but shrug and find a comfortable spot in the dirty straw on the wagon's bed.

The guards closed and locked the gate. Then half of them stepped away while the others formed ranks to either side. The driver cracked the reins, and the wagon wheels groaned against the cobbles.



They drove us out of the city, toward the Northern Wastes. Except for the clopping cadence of hooves and the creaking of the wagon, the first hour was silent. The Knights marching to either side were grimly disciplined, glancing regularly into the wagon and out toward the plains. I hoped they'd be less wary when we stopped to rest, assuming we did so. Even then, my work had never required me to escape from alert sentries, and I couldn't kill more than one or two before they would cut me down.

Still I thought of escape. Perhaps there would be a time later, when the wagon stopped for the night. More likely we were to be executed out in the new desert. That was no more than I deserved, but not from these Dark Knights. I had committed only one crime against them, and they couldn't possibly know about that. But why else had they arrested me?

In the meantime, I appraised the other prisoners. Most were men, but two women shared the cage. One was a lean, muscular woman with the hard eyes of a mercenary. She met my eyes briefly, then looked away. The other woman was a whiskery crone. Her tattered shawl lay over a dress patched so variously that I couldn't guess the original color. She was the only one who kept my gaze. She made a gap-toothed grin and shuffled over to sit by me. From her dirty clothes and ruined teeth, I expected her to smell frightful. Instead, she had a strange, dry, snaky odor. Old age does peculiar things.

"They're all frightened of the Knights' assassin," she said. "Not me. We're all here to die, yes?"

"Yes," I agreed. It wasn't likely that the Knights had gathered us all up for a work camp somewhere. With so much of the once-fertile farmland near Palanthis turned to desert lately, there were more farmers than there was land. The resulting food shortages made robbery and hoarding punishable by death. Who among us criminals was here for hiding stores from the soldiers? Who, like me, was here for murder?

"Even the Knights are afraid of you," she said. "Is it true that you murdered one of their generals?"

So they knew I had killed Knight-general Krakus. But how? I had been careful, waiting for months after the massacre at Stonebrook before visiting Krakus. When they arrested me, I knew it had to be for his death, but only now did it sink in that they were certain.

It wasn't that I expected the Knights to need proof, but surely Sivaan would have wanted to question me himself. We had an understanding, I thought. I gave him good service, killing the rebellious mayors who would rather see their towns burned, their people killed and raped, than allow the Knights to install their own governor. These petty officials were as insane as the Knights of Takhisis. It was up to me to provide a sane solution.

"Is it true?" the crone persisted. I almost answered her, but something from my years of caution kept me from confession. There was no reason not to admit it, but then I'd have to explain why I killed Krakus. Not many would understand that.

I shrugged at her. "What does it matter? Truth is what they think it is. Maybe I annoyed someone. Maybe they don't need me any longer."

"So you are the assassin."

I hesitated for just a second before nodding. It felt good to admit it.

"So why did you kill that general? The Solamnics finally decide to fight fire with fire? They've lost so much, its easy to see why they'd change their tactics." She grinned at me, her teeth jutting awry. The old woman seemed somehow familiar, but I was sure we hadn't met. Something about the way she cocked her head and looked at me . . . It put me on my guard.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I lied. Her peculiar smile made me think it was too late. She had already learned something about me, something I didn't want to give up.

"You don't have the look of a killer about you," she said. "You look sad and tired. Is the money so good?"

"No." I surprised myself with such a quick denial. No one but Sivaan had ever talked to me about the killings before, and he seemed more interested in my methods than in my motives.

"That's not it at all. The money doesn't matter." Something opened inside me, and I wanted to explain myself. I wasn't afraid to talk then. I should have been.

Her smile softened. As she waited for me to speak, I looked at the other prisoners, but none of them seemed to be listening to us. A few ragged laborers whispered together near the gate, probably planning an escape or debating whether we were headed for prison or execution. The mercenary woman sat cross-legged, her wrists resting gently on her knees. She was saving her strength.

"When the Knights came to Palanthis, I was with my father in the fields. My brother and sisters were younger, so they were at home." When I paused, the old woman nodded patiently. Her smile was gone, and her eyes never wavered from mine.

"My father and I watched as they marched in from the outer fields. They didn't seem terrible to me. They seemed wonderful. So many men wearing the same colors, marching in formation, looking like a single, gigantic creature. I wasn't afraid. I was awed."

The old woman didn't nod or grunt to encourage me. She just watched me. I nodded to her.

"The whole day they gathered. That night we watched their campfires appear in the distance. It was as though a

new constellation had fallen to earth, all the stars ringing our village. For a night, we were at the center of the world.

"Father came home from the village meeting angry. He and the other men had talked about what to say to the Knights. They would want our harvest, he said. To refuse them would be to invite disaster.

"But the headman saw it differently. He rallied the majority in a decision to defy the Knights, to refuse them our crops. He called it a matter of principle.

"The next morning, the Knight-general sent an envoy to the village. The headman told him to find slaves somewhere else. By noon, all of the men of the village were dead or imprisoned. That day was worse for my mother and the other women, but they lived. So did I."

I looked at the old woman to see how she felt about this story. Her dry lips had parted and I could see her teeth lightly grating.

"Four years later the Knights came again. There weren't nearly enough Solamnics to keep and hold the fields near Palanthas. Again, I watched them arrive.

"The headman of this other village was a cousin to the one who had died four years earlier. When I joined the other men that night, most of them my own age and also orphaned these past four years, the headman had already persuaded them to refuse the Knights. I couldn't believe it! He was mad. We would all die for his defiance — if he lived.

That night I took a reaping knife and climbed into his window. When the Knights' envoy arrived the next morning to ask for the headman, I came out of the man's house and showed what I had done. The other young men hated me for it, but later I think they realized that, had I not acted, what remained their families would have been raped and killed. Still, I couldn't stay there any longer. I had chosen to be a killer.

"The envoy's name was Sivaan. He liked what I had done, thought it showed "intelligence and talent." I thought it was the only reasonable action. We had enough in common that when he offered me the chance to save other towns the same way, I took it.

"A natural talent, Sivaan called me. I had never been to war, but I wasn't afraid to enter a man's house at night and slit his throat or throttle him — as long as I knew his death would save a dozen families from massacre. Over the years, I became skilled. After every job, Sivaan would show me something new: a way to silence a man with one hand while cutting his throat with the other, a way to hold a man's arm and paralyze him, or a way to break a man's larynx to prevent a scream.

"Sivaan sent me to kill governors, high priests, even Solamnics Knights. I never failed because I was never afraid. Either I'd kill the man or I'd be caught and probably executed. Either way, the world would be rid of a murderer."

That was more than I'd planned to say. This time the woman smiled at me with amusement.

"You fancy yourself a hero," she laughed.

"No," I said. "Nothing like a hero. I'm a . . ."

I didn't know what I was. Perhaps I didn't want to

think about it. What I had done was wrong, if you didn't look at it very deeply. But for every man I killed, how many were allowed to live because he died before setting them to war? Only those who choose war should have to suffer it.

"The guards say you killed their Knight-general."

"He was insane!" I snapped. "Even after I killed the governor in Ligett for him, he ordered the town razed. There was no need for that!"

"Oh, Vance," said the old woman. The smile returned, half-sad. Disappointed? Hearing her say my name surprised me less than it should have. Then the woman stood up, slapping away the dirty straw in a most uncrone-like manner. She seemed to grow taller.

As I looked up, the old woman's body flowed like a reflection in a rippling pool. I blinked, but my eyes were clear. I heard a murmur behind me, and I turned. The other prisoners pressed farther away from us, no longer afraid of me as much as the crone. Looking back at the old woman, I saw her melt into another shape. A tall, muscular man with perfectly smooth skin and silky black hair stood before me.

"Sivaan!" I blurted out. The man smiled smoothly as he always did when I reported a successful killing.

"None other," he purred. His mouth smiled, but his eyes were unhappy. "You hated Krakus for razing that town after you did his killing. I knew it had to be you, but I had to hear it for myself."

My lips worked, but no words came. Sivaan smiled again, but it was a fleeting thing. He looked at my chest, unable to meet my eyes.

"I didn't want it to be true, but it became obvious. The Solamnics never employ assassins.

"They have other enemies, of course. But there are fewer than a dozen assassins capable of killing a man like General Krakus." He looked to see that I was listening. I'd closed my mouth. There was little point in protest. Sivaan dropped his gaze again.

"There were no substantial clues. But it had to be someone talented, and I know all of our assassins.

"If anyone had employed Shona to kill Krakus, there would have been some trace of poison, however faint.

"Monsat always uses that knife. He's obsessed with the thing. Have you ever watched him hold it while he talks?" Of course, I had never met Monsat or any of the others.

"He couldn't kill a man any other way, even to disguise his identity. I considered the Ferret and Kameran. Either of them could strangle a man with Krakus's bull neck, but each is too far afield to have returned so quickly. Krakus never employed a bodyservant, so the Ferret wasn't likely. Kameran could never have entered the keep unseen; his methods are more direct." I had known that Sivaan procured others like me, but I'd never met them. Some of the names were familiar, but only from whispers in the darkest alleys and most despicable public houses.

"The method wasn't the most important thing, though. No one who could have reached Krakus had a motive to kill him."

The wagon came to a halt with no obvious order from Sivaan. The guards marching outside maintained their discipline, watching the horizon, the road, and the wagon in turn. All the other prisoners stared at Sivaan and me.

"No one but you, Vance."



Sivaan had no trouble leaving the cage. For a moment I thought wildly of using him as a hostage. The other prisoners must have had the same thought. Something in his cool demeanor was more deterring than any weapon he could have carried, and no one touched him as he stepped down from the wagon. Sivaan watched the guards secure the cage again before walking around to take a seat with the driver. The wagon jerked forward, and we continued our journey.

Three days later we were deep into the ruined waste land north of Palanthas. The road had vanished late on the first day, and the wagon leaped and fell as much as it moved forward. We passed vast flats of parched mud, dry gulleys shriveled like the veins of some gray gargantua lying dead of thirst. The mountains withered to sharp and barren crags, the giants cracked and splintered bones. Great stones jutted like tumors from dying flesh.

Inside the cage, the straw stank of waste and sweat. Our throats were parched, for the guards gave us precious little water. None of us had eaten in that time, and I saw the fat merchants jaws move in a pantomime of eating, his hopeful stomach pining for a meal. Few of the prisoners were talking now, and still none had come near me. I listened to their conversations as much as I could.

What talk there was usually concerned our destination. No one believed we were headed for death. If we were to have been executed, we'd be three-day old corpses dangling from poles outside the city walls. Why would they take us so far into the wastes only to kill us? It had to be a labor camp of some sort.

Occasionally I caught a hateful glance from one of the thick-bodied prisoners, laborers who had been arrested for brawling or fighting with soldiers. They grumbled that their punishment would be worse for being captured along with the man who had killed a Knight-general. Perhaps they were right. Somehow I knew that we were heading for something far, far worse than a mere labor camp.

The answer came on the third night. As the sun sank bloated and bloody on the western horizon, the wagon passed through a wide gap between a pair of monstrous, ragged stones. The land beyond them was remarkably flat, except for a ring of dark standing stones, perfectly arranged. They encircled a clearing perhaps twenty yards in diameter.

We passed under the shadows of the rocks, where the air was startlingly cooler. I suppressed a shudder. The wagon drew near the ring of menhirs and clattered to a stop. The horses stamped and puffed, their coats steaming in the sudden cold.

Our guards threw latches and pulled hitches below the wagon. We couldn't see what they were about until the vehicle snapped forward again, tilting and dropping us

hard to the ground, still within our cage. Unprepared for the rude crash, we fell together, hoarders and thieves, brawlers and murderers. Only the hard-looking mercenary avoided the spill into the crowd, clinging nimbly to the bars.

"Get off!" grunted the fat merchant who had cushioned my fall. He punctuated his demand with a powerful elbow to my ribs. My hands were on his arm before he saw whom he had struck. My right thumb pressed hard into the spot that hurts and stings. His eyes swelled with pain and fear. I carefully regained my feet and stood as far back as possible while maintaining my hold.

"I'm off you," I noted. Then I let go his arm, placing my own carefully neutral by my side. He was one of the prisoners with friends in the cage. I wasn't ready to die yet, and apparently neither was he. He stepped away as quickly as from a snake, and he said no more.

Meanwhile, our guards were busy erecting tents some distance from the ring of stones. Near the huge shading rocks behind us stood a line of crates covered in dusty canvas. This was not the first visit the soldiers had made to this place.

They worked quickly, and the first of the tents — a richly dyed affair, far too luxurious for petty Knights — was ready before full darkness had fallen. I couldn't see Sivaan anywhere, and I guessed he was inside that tent. He emerged an hour later.

He wore a blue silken gown that glimmered under the rising moon. Such elaborate dress seemed incongruous to the neat, understated clothing he had always worn when briefing me on a killing. Indeed, his bearing had changed from the curt, businesslike manner I knew. He now assumed a regal, almost religious air. As he passed the soldiers, they stood back and lowered their gazes, like suppliants bowing before a priest.

Sivaan strode past the cage, his eyes staring up into the blue-black sky. He seemed to be concentrating or meditating, even praying. I couldn't imagine what he was doing as he walked serenely past us and into the circle of stones.

The merchant who had struck me earlier found his courage then, or something close to it. "What are you doing?" he demanded. "What are you planning for us?"

A sharp hiss silenced him. I looked back to see the mercenary frowning at him. The other prisoners all stared at Sivaan as he approached the center of the circle, his arms half-lifted in what might have been the prelude to a slow, graceful dance. Then the cage shifted again. I saw that the soldiers were pulling us around to the edge of the circle, between two of the menhirs. All but one of them moved quickly away once the entrance to our cage faced Sivaan and the center of the circle. The last soldier held the padlock to the gate in one hand, inserted a heavy iron key with the other, then turned to await a signal from Sivaan.

We waited with the guard, staring at the man inside the circle of stones. He was speaking, but I couldn't make out the words. All around him, the stones seemed to grow wet, their surfaces glittering in the silver light from the moon and the stars. Now I could see that the rough

surfaces were carved by chisels, not the wind. Whorls and arcs curled upon their faces, patterns suggestive of ocean waves or stormclouds. Jagged slashes cut through here and there. Scars, perhaps. Or lightning.

A shout from Sivaan galvanized our attention. He looked toward us then, and the guard quickly turned the key and dropped the padlock, running outside the circle. We stared blankly at the open lock, and then the mercenary grabbed it through the bars, twisted it from the chains, and threw it aside before pushing through the gate. No one else followed at first. We all watched to see what would become of her.

She glanced to either side, looking past the stones to see the soldiers standing well back from the circle. They watched her too, but none moved to intercept her. Then she turned to Sivaan, her knees bending slightly in a fighter's stance. She wasn't ready to approach him any more than she was prepared to run through the stones into the waiting arms of the soldiers.

I slipped out of the cage but was careful not to approach the mercenary. Instead I moved to the side, keeping an eye on Sivaan as I tried to get a better view of the circle and the soldiers beyond. The moonlight left plenty of shadows, perhaps enough for a stealthy prisoner to escape. But the guards must have thought of that. I waited for a sign.

Sivaan's gaze moved between the mercenary and me. The other prisoners gradually emerged from the cage, but he paid them no heed. He was speaking again, still too low for us to hear. A flash of light ran across the stones, but I heard no thunder. Another flash, and this time I saw spidery threads of lightning arc from stone to stone.

Then Sivaan laughed.

"It is time!" His voice was clear and loud now.

"Time for what?" shouted the fat prisoner. He and his friends had gathered behind the mercenary, like children hiding behind their mother.

Sivaan sounded like a street actor or a preacher. "Time for rebirth!" he cried. "Time for absolution and renewal."

Had Sivaan brought us out here to indoctrinate us into some religion? I couldn't believe that.

"And for some of you," he said, "time to die." That I could believe.

The mercenary ran at him, silent and quick. But what she saw brought her up her short, her bare feet skidding on the rough ground.

Sivaan burned in a halo of lightning. His body was shifting, changing again. He thickened, his shoulders hunching. The fine robes remained, but his skin melted away, shrinking into a gray sheen of scales. Two great sheaves of flesh rose upon his back, stretching into bat-like wings through long slits in the fabric of his robe. Sivaan's face stretched long and angular, splitting into an impossibly wide grin as his transformation was complete.

"Sivak! Shapechanger!" I didn't recognize my own voice at first. I hadn't questioned Sivaan's transformation from the body of the crone, assuming he had found some ancient magical device that created illusions. But mortal wizardry had died with the gods. This made more sense. Sivaan smiled at me, pleased at my revelation.

The twisted get of dark magic and stolen dragon eggs had created the shock troops of the Dragonarmies before the Second Cataclysm. Common in the War of the Lance, draconians were a dying race, unable to propagate as do natural creatures. Some of them, those wrought from silver dragon eggs, were said to change shape.

Against all reason, I felt betrayed. You'd think a killer would have stilled his heart against such feelings, but you'd be wrong. Sivaan was the only constant in my life. He had given me the chance to kill those I considered responsible for so much senseless death, and I had eliminated his obstacles. It seemed fair that he would punish me for killing Krakus, but unforgivable that he wasn't even human.

Sivaan's jaws parted wide and bestial, but his eyes glittered with intelligence. "No more secrets," he said. "Soon we will share everything."

He turned to point a crooked finger at the mercenary. "You," he said. "Kill that one, and you shall live." His finger moved to the fat merchant. His thick face paled as he met the woman's gaze. He stepped back to gain the protection of his friends, but they were gone. His eyes bulged with fear as he saw the hard-limbed woman pick up a sharp stone and begin stalking him.

"You three," Sivaan said. This time he pointed at a trio of muscular prisoners. "If you would live, kill him."

His scaly finger jutted straight at me.

At first it was almost comical. The mercenary woman chased the fat merchant, who immediately tried to escape the circle. A sheet of lightning snapped between the menhirs at his approach, hurling him backward onto the hard desert floor. The shock made his pursuer pause long enough for him to regain his feet and run again, trying to use others as shields. All the while, Sivaan continued to point to prisoners and bargain their lives with a trade of murder.

"Kill that one, if you would live."

For my part, I must have looked as ridiculous as the merchant, because I ran at first. The three Sivaan had chosen to kill me were not warriors, but they knew enough to attack me from all sides. They spread out, trying to trap me among them. This was not my sort of killing. I needed to find a victim, not face an opponent. Better to face them, though, than to await an assassin.

The trick was to deal with them one at a time. They must have realized that too, because each time I moved toward one, he backed away just enough for the others to step in from my flank. I skipped away when two came close, narrowly avoiding the third. Soon they would have me near a menhir, or between them. That gave me a thought.

I spared a glance at the other prisoners. The mercenary had made quick work of the merchant. She clutched a bloody stone and glanced at Sivaan, who calmly pointed at another prisoner, one who had refused to attack his chosen victim. The mercenary went to work without hesitation.

One of my attackers took her example and pried a small but sharp stone from the hard, dry earth. The

others kept to either side, herding me toward the edge of the circle. This time I let them. When their companion had his weapon ready, they closed, fingers working on the empty air, aching for my arms and throat.

I fainted to the left. When they moved, I spun to the right and ran toward the space between two stones. When the closest one followed, I dropped to the ground before him. When his legs hit my shoulder, I thrust upward, throwing him into that dangerous, empty space. The electric crack was deafening so close. My enemy lay on the ground just within the circle, stunned and lightly burned, but not dead.

One of the remaining attackers hesitated, but the man with the rock took his opportunity and swung. I wasn't fast enough. He struck me on the cheek and brow, smashing my left eye. The blow stunned me, and I nearly stumbled into the invisible barrier between the standing stones.

Catching myself on the menhir, I spun away to get some distance. Now the pain came, and blood smothered my eye. My head felt light and hot.

"Yes!" cheered Sivaan from the center. "Feed your anger! Kill the weak, and the strong shall gain great power!" He said other things, too. Words I couldn't make out through the thrumming pulse in my ears. I focused on my remaining attackers. The one with the stone had to be first.

He had both hands on the sharp rock now, and he came on carelessly, heartened by the sight of my blood. This time I fainted down, as if the wound had done its work. He believed, and I lunged for his legs, pulling them together and shoving him down hard. I had only a second before his friend was on me, but that was enough for me to put my knee upon his neck and crack.

The last one wanted to wrestle. He was stronger than I, but I was quicker. Soon our hands were on each other's throats. I would have died if he knew where to put his thumbs. Unfortunately for him, I knew exactly where to place mine.

When I was done, I moved quickly to the one who had been dazed by the lightning from the stones. He blinked hard, still trying to recover his vision. When I lifted his shoulders to gain a good grip, he mistook me for one of his friends.

"Thanks," he said. "Where's —"

The sound of a neck breaking is surprisingly loud, even in a field of battle.

When I looked up, everywhere there were bloody hands and wild faces. About a third of the prisoners were dead, and the rest chased or fled each other. Several groups had formed, but each time they made a kill, Sivaan divided them by choosing killer and prey from within their ranks.

When I saw that killing circle and felt myself a part of it, I knew I had changed. I'd killed to stop war, but now I'd become a part of the massacre. This wasn't the way I wanted to fight. I wanted to kill the killers.

Everyone in the circle focused on predator or prey. They murdered or died, never seeking the source of their frenzy. None would approach Sivaan.

None except me.

I hadn't made it halfway to him before he spotted me. Like the mercenary, I stopped rather than attacking him when he was prepared.

"Well done, my friend," he congratulated me. "I wasn't sure you could survive an honest fight. You have never been a good soldier, only a killer. Now you are ready." He raised his voice for all to hear.

"All of you are blooded, prepared."

"Prepared for what?"

His answer was to look up, raising his arms in that graceful gesture again. I followed his gaze. There was the moon, lonely in the sky since the death of its siblings three decades ago. But the stars were gone.

No, there I saw a trio of stars not far from the moon's edge. And there appeared a sliver of white, then two.

Eyes. And then the mouth split in a galaxy of perfectly sharp teeth. The sky was gone. We were surrounded by a night-blue Dragon.

All sound in the circle vanished. We stared as one up into the deep blue expanse. I had felt the killing blood coursing in my veins, but now it turned cold. Strangely, just as I had felt so many years ago when the blue wave of Dark Knights washed across the fields, I was not afraid but awed. The Dragon was not terrible, but magnificent.

Its voice was thunder, too vast for human ears. It spoke to Sivaan, who responded as the gull answers the sea. My ears were insufficient for the words, and I heard only their far, distorted echoes: ". . . strongest children . . . process . . . the tear . . . Kit. . ."

My blood surged faster. My heart pounded, my skin crawled with chill, my breath panted. I watched as a glistening star formed under the Dragon's eye, falling slowly toward Sivaan. Behind it, the Dragon opened its mouth, and the sky flashed white.



Darkness, silence, numb insensibility. Waiting.

Long waiting.

When the presence came, I knew it meant to kill me. I couldn't see it. I knew only that it was there, a malicious entity, bodiless as me. It was waiting for something from me. Then it would strike.

There was nothing to hold, nothing to break, no way to kill it first. I couldn't see it, smell it, hear it, or touch it, but there it was. Waiting to kill me.

I couldn't feel my body, but something like a heart quickened within me. The presence responded, excited. I imagined hot breath on my neck, and I thought: Either I will die, or I will not. Whatever ran inside me slowed, slowed, and waited with me.

Near me, the presence became impatient. It needed something I wasn't giving. I sensed a shuffling discomfort, but it wasn't mine. I was calm. I was in control.

It grew frantic then and gave me hands that it might have them too. It gave me a neck that it might strangle me, but my hands found its throat sooner.

I knew where to press.



An unmeasurable slumber cradled me warm and blank before the first dull sensation returned. At first I felt like a drowned corpse, rising to the surface of a moonless sea. My lungs wanted air, but my face smothered in a mud-heavy grip. Some thick, wet mass covered me completely. Slowly, the pressure of suffocation began to rise, and I tried to move.

Every muscle was a flame stretched thin across the coals that were my bones. Nothing could have impelled me to move against that agony except the scream that possessed me then. It jerked my tortured body alive, thrust my arms deeper into the binding mass around me, and split my mouth open, yet the only sound was a pitiable wet mewling, muted and submerged.

Something loosened on my face. Panic joined the pain, and together they thrashed and clawed, and my terror was powerful. One hand tore free, pushed up toward my face, then broke through a thick, gelatinous membrane. My jaws gaped, and my lungs greedily gulped cool air.

My body lay still again, but this time with piercing exhaustion, not the insensible stupor from which it had just escaped. I could feel every limb now, throbbing with pain but responsive to my thoughts. My legs were still trapped by whatever muck buried me, but I had one arm free, and the other was drawn up near my chest. I wriggled to free them both. A cooling gelatinous mass covered my eyes, but I could sense — not really see — light through it.

Soon I had both arms out of the muck, and I wiped my eyes with the back of a hand. It felt rough and scabrous. I scraped at the glop on my eyes, feeling a strange mask where my face should be. The only familiar mark was a tender scar upon my brow. What had Sivaan done?

Then I opened my eyes. I saw ragged claws before my face. For a mad second I thought some monstrous creature had freed me, but then I realized that I was that creature. These claws were my hands. My body was something like Sivaan's true form, but with scales as dark and blue as his masters.

I scrambled out of the mess with even greater panic than before, slipping to fall on another slimy lump. Two dozen glistening, fleshy cocoons lay within the circle of stones, mired together in a disgusting pool of mottled tissue. Some were shaped like corpses, withered and curled. They must have died early, and part of me already envied them. Others were round and thick, and a few pulsed with movement. More of us were coming out. Being born, I thought.

I stood weakly and nearly fell again. Something weighed at my shoulder-blades. I stared over my shoulder. Wings.

My body knew more than I did. My shoulders shrugged, and I saw the wings unfold. They felt like two great hands upon my back, impossibly thin fingers spreading to draw the blue webbing far and thin. Wings! A tiny delight blossomed and died in my heart then. What a wonder among the horrors.

There!" cried a man's voice. They're coming out! Tell Sivaan."

Only half of the guards remained. While one hurried back to the tent, the other five grabbed long, barbed spears and cautiously approached the edge of the circle of stones. Others hurried toward us from their farther stations. They bore crossbows, all held ready, but none trained directly on me.

A sucking sound arrested my attention. Not six feet away, another blue claw had pierced the spawning mass. A triangular snout followed, gasping for breath. Its tiny eyes glittered not with intelligence but with the natural wicked cunning of a newborn eel.

"Children!" called a gleeful voice. Sivaan emerged from the tent. He wore his true form beneath the ritual robes, gray claws gripping a heavy wooden staff for support. Whatever that night had taken out of him, he hadn't regained it all. Still, his draconian jaws appeared to smile.

"Sivaan," I rasped. My voice had become a tumble of stones, echoing from the bottom of a deep well.

His scaly brows rose, and his rough jaws parted in surprise.

"You know me? You can speak already?" He peered at me, amazed. "Vance!"

"You miserable bastard! I'll kill you!" I stepped toward him. My legs felt strong but uncertain. My weight was all wrong. I could feel my skin drying, hardening, thickening.

"Incredible!" he exclaimed. He didn't seem to hear my threat. I continued to move toward him. "You've kept your own mind. It is unprecedented! Khellendros will be so pleased."

Whatever I tried to say next was drowned in a bestial snarl. Three of the other spawn had emerged around me now. One crouched low, unfurling its wings as I had done. Another hissed at me like a cat, crawling nearer. My savage growl of warning frightened it almost as much as it frightened me.

My hissing brother (sister?) leaped at me. Its wings had not opened fully, so its attack was clumsy. Had I a moment to choose, I would have thrown the beast aside, but faster than I could think, my claws were wet with ichor. My spawn-mate sprawled at my feet, mewling almost pitifully.

"Magnificent! With your killer's mind and this powerful body, what an assassin you shall be!" Sivaan was oblivious to my hatred. "At the price of one foolish human general, we have won a great soldier."

"No," I said. The other newborns were wary of me now, some snapping at each other, others tearing into the spawning mass with hungry teeth, devouring their still-born siblings. I felt that hunger, too, but it could be sated only by another death.

"Can you feel it?" cried Sivaan. "The spirit that lives with you in there — can you feel its fury? It gives you power. It makes you one with us." He stared at me, admiring my new form even as I stalked closer to him.

I understood now, I thought. What Sivaan had done to me, it was meant to affect my mind as well as my body. Whatever had died in that dream was supposed to have killed me, to have lived in this monstrous body.

"I killed it, Sivaan. I murdered it. And now ..." I was upon him.

Had I waited an hour for strength, I might have had him. My claws rendered his robes to ribbons. I felt his hot ichor upon my fingers, in my mouth. His scales were hard as armor, but I raked lines in them.

"Stop!" he cried. I wouldn't.

Then I felt a painful stab in my side. The Knights had advanced, and I faced their weapons. I whirled and leaped away, only to face another trio of Dark Knights. Their crossbows followed my chest.

"Don't kill him! He must be kept alive," said Sivaan. He was out of breath, surprised by my attack and exhausted from the ritual that had transformed me. I refused to be taken again, but everywhere I turned, more enemies: there the pikes protecting the wounded Sivaan, there the crossbows, and there the other dragonspawn.

Wings.

I ran toward the dragonspawn and reached out with the strange new fingers upon my back, hoping to catch the air and . . . and I was aloft, flying clumsily — but flying! My shins barked the edge of one of the menhirs, and I scrambled to grasp it. There I perched, looking back down at the circle.

"Don't shoot!" ordered Sivaan again. Then he looked up at me, his own rough claws pressing the shallow wounds I'd given him. From this vantage, I saw that they were minor at best.

"Come back, Vance. You can't escape. The spawning links you to Khellendros, body and spirit. You are a part of him, always."

"No!" I shouted, my voice painful. I felt as if I was choking. A fire raged in my chest, and my eyes burned as from tears. I wanted to bite, to spit. My mouth shot open and wide. With a sharp report, a hot spear of lightning flashed down to blast the Knight nearest Sivaan. He lay on the ground, moaning in pain as the ruined meat of his leg sizzled.

"That's it, Vance! Let the rage fill you. It's the only way you will ever be whole. The process must be complete!"

Now the burning in my eyes dissolved to tears, and all the strength my anger had brought fled.

"No," I croaked. Sivaan didn't hear me. I stood high upon the standing stone, spread my wings, and let the hot desert winds lift me.

The room is silent for a long time after the hooded one stops speaking. Even the wind has died, as if it had been sustained only by speech, now fading since the words have passed. The yellow candlelight has grown brighter in the stilled air. Now it gutters and hisses as it reaches the base of its holder. Slender peaks of tallow form a ring of pillars around the perishing flame, their shadows undulating on the walls and ceiling.

"I've been busy these past months," says the hooded figure. "You move around quite a bit. Now that you have both the Legion of Steel and your old enemies to face, it's impressive that you've held so much territory and conquered even more. Of course, you serve the Dragon.

"You are my fifth since that day. I found Rogand in his new home near the keep. I heard that Stavros and

Malkom were both in Kalaman, so I made the long trip to visit them together. They were surprised to see me.

"Last week I visited your neighbor, Knight-general Urkohn.

"Was it his funeral that prompted those guards below, general? I like to think so. My work is much easier if one doesn't expect a visit, but your preparations were gratifying. If I had to walk past that legion of bodyguards below, I might never have made it. Wings are the one gift I do not begrudge Sivaan."

He rises to stand near the bed. Bending, he takes the general's dangling hand in his own huge, gnarled claw.

"There's only so much I can accomplish single-handed. But I don't think I'll be alone much longer. I've been visiting the camps they've set up in the desert. Khellendros is pleased with his new children, and he wants more. I can see the wagons leaving the city all day long. With each one, there's another chance that someone else will become like me — free of the Dragon's control. Like me, some will escape."

He lays the dead man's hand gently over the other other upon his chest.

"I'll find them," he says, returning to the window. He shrugs off the concealing robe and stretches his wings. The candle dies in the wake of their motion.

"And I will show them how to find the rest of you."

Dave Gross used to brew beer, play games, bake bread, paint miniatures, collect comics, read books, watch way too many movies, and play with his three spoiled cats. Now he edits DRAGON® Magazine



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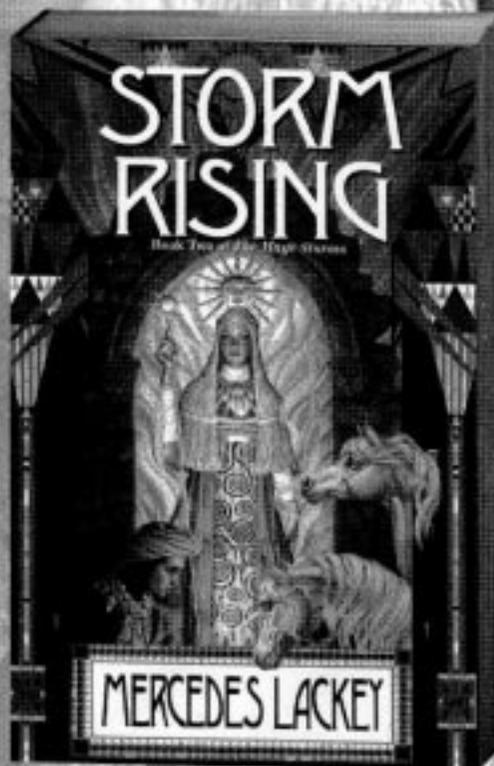
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THE ROLE OF BOOKS

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A Breach in the Watershed

Douglas Niles

Ace

\$5.99

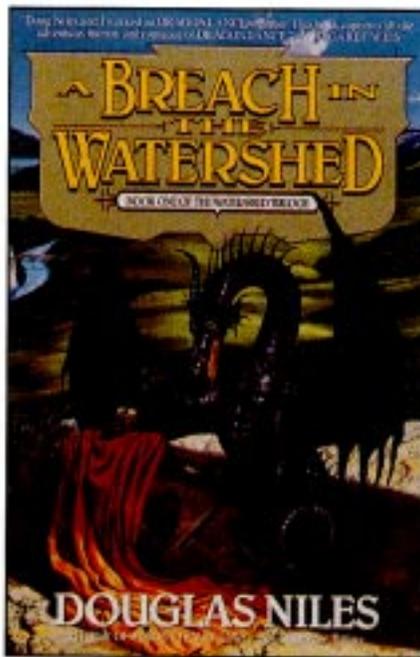
There's a reasonably intriguing story at the heart of *A Breach in the Watershed*. But Douglas Niles has surrounded it with a web of distractions and miscues that badly undercut the genuinely distinctive elements of this first volume in a planned trilogy.

The Watershed itself is a clever construct. In addition to the ordinary water that fuels mortal life, there's Aura, defined as pure magic distilled into liquid form, and Darkblood, the essence of evil embodied in a similar substance. Each sort of water is the province of a different god — one for man, one for the Faerine, one for the powers of darkness. And of course the god of darkness, one Dassadec, is perfectly willing to break all the rules he needs to in order to control and destroy the entire Watershed.

Likewise, human protagonist Rudy Appenfell's mystical destiny is quickly and effectively defined. After being wounded by a Darkblood-forged weapon and healed by the power of Aura, he becomes the living embodiment of all three waters and, by implication, the one man uniquely able to perceive and perhaps counter Dassadec's plans.

It's at this point that the distractions set in. The first of these is that such geog-

raphy as Niles describes — in this volume, at least — is cloudy in the extreme. We're told that the human lands of Dalethica are separated from the Faerine, home of a variety of magical races, by impenetrable mountains broken only by a single pass, and in turn, that a similar mountain barrier divides the Faerine from Dassadec's realm of Duloth-Troi. Thus, goes the logic, the dark god must get through Faerine to attack humanity. What's not explained, either in the text or on the accompany-



ing map, is why Dassadec's troops can't simply detour around the opposite side of the world and sneak up on Dalethica from behind. If the Watershed is an ordinary Earth-like planet, there's no reason this shouldn't work — and if it's not, Niles fails to make the matter clear.

Then there are the Faerine themselves: sylves, twissels, diggers, gigants and so forth. The names come from Niles, but the folk they label are painfully familiar — elves, sprites, dwarves, giants, and the like. It's a peculiarly annoying

technique, as the borrowing is all too obvious and there's no underlying language-convention to make the renamings feel consistent. The individual characters Rudy encounters are pleasant enough, but their too-artificial racial backgrounds detract from the adventure rather than enriching it.

A further complication derives from one of Niles' narrative techniques. Some of the background material is framed as part of a volume of reminiscences — which proves, partway through the book, to be written by one of the major secondary characters. While it's a convenient way to deliver some of the settings more colorful history, the strategy undercuts the epic's long-term suspense. We know from the narratives that Raine will survive and can deduce several likely plot twists based on other hints dropped in the course of her recollections.

One wants to like *A Breach in the Watershed* Rudy and his traveling companions are a pleasant band, very much in the tradition of epic quests and heroic adventurers, and when Niles is concentrating on their exploits of the moment, the story moves along briskly enough. Likewise, the interludes featuring evil minion Nicodareus are smoothly crafted and generally chilling. But Raine's later writings are ultimately too intrusive, and the Faerine too obviously cloned, for Niles' world to be truly convincing. Which is too bad, because the Watershed done right could easily have been a highly successful fantasy realm. Instead, it's merely another in the long list of series that merely repeat the genre's conventions rather than transcending them.

Palace

Katharine Kerr and

Mark Kreighbaum

Bantam Spectra

\$5.99

If you define "cyberpunk" as that subset of SF featuring people who hard-wire themselves into enormous and exotic virtual-reality manifestations of cyber-

space, then *Palace* conceivably qualifies. But while this new novel from Katharine Kerr and Mark Kreighbaum is chock-full of “cyber,” it isn’t “punk” in the slightest. Instead, Kerr and Kreighbaum have blended their cybertech with a healthy dose of space opera and a setting that might reasonably be summarized as “the French Revolution on drugs.”

There are nuns and cardinals, an influential network of guilds, a Versailles-sized palace complex, hidden assassins, and decadent nobility. But though the power struggles and intrigues would be entirely at home in eighteenth-century France, the novel takes place on a remote colony world in a part of space referred to as “the Pinch.” Humans are the dominant species, but there are other races as well. The subservient saccules are bought and sold as slave labor, though they may in fact be sentient, and the more advanced reptilian Lep are tolerated — more or less — despite previous conflicts with humanity.

Kerr and Kreighbaum — who make it clear up front that theirs is a full-bore collaboration — develop their multifaceted setting with impressive vividness. We get a vibrant picture of *Palace*, the city in which the action takes place, from dangerous low-class neighborhoods to busy entertainment districts to the baroque elegance of its wealthiest citizens’ homes. The virtual realm called the Map is no less detailed if substantially less crowded, and in fact Kreighbaum and Kerr give the Map a rich texture and flavor unlike most of the cyberspace-environments found in typical cyberpunk adventures.

But though *Palace* gets much of its energy from its densely atmospheric scenery, its more than a tourist guidebook. Three characters out of a substantial cast share the lead roles: Vida, a young woman plucked from impoverished obscurity to assume a position of considerable influence; Rico, a junior-grade map technician who comes across dangerous knowledge; and Vi-Kata, a Lep assassin whose mysterious sponsors want both Vida and Rico out of the way. Of this trio, Vida is the prime mover, quickly proving more adept at games of diplomacy than her own supporters have anticipated. While the plot is impressively convoluted — to the extent that even at novel’s end, the reader knows more than most of the characters about what’s going on — its never so baroque that the reader feels lost.

That’s not to say that *Palace* is an effortless read. Keeping track of the var-

ious secondary characters stops just short of requiring a scorecard, and its sometimes difficult to figure out what’s a subplot and what’s a red herring. (In particular, the matter of saccule intelligence doesn’t get as much of a payoff as certain incidents suggest it should, and it’s hard to tell whether this is a loose end or a deliberate opening left for a possible sequel.) But even if the attention required is a bit more than one needs for the average SF adventure yarn, Mark Kreighbaum and Katharine Kerr offer more than sufficient rewards for expending the effort.

Glenraven

**Marion Zimmer Bradley
and Holly Lisle
Baen**

\$23.00

Europe is full of pocket countries, little lands so small they exist mostly as tax havens or tourist novelties. But Glenraven, tucked into a tiny space on the border between France and Italy, is neither one of these. Rather, it’s a land with a mystery attached to it, where the medieval scenery is more authentic than travelers expect and where the head of state is rather more than a professional politician.

It’s an intriguing creation, and readers of this new novel from Holly Lisle and Marion Zimmer Bradley learn Glenraven’s secrets only slightly faster than Jayjay Bennington and her traveling companion Sophie. The pair are abroad fleeing personal crises: Jayjay’s husband has yanked the rug out from under their marriage, and Sophie is still emotionally frozen from the accidental death of her young daughter some years before. Why Glenraven in particular? Simple enough: Jayjay had found a guidebook for the country in a local bookstore. Once the duo reaches Glenraven’s borders, it rapidly becomes clear that both book and country conceal unexpected and exotic secrets.

Both collaborators’ strengths are visible in the storytelling. Lisle has often demonstrated a knack for creating realistically troubled characters, and Jayjay and Sophie are both products of that ability. To some extent, that may make the novel more appealing to female readers than to men, as both women’s problems derive in part from male insensitivity. But Glenraven is much more than a “woman’s novel.” Bradley’s talent for worldbuilding, for creating exotic settings and distinctive cultures, is also much in evidence. Glenraven is home to several races possessed of divergent yet complementary

gifts, and the powers that enable it to exist at all are also neatly worked out.

A solid cast of secondary characters rounds out the book, distinguished by several players whose shifting loyalties (all eventually well-justified) fuel a cleverly suspenseful plot. Though Watchmistress Aidris Akalan is our heroes’ overt nemesis, aid and opposition arise from a variety of quarters before the adventure is done. And though there’s a solid, permanent conclusion to the novel, Bradley and Lisle have left room for a sequel.

At present, Marion Zimmer Bradley’s name on *Glenraven’s* cover is likely to sell more books than Holly Lisle’s, although Lisle’s string of credits is by no means undistinguished. But while that may be a commercial fact of life, what readers will find in this novel are the results of a genuinely shared vision, one that neither writer alone could have produced. This is collaboration as it ought to work, and the result is a memorable and absorbing fantasy with more of a conscience than most.

Reign of Shadows

**Deborah Chester
Ace**

\$5.99

Trilogies and series are a fact of life nowadays; if one is going to read fantasy in the first place, one has to get used to waiting for the next book in a given sequence to come out. Some authors are more skilled than others at designing stories to match today’s publishing requirements, either wrapping up most subplots by each book’s end or leaving the heroes facing mortal peril on the last page. Deborah Chester’s debut novel, billed as first in a trilogy, regrettably adopts a different convention: it merely stops partway through its tale, neither resolving its characters’ futures nor threatening their lives.

Stranger still, one gets the distinct impression that *Reign of Shadows* is made up of parts of two mostly separate books which have been grafted together so that we get the first half of each story. One plot concerns the would-be warrior Caelan, who is determined not to follow in his father’s footsteps even though he’s inherited a measure of the family’s magical healing gift. The second, introduced halfway into the volume, involves a young woman who’s been raised as a servant to nobility despite her own noble blood, and whose destiny involves exotic magic and a dynastic marriage.

Alone, each tale is compelling and well-told. Chester's milieu is lightly but vividly detailed, and we see very little in this first book of the dark emperor whose impending doom is driving the fates of both Caelan and Elandra. But the two protagonists are appealing; each is a strong personality, but knowledge, circumstance and custom prevent either one from rising too high too quickly.

The structure of the novel is extraordinarily frustrating. The first half of the book, labeled "Part One", belongs entirely to Caelan. The second, while split more or less evenly between Caelan's and Elandra's separate stories, doesn't do anything so conventional as merely alternating chapters. Instead, we get several chapters featuring Elandra, then several more about Caelan, then one more chapter concerning each. As a result, Elandra ends up with scarcely a quarter of the book to herself even though she's clearly one of its leading characters.

As the volume closes, neither Caelan nor Elandra has so much as heard rumors of the others existence, and while each has reached a turning point in life — Caelan has won status as a gladiator, Elandra is set to embark on a course of magical training — their independent adventures are clearly far from over. It's reasonably safe to project that they'll spend at least half of Chester's second book, if not all of it, still on their own.

The conclusion is clear. Chester seems to have a three-part story to tell: Caelan's rise as a fighter, Elandra's development as a seer and bridal candidate, and the adventure they share once they've met. Logically, you'd expect each of these stories to occupy one book out of the anticipated trilogy. But instead, Chester or her publishers appear to have taken the first two books, shuffled them together, and given readers the top half of the resulting manuscript. The book doesn't so much end as simply stop.

That makes *Reign of Shadows* a distinct disappointment taken by itself — especially given that what we do see of Chester's writing is sensitive and inventive. There's promise in this book, and it's a shame that modern publishing trends have conspired to prevent her from offering readers a viably structured story.

Murder in Tarsis

John Maddox Roberts

TSR **\$18.99**

The problems begin with the very first sentence:

A thin mantle of snow lay upon the city, reflecting the gleam of the full moon, silver-gilding its towers, its mansions and great public buildings.

That's right — though the cover carries the DRAGONLANCE® logo, the Tarsis in which this novel occurs can't possibly be Krynn's. While a reference a few pages later specifies the moon as Solinari, one is left to wonder where Lunitari and Nunitari have gone. Nights when Solinari alone is full and visible ought to be rare at best, and if the night that opens this book is one of these, it's a wonder that the narrative fails to mention it.

This is just the beginning. Though we meet a number of magic-users during the course of the tale, not one of these wizards wears the robes of one of the three great Orders of Magic. A single renegade such as the minor scholar Stunbog might be believable, but it's difficult to imagine that the Orders would permit one of Tarsis' nobles to sponsor a houseful of renegade mages as does John Maddox Roberts' Lord Alban.

Then there's the chronological puzzle. While *Murder in Tarsis* clearly postdates the Cataclysm, internal inconsistencies make it unlikely that the tale either precedes or follows the Wars of the Lance. It must be at least the Age of Dragons, because there's a black dragon lurking in the background, but the Wars can't be too far advanced or Tarsis' ruling council of merchant-class nobility would be far less comfortably entrenched. Yet there's no sign that Ansalon's larger political and magical conflicts have touched Tarsis, and one character even says that wars elsewhere have "petered out." Nor are there real clerics anywhere to be found, which makes matters even more confusing.

Eyebrows also rise at the appearance of rapiers and basket-hilted gentleman's swords, such as that wielded by the poet/assassin Nistur, in polite Tarsian society. These aren't weapons one expects to encounter on Krynn, where bloody warfare and rugged monster-slaying have been more the rule than elegant duels and affairs of honor.

As a pure storyteller, Roberts doesn't fare badly, although his plot mutates in mid-book. Initially, the tale looks like a fair-play deductive whodunit; an early scene in which Nistur investigates the site of a barbarian emissary's murder shows cleverness worthy of a Sherlock Holmes yarn. But along the way the tale turns into a thriller, with a villain who isn't properly introduced until very late.

The "invading barbarian" scenario Roberts establishes is short on originality (yet another un-Krynnlike element), but what the adventure lacks in freshness it makes up for in engaging protagonists: the stylish Nistur, the dour mercenary soldier Ironwood, and the deft young rogue Shelling.

But while *Murder in Tarsis* is at least a passable mystery adventure, it simply won't fly as a credible DRAGONLANCE novel, and that's not easy to forgive — especially considering that until now, no chronicler of Krynn besides Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman has rated hardcover status. Fans of DRAGONLANCE fiction deserve better than this.

Recurring Roles

Swashbuckling in a very different milieu dominate *Season of Storms*, (DAW, \$5.99) Ellen Foxxe's second "Summerlands" novel. Former spy Rolande Vendeley is now a privateer, and much of the tale takes place on the high seas between the New World and Albin as Rolande aids her former adversaries and dodges a host of intrigues. Foxxe has the atmosphere down cold, and readers should definitely hope for more volumes in this well-imagined world.

Elaine Cunningham, meanwhile, turns from the exploits of Liril Baerne to those of Arilyn Moonblade in *Silver Shadows* (TSR, \$5.99), and the story she tells is well worth the wait. This time Arilyn is in Tethyr, unraveling a convoluted plot which threatens an ancient elven forest and its beleaguered population. Followers of Cunningham's work will recognize the opposite sides of several key scenes from earlier tales, intricately and cleverly woven into the new novel. (On the flip side, events here don't seem to integrate well with those in Victor Milan's *War in Tethyr*. But that's a puzzle for expert Realms historians to unravel, and doesn't detract from the present adventure.)



John C. Bunnell has rarely been seen in public without a book since 1976. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" may be addressed to him at 6663 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy. #236, Portland, OR 97225-1403.

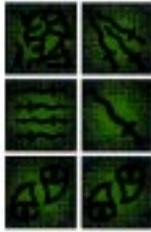
**COMMON
TROOPS**

Ravager



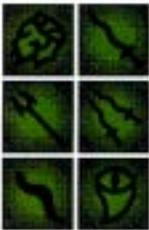
**UNCOMMON
TROOPS**

Annihilator

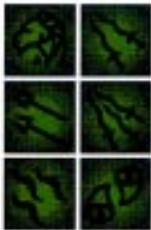


Heavy

Attacker



Raider

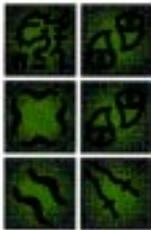


Light

Bog Runner



Marsh Swimmer



Cavalry

Sprayer



Stormer



Missile

Bog Adept



Marsh Mage



Magic



by David Eckelberry

The war on Esfah grows desperately fierce with the invention of magical items, and even more of the world has grown battle scarred as points of minor terrain become contested. Fortunately for the forces of good, Nature constantly creates savage Feral to fill the ranks. Death's foul minions send out a cry for assistance, and their dark lord works his twisted sorceries again, combining his own essence with water.

So the Swamp Stalkers are born. Kicker Pack #5 introduces the newest evil race in the DRAGON DICE™ game. The Swamp Stalkers are a snake people, twisted and deceptive. Here is an introduction to the serpentine world of the Swamp Stalkers and some ideas for unleashing them in battle.

Power corrupts

Swamp Stalkers follow the same basic rules as do the other races; it is their special ability that makes them unique. Infused with the corrupting powers of Death, the Swamp Stalkers seize upon the fallen dead and them to a semblance of life — but their twisted breath also transforms the newly risen into more Swamp Stalkers!

In game terms, this means that at the start of your turn, your armies that contain at least one Swamp Stalker unit at a terrain can **mutate**. Bury one dead unit of any size belonging to any other player for each terrain at which you have a Swamp Stalker unit. In return, you can recruit a Swamp Stalker unit of size

equal to the buried unit from your dead pool to your army.

The Swamp Stalkers follow a simple doctrine: they worship putrid water and the blackness of death. The embrace of death is a gift the Swamp Stalkers seek to bestow on all of the "lesser races" of Esfah.

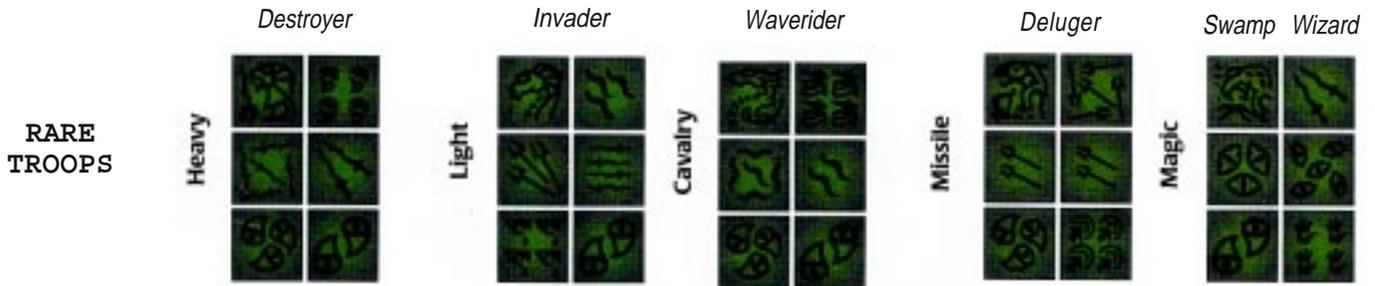
Pretty poison

The Swamp Stalkers have several special action icons unique to them. These icons allow you to mold your Swamp Stalker army and focus it on any form of combat that you choose: melee, missile, or magic. The new special action icons are as follows:

Poison: Found on the swamp giant and swamp beast monsters as well as on the rare light infantry troop, the invader, it is a fearsome addition to the list of Swamp Stalkers weapons. During melee, choose four health of opposing units. These units must save or be killed; those that die must save or be immediately buried. Some commanders of Swamp Stalkers armies forbid the use of this power by their troops; after all, units that are buried cannot be mutated.

Coil: Found on the rare cavalry unit, the waverider, and the ormyrr monster, this icon inflicts four points of damage against a target unit. The target unit rolls to save; any melee results on the save roll inflict damage on the coiling unit, which cannot rolls saves against the damage. The wise commander will command his unit to coil a unit that cannot





deal enough damage to kill it during the counterstrike — in other words, not a monster or heavy melee unit.

Wave: The swamp beast is the only master of this power. When an opposing army rolls for saves at a terrain occupied by the swamp beast, roll this unit. If the wave icon comes up, subtract four save results from the army's roll. In addition, if this icon is rolled during a maneuver roll, subtract maneuver results from one opposing army. Because of the order by which dice modifiers are applied (subtract, multiply, divide, then add), the swamp stalker's subtraction power is actually more powerful than if it simply added additional results.

In addition to these new special action icons, the Swamp Stalkers have a good mix of the old. They can make **tail attacks**, adding additional damage like a rend; **surprise**, which negates an opponent's ability to counterattack during a melee; and **smother**, which kills an opposing unit unless it maneuvers quickly away. Of course, Swamp Stalkers do not lack the popular talent of **cantrip**.

Trust me . . .

Death has taught his new children clever new sorceries to make them powerful sorcerers. That they can use green (water) magic is crucial. Until now, only the Coral Elves had the gift of water magic. Thus Swamp Stalkers are only the second race to protect themselves with **watery doubles** and **walls of ice**, to obfuscate terrain with **walls of fog**, to bog down armies with **flash floods**, or summon a green dragon. They are not without the ability of other creatures of Death to use black magic.

The Swamp Stalkers' new spells add unique power. **Foul water** is like a **hail-storm**, but only one-point units can be affected, coincidentally benefiting their **mutate** power. The mire spell prevents a terrain die from being adjusted. Their ultimate water spell, **black rain**, halves the saves of all armies at a terrain (including the caster's army, if present).

New death spells include **decay**, an easy enchantment that subtracts melee hits from a target army; **disease**, which kills and buries opposing units much as the poison special action icon, and **bloodlust**, which fills an opposing army with so much anger that its units attack one another in a frenzy.

Murky strategies

The Swamp Stalkers could easily be the best all-around units that the forces of evil have seen. They have few weaknesses and many strengths. Here are some strategies for using the Swamp Stalkers in battle:

Kill, divide, and mutate! To take advantage of their special ability — and in the **DRAGON DICE** game, you must seize every advantage or be lost — the steps for a successful commander are simple. For Swamp Stalkers to mutate the opponents, they must first send some enemy units to their graveyards. This also means that Swamp Stalkers are ideal for combination with Coral Elves and Amazons, natives of those terrains.

Mutate, don't bury: The power to double black magic through burying the enemy's dead has always been a fearsome talent of death's servants, but the Swamp Stalkers should be cautious lest they bury so many of the enemy that

none be left to mutate into more Swamp Stalkers.

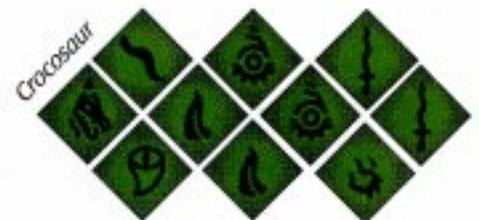
Powers combined: Abhorrent as the idea may be to combine good and evil units, the **DRAGON DICE** warlord will do anything to win. Combine Swamp Stalkers with the Feral and your units will be springing back to life at an astonishing rate. Adding dragonkin to your army is never a mistake.

Draw thy blade: In truth, Swamp Stalkers were made for combat. They maneuver well enough, and they can engage in a contest of missiles or magic without any shame. But the trial of arms is where they excel. Why? Swamp Stalkers average a few more saves than other units.

Villains are priceless: No race is perfect. While the Swamp Stalkers consider Goblins a weak race to be enslaved and eventually mutated into superior serpentine forms, they share one weakness with their dark allies: The Swamp Stalkers lack a spell that can return to life their more powerful units. Their only spell for resurrection, **reanimate dead**, can affect only one-point units. Whenever possible, prevent the loss of the stronger units. Another solution is to augment your Swamp Stalkers with a race that can cast **spark or life** or **breath of life**. Or include a regenerating unit like a troll.



Dave's office looks like a swamp lately, and even his friends think he's cold-blooded, so he is the most appropriate authority on the Swamp Stalkers.



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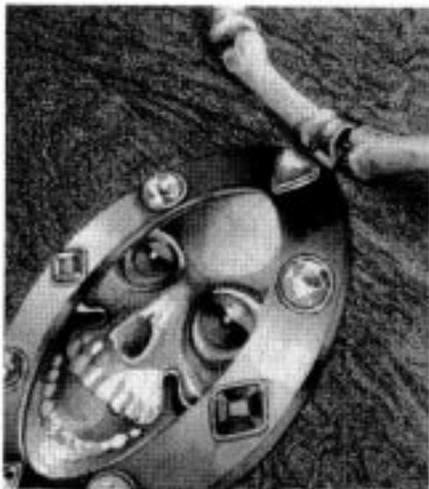
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The *MONSTROUS MANUAL*[™] tome description of the lich warns that “adventurers should be prepared to face magic the likes of which they have never seen before when stalking a lich.” This is because liches need no sleep and often devote their every waking hour to the study of new and more powerful magical spells and items. This article presents nine new magical items that were created by, and for, liches. At the DM’s discretion, they may also be used by spellcasting vampires and other powerful undead creatures. However, due to the nature of most of these magical items, they will not be of use to PCs. This gives the DM the freedom to “power up” his lich NPCs without worrying about the items getting into the hands of the PCs if they defeat their undead opponents.

Although the following items are created primarily only by liches, both experience point and gold piece values are listed after each item. PCs would be hard-pressed to find a buyer for any of these lich-created items once their true nature is known, but the information might be of value to the DM nonetheless. In some cases, he might wish to award the experience point value of a lich-crafted item to PCs involved in the item’s destruction.

Amulet of the undead

An *amulet of the undead* can be used only by an intelligent undead creature, such as a lich or vampire. It consists of a golden disc, about 3” in diameter, with various gemstones of different colors set in a circular pattern along the outer edge. Each of the gemstones represents a different type of undead (vampire, lich, ghost, and so on), determined at the time of the *amulet’s* creation. The *amulet* is worn around the neck, often on a necklace of human finger bones.



Lich Magical Items

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

By means of the *amulet* the lich can detect the location of the nearest undead creature by tracing its link to the Negative Material Plane. To do this, the lich must hold the *amulet* in his hand and spend one round in concentration, holding perfectly still. At this point, one of the gemstones begins to glow. The brightness of the glow indicates the proximity of the undead creature to the lich (the brighter the glow, the nearer the being). If the lich continues concentrating while slowly turning in a circle, the *amulet’s* gemstone indicators alter, providing information on the closest type of undead and general proximity in

each direction surrounding the lich. By traveling in the direction that increases the brightness of a particular gem, the lich can eventually track down that individual undead creature. Note that the *amulet* ignores the presence of the undead creature that currently wears it when indicating the nearest type of undead (otherwise, it would indicate “lich, very near” in all directions when worn by a lich). The range of detection is 10 miles per level of the lich (and since wizards must be at least 18th level before they can become a lich, this makes for quite a large range indeed). Since the *amulet* “homes in” on magical

links to the Negative Material Plane, substances such as stone and lead cannot shield undead creatures from being detected by this device.

An *amulet of the undead* can be very useful to a lich, enabling it to track down undead allies. It would be of extreme value to PCs as well, especially those pledged to hunting down and destroying undead creatures, but the main source of the *amulet's* power stems from the lich's link to the Negative Material Plane. Without such a link themselves, an *amulet of the undead* is useless to PCs.

XP Value: 5,000 **GP Value:** 20,000

Blackfire wand

Blackfire wands are as twisted and black as the hearts of the foul creatures involved in their creation. Usually tipped with an opaque crystal, they are often carved with minute magical runes into which molten silver is poured.

Unlike most other wands, a *blackfire wand* has no charges, acting instead as a channeling device. With it, a lich is able to focus its aura of absolute cold into a narrow beam of dark energy capable of striking a single opponent at any range within sight. Like the lich's touch, the beam inflicts 1-10 hp cold damage, but it has no paralyzation effect. No saving throw is allowed, although creatures normally immune to cold damage are unharmed by the *wand's* beam.

In the hands of a PC the *wand* is useless, for it merely focuses energy from the lich's link to the Negative Material Plane.

XP Value: 3,500 **GP Value:** 15,000

Bonebriar amulet

This *amulet* is carved from bone and usually has its command word inscribed in plain sight on the front. It is almost always circular, with rays of varying length projecting in all directions like a twisted compass or a madman's carving of the sun.

When activated, the bones of the lich's body produce sharp, thorn-like protuberances. These "bonebriars" cause an additional 1d4 hp damage to anyone struck by the lich; anyone grappling with the lich suffers 1d8 hp damage from the numerous bony spines. The bonebriars will remain in place until the lich "deactivates" them by calling out the command word a second time, at which point the spines melt back into the lich's bones. The lich suffers no damage from the forming or recession of the bonebriars.



Any PC who dons a *bonebriar amulet* and calls out the command word causes bonebriars to jut out from all over his body, piercing flesh and armor alike. The PC must immediately make a system shock roll at a -30 penalty, with failure resulting in immediate death. Even if the roll is made successfully, the PC loses 3d6 hp with an additional 1d6 lost on subsequent rounds. Until healed by means of a *heal*, *limited wish*, or *wish* spell, the PC continues to lose 1d6 hp per round. Lesser magic, such as *cure light/serious/critical wounds* spells and *potions of healing/extra-healing*, cannot prevent death after damage on such a massive scale. Deactivating the bonebriars causes no further damage to the injured PC.

Because of the damage such an amulet can cause to living beings, liches will often leave *bonebriar amulets* poorly

guarded in their lairs, hoping to tempt and punish those who would intrude upon and steal from them. In typically devious fashion, the amulets are often stored in an untrapped wooden box along with bogus instructions claiming the amulets have powers of protection from undead, regeneration, or any number of beneficial effects. Woe be to the adventurer who believes the lich's fraudulent claims!

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 8,000

Brooch of turning resistance

Similar to a *brooch of shielding*, this magical *brooch* allows the lich to resist being turned. When a priest or paladin is attempting to turn the lich and the die roll indicates success, instead of the lich being turned, one charge of the *brooch of turning resistance* is used. Note that the priest or paladin is not prevented from attempting to turn the lich on subsequent rounds, but until the *brooch's* charges are depleted, no attempt succeeds. A charge is not expended if the die roll indicates that the attempt at turning fails.

The *brooch*, when first created, holds from 10-24 (2d8+8) charges. After the last charge is expended, the *brooch* crumbles to dust.

These magical items are highly sought by intelligent undead. They often are worn by vampires or other intelligent undead who provided some service to the lich in exchange for the *brooch of turning resistance*. They are worthless to PCs, even paladins, who are normally susceptible to being turned by evil priests of high level. If a paladin were so foolish to wear a lich-made *brooch of turning resistance*, he would find that evil priests could turn him as if they were actually three levels higher.

Brooches of turning resistance can be made in many different forms, but are most often carved from platinum. A favored design is a grinning skull with small gemstones (usually rubies) for eyes.

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Gauntlets of aura suppression

Upon occasion, a lich finds it beneficial to pass among humanity without being detected as an undead creature. There are many illusion-based spells (and magical items — see the *staff of flesh*, below) that allow a lich to look like a living being, but if he wishes to interact with people, these gauntlets are necessary. While appearing to be a normal

pair of well-made leather or linen gloves, *gauntlets of aura suppression* negate the aura of absolute cold that normally causes cold damage and paralysis to living beings. In this way, the disguised lich does not give away his true nature when coming into contact with the living.

Both *gauntlets* must be worn in order for the suppression to occur; wearing only one has no effect. A PC who dons a pair of *gauntlets of aura suppression* gains absolutely no benefit, but neither is he harmed.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 4,000

Memory globe

Often in the early stages of lichdom, a lich becomes despondent over what he has lost, the price he has paid for his immortality. Memories of loved ones, of the times spent in the company of friends — these can only be distractions to the power-hungry lich. For this reason, many liches early on create *memory globes* to help them deal with such annoyances.

In appearance, a *memory globe* looks like a simple crystal ball, although these items often seem to be filled with a distorting, hazy mist that shifts and wavers inside the glass like a heat mirage in the desert. It has been filled at the time of its creation with the memories the lich no longer wishes to have. These memories inhabit the globe. When touched, the *memory globe* displays random images of the memories it contains. Since they were purged from his mind during the creation of the globe, the images are meaningless to the lich.

However, the *memory globe* is a two-edged sword. While the creation of such a device can be extremely useful to a lich, allowing him to forget about the painful parts of his past existence that he can never have again, it can be a deadly weapon in the hands of his enemies. If discovered by an enemy, the images in the *memory globe* can be very revealing, perhaps giving away some weakness of the lich that can be used against him. Additionally, if the *globe* is shattered, the memories immediately return in full force to the lich, who is stunned for 1d4-1 rounds (one round minimum). While stunned, the lich is unable to move or take any actions, and he is at his most vulnerable. For this reason, a lich's *memory globe* is usually as well-hidden and protected as is his phylactery.

Memory globes are not inherently evil in nature and could conceivably be

made by PC wizards if the procedures were properly researched. However, each memory globe is a single-use item, able to hold only the selected memories of the wizard creating it and unable to be "erased" other than by its destruction. Furthermore, there are few instances when a living PC wizard would find it necessary to purge his own memories in such a fashion.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Nightmare harness

By means of this leather harness, the lich can summon a nightmare from the Lower Planes (see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* for statistics on the nightmare). The nightmare arrives in 1d4 rounds, has maximum hit points, and willingly serves the lich indefinitely as a riding mount. If the nightmare is ever killed in the lich's service, the *harness* crumbles to dust.



A *nightmare harness* is expensive to make, as it is studded with platinum and precious gems. The gems used in the *harness'* construction are usually the colors of flame and often glow with an inner fire. A PC could use one of these devices to summon a nightmare, but the creature immediately attacks the PC upon arrival, fighting until either it or the PC was slain.

Those thinking to steal a *nightmare harness* in order to strip it of its gems had best think again — once used in the creation of a *nightmare harness*, each gem becomes cursed. Anyone with such a gem in his possession is plagued each night by terrible dreams, dreams in which he is chased over a desolate, barren wasteland by a vicious, flame-snorting nightmare intent upon his death. Each night the gem remains with the thief, he loses 1 point of both Strength and Constitution. Once either attribute reaches zero, the PC dies.

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Potion of yellow mold distillate

Liches like yellow mold. The mold's spore clouds are deadly to living organisms yet cannot harm the lich, as it does not breathe. Liches often have patches of yellow mold growing in the entrances to their hidden lairs, as one level of defense against intrusion.

Many liches have investigated and experimented with yellow mold to great extent, developing *potions of yellow mold distillate*. These potions are extracts from yellow mold spores, magically suspended in liquid and mutated to have extremely fast-acting effects when they come into contact with living or once-living flesh. As expected, the distillate is a cloudy yellow color, often with clots of gray-green or milky-white substances floating in the mixture.

When a *potion of yellow mold distillate* is quaffed, the drinker's flesh and organs are transformed into yellow mold in the space of a single round, exploding into a 10' cloud of spores the following round. No saving throw is allowed; the drinker perishes instantly, collapsing into a pile of bones, and those caught within the spore cloud must save vs. poison or die themselves.

As liches are found in varying stages of decay, those that still retain a layer of mummified, leathery skin are able to drink the *potion of yellow mold distillate* themselves, transforming their remaining skin into a deadly cloud of spores. As the *yellow mold distillate* does not eat

away bone, and the lich is not discomfited by the lack of skin and organs, the lich is not harmed in any way by this action. His opponents, however, are not so lucky — not only must they deal with the spore cloud, but such a display will often (in the RAVENLOFT® campaign) call for a Fear Check as well.

Liches have also been known to chain human captives in a location leading to their inner lairs and leave one of these potions, unmarked, within their reach. After several days without food and water, most captives eventually give in to their thirst and take a chance on the potion. This creates a new patch of yellow mold for the lich and also gives him a fresh new skeleton to animate as a servant.

It should be noted that psionic liches do not generally have such a liking for yellow mold, since the larger patches can develop psionic abilities and attacks, to which no psionic lich would wish to subject himself.

The success of *potions of yellow mold distillate* have encouraged at least one lich to investigate the possibility of a *potion of phycomid distillate*. To date, such a substance has eluded him, but it's surely only a matter of time — and time is one thing liches have plenty of.

XP Value: 800 **GP Value:** 2,000

Staff of the flesh

A *staff of the flesh* is fashioned from a sturdy, twisted branch of light-colored wood, often bleached until it takes on an almost bone-white color.

This magical staff serves two purposes for the lich. First, it can be used as a weapon, striking as a staff +2. In addition, by using a charge, an opponent struck by the *staff* must save vs. death magic or have his skin and organs shrivel up to nothingness, leaving behind a pile of bones and any clothing and equipment worn or carried. The intent of this use of the staff must be made before the attack roll is made, and one charge is used up whether the *staff* hits its target or not.

When a hit is successful and the victim fails his save, the life-force of the victim is absorbed into the *staff*. When this occurs, the victim cannot be *raised* or *resurrected* by normal means — his life-force remains imprisoned in the *staff*. Only by touching the *staff of the flesh* to the victim's remains and invoking the command word can the victim be returned to life. In such a case, no resurrection or system shock roll is necessary; the *staff*



merely undoes what it did, with no further effect to the victim. However, at the lich's option, he may use the life-force present in the *staff of the flesh* to clothe his own bones in flesh for up to 24 hours. This magical effect gives the lich the exact appearance he had in life, regardless of the appearance of the victim. In this fashion, the lich can pass himself off as one of the living. The only hint as to the artificial nature of this appearance is that the lich's body will detect as magical under the scrutiny of an appropriate spell or magical item. Furthermore, being clothed in flesh does not prevent the lich from using his aura of absolute cold to paralyze those he touches (and those liches that wish to hide this ability while disguised as living beings will wear *gauntlets of aura suppression*, detailed above).

A *staff of the flesh* can only hold the life-force of a single victim at a time. While one life-force is being held, the *staff* cannot be used to drain another victim of his until the stored life-force is either returned to its original body or used by the lich to clothe himself in flesh. Often a lich will drain the life-force of a member of a PC party, and use that victim as a "hostage," forcing the other party members to do the lich's bidding in order to "earn back" their comrade's life.

PCs are able to use the *staff of the flesh*, both as a weapon and to drain a victim of his life-force, but the latter use of one of these weapons is an evil act, and could result in an alignment shift. For PCs in the RAVENLOFT setting, such use of one of these weapons is grounds for a Powers Check.

When first created, a *staff of the flesh* has 1d6 + 19 charges. These staves can be recharged by the liches who create them.

XP Value: 8,000 **GP Value:** 35,000



Johnathan M. Richards seems perfectly human on the telephone, but we wonder about the jewelry he fancies, not to mention that mean horse. And those gloves . . .

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Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

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

Convention flyers, newsletters and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, *DRAGON® Magazine*, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, *DRAGON Magazine*, TSR Limited, 120

Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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



October Conventions

AtCon III

October 3-6 TX
 Ramada Inn, Austin.
 Special guests: Allen Varney, Scott Haring, Jeff Dee, and Aaron Allston. Events: AD&D® role-playing. Other activities: win ticket to AtSea. John Paul Carney, 3816 S. Lamar #901, Austin, TX 78764.

Archon 20

October 4-6 IL
 Gateway Center and adjacent Holiday Inn, Collinsville. Special guests: Ray Bradbury and Ray Harryhausen. Events: panel discussions, art show, and gaming. Other activities: 24-hour videos. Registration: varies. Archon 20, P.O. Box 483, Chesterfield, MO 63006-0483, or e-mail: <http://www.ecc.cc.mo.us/~randy/arch20.html>.

Cangames

October 4-6
 Ottawa Congress Centre, Ottawa, Ontario. Events: role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: auction, seminars, painting contest. Registration: varies. Sunset Blvd., Greely, ONT, K4P 1C5, Canada, or e-mail: cangames@iosphere.net.

- * Australian convention
- * Canadian convention
- * European convention

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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.

Necromicon '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: Ygor party, panels, art show, dealers, and masquerade. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$25 on site. Necromicon, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview, FL 33569 or e-mail: 74273.1607@compuserve.com.

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 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: mcsnova@tamu.edu.

Pensacon

October 11-13 FL
 Pensacola Grand Hotel, Pensacola. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and 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.

Horrorcon V

October 18-20 TX
 Seven Oaks Resort, San Antonio. Events: role-playing, RPGA® tournaments, board games, miniatures, computer and collectible card games. Registration: \$20/4 day pass, \$11/day. GMSA, 12205 Valley Oak, Live Oak, TX

Important:

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 your 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.

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Middle fair '96

October 12 W V

Middletown Mall, Fairmont. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: *MtG** tournament, recreationists, costume exhibitions, and computer software. Registration: varies. Ken Gould c/o Middletown Mall office, Middletown Mall, Fairmont, WV 26554.

TennCon '96

October 12-13 TN

Knoxville Convention and Exhibition Center, Knoxville. Guest: Lester Smith. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: varies. Gameboard, 3018B Mall Rd. North, Suite 161, Knoxville, TN 37924.

Kettering Game Convention XV

October 18-19 OH

Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center, Kettering. Events: role-playing RPGA Network tournaments, board games, miniatures, and collectible card games. Other activities: movies and a game auction. Registration: \$3. Bob von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering Ohio 45429.

Totally Tubular Con IV

October 18-20 CA

Days Inn, Fullerton. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a *LIVING City*TM tournament. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Totally Tubular Con, P.O. Box 18791, Anaheim Hills, CA 92871-8791, or e-mail: partdragon@aol.com.

Rucon VIII

October 25-27 PA

Lock Haven University. Events: *Magic: the Gathering** tournament, masquerade ball, and speakers. For information send a SASE to William E. Donges III, Lock

Haven Role Playing Games Society, R.D. #2 Box 309C, Mill Hall, PA 17751, or e-mail: falerin@mail.csrlink.net.

Fantacon

October 26 IN

Porter County fairgrounds, Valparaiso. 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, art show and auction, and 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.

Organized Kahn Fusion 20 - General Con

Oct 26-27 PA

Newberrytown Fire Hall, Etters. Events: role-playing,

card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: varies. M. Forner's Games Only Emporium, 230 S. 8th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043.

November Conventions

Ork Con '96

November 1-3

Panorama Hotel, Am oberen Marienbach 1. Schweinfurt. Special guests: Larry Elmore, Lester Smith, Mike Tinney, Ash Arnett, Brom, Jeff Grubb, Ken Whitman, Oliver Hoffman. Events: AD&D[®] Championship, *DRAGON DICE*TM, *Rage** and *MtG** tournaments. Registration: \$7, all weekend \$18. Robert Moore, Ruckertstr. 15, D-97421 Schweinfurt, Germany.

Corpse Con III

November 1-3 TX

Howard Johnson Airport Hotel and Convention Center, Corpus Christie. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: Masquerade ball, *MtG** tournament, Japanimation room, and dealers area. Registration: \$10/weekend, \$5/day, plus 50¢/game. Game Lords of Corpus Christie, P.O. Drawer 987, Odem, TX 78370.

Novagcon '96

November 2-3 VA

Kena Temple Hall, Fairfax. Events: role-playing painting contest, historical and SF miniature wargaming and card games. Registration: \$8 NOVAG members, \$10 general admission. Send SASE to: NOVAG, P.O. Box 7158, Reston, VA 22091.

Sci-Con 18

November 8-10 VA

Holiday Inn Executive Center, Virginia Beach. Special guests: artists Larry Elmore and Melissa Benson, SF author Charles Sheffield, and others. Events: *Starfleet Battles** *MtG** and live-action games. Other activities: char-

ity auction and workshops. Registration: \$30 on site. Hampton Roads Science Fiction Association, Inc., c/o Mark Shaffer, P.O. Box 9434, Hampton, Virginia 23670, or e-mail: scicon@earthlink.net or <http://www.earthlink.net/~scicon>.

Configuration 7

November 8-10 OK

University of Oklahoma campus, Norman. Events: AD&D, role-playing *Vampire* Interactive theater, Convention Suite, and art show. Registration: \$9/weekend pass, \$9/Vampire pass, \$15/for both. War and Role Playing, 215-A OMU, Box 304, 900 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019.

Fields of Honor

November 8-10 IA

Adventure Lane Inn, Altoona. Contact Scott Friedmeyer, Comics Plus, 6501 Douglas Ave., Urbandale, IA 50322.

Chimaeracon '96

November 15-16 IN

French Lick Springs Resort, French Lick. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniature games. Other activities: *Star Trek* Con, dealers, home film contest, costume contest and ball. Tentative guests: Grace Lee Whitney, Bjo Trimble and NASA. Registration: varies. Send SASE to: Chimaera, P.O. Box 42, West Baden Springs, IN 47469.

Pentacon XII

November 15-17 IN

Grand Wayne Center, Downtown Fort Wayne. Events: role-playing, RPGA Network tournaments, collectible card games, board games, auction, miniatures painting contest, charity raffle and art show. Other activities: seminars and computer games. Northeastern Indiana Gaming Association, P.O. Box 11174, Fort Wayne, IN 46856, or e-mail: 102654.230@compuserve.com.

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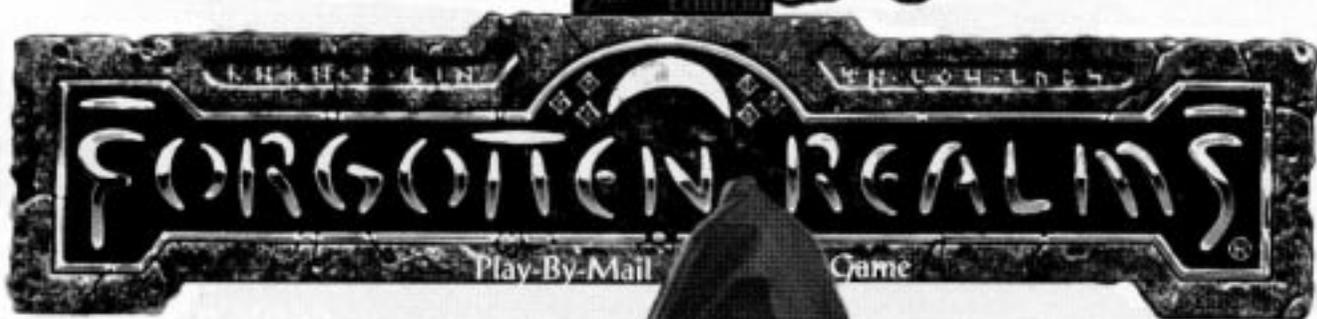
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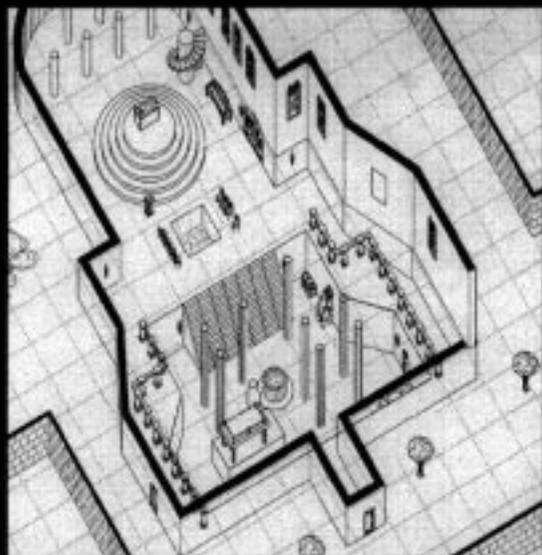
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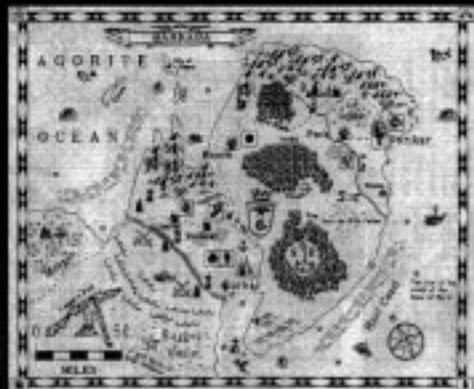
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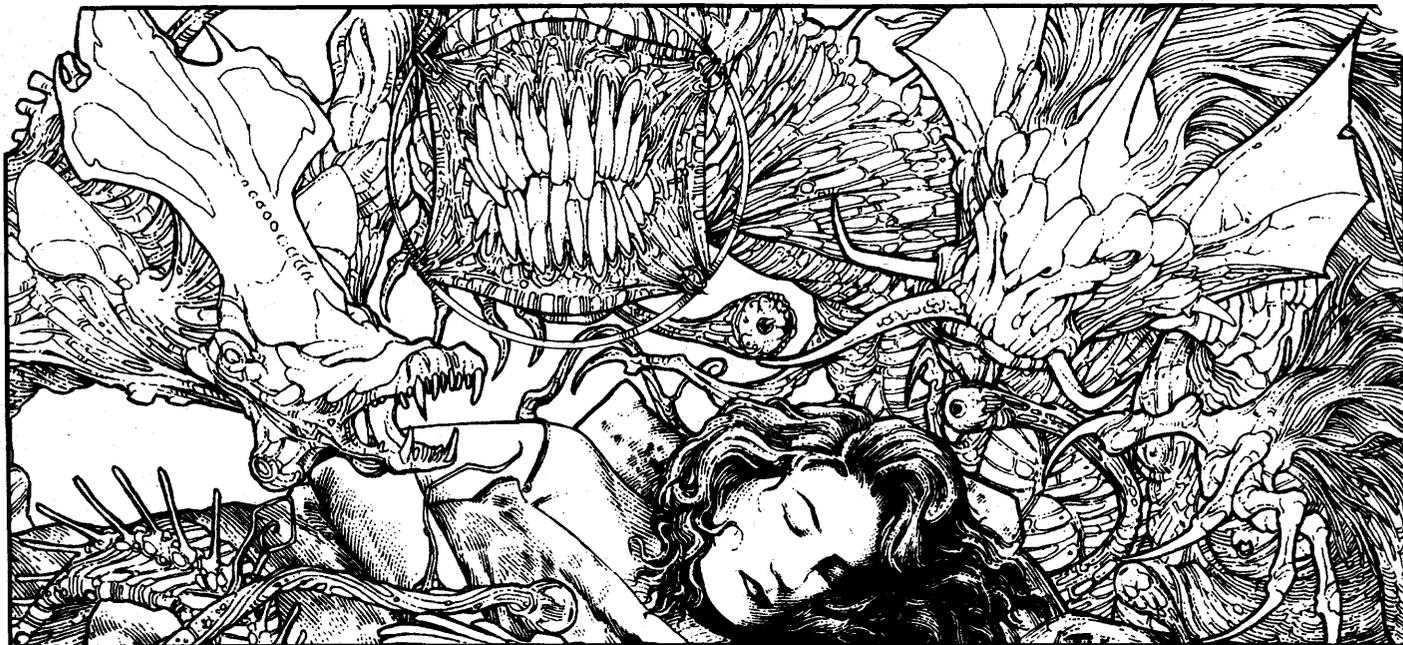
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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs 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.

We are no longer able to make personal replies. Please send no SASEs with your question. SASEs are being returned with copies of the writer's guidelines.

This month, the Sage considers questions about magical items for the AD&D® game, pauses to count pummeling attacks, and responds to a critic.

There is an evil cleric: we will call him Bob. Bob casts a *hold person* spell on a fighter we'll call Joe. Joe fails his save. Joe's fighter companion Sam has a *ring of free action*. Sam puts his *ring* on Joe's finger. What happens? What if Bob dies before the spell ends? Is Joe freed from the hold person spell then?

I recommend that nothing happen when Sam puts the *ring of free action* of Joe's finger. The *ring* prevents *hold* spells from affecting the wearer after the wearer dons it, but it doesn't necessarily help him with effects that already were in place when the *ring* goes on his finger.

Generally speaking a spell that does not require concentration from the caster (such as *hold person*) runs merrily along until dispelled or until its duration runs out, no matter what the caster does or what happens to the caster.

Does the *hat of difference* allow races to assume classes that they wouldn't be able to normally? For example can a dwarf don a *hat of difference* and become a paladin? Are there any negative effects of using a *hat of difference* to assume the form of a priest and following different deities each time?

A *hat of difference* allows the wearer to follow any new character class, but the assumed class must be different from the character's current class. Once a character dons a particular *hat of difference*, he cannot change the class the hat allows him to assume thereafter (though he could follow another class if he acquired another *hat of difference*). While following the assumed class, the character must abide by the alignment and ethos restrictions imposed by that class. If he violates those restrictions, he suffers the consequences. If the character violates his own alignment while maintaining an alignment required by the assumed class, he also suffers the con-

sequences. For example, a paladin donning a *hat of difference* and assuming the druid profession could find himself facing a big atonement or even the loss of his paladinhood as he strives to follow the druidical ethos.

Can *oil of impact* be used on slashing and piercing weapons? Does the oil have a lesser effect on these weapons?

Sure, you can pour *oil of impact* on an edged or pointed weapon, but it doesn't do much good. The *oil* creates a magical effect only when poured on a blunt (type B) weapon.

How can someone tell if a material component is used up in a spell? Sometimes the spell description says whether the material components are consumed and sometimes it doesn't.

Priests' holy symbols usually are not consumed when used to cast priest spells. Likewise, most priest spells that require holy water require only a small sprinkle, say a tenth of a vial, per spell. Beyond that, assume that any spell's material component is consumed in the casting unless the spell description specifically says that it is not. Some spell

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descriptions go out of their way to note that the material component is consumed, but that's just a reminder.

I have a question concerning detecting scrying. The subject matter I read was the crystal ball description in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*. It seems as if there are two different checks for detection. The first check is a percentage based on class, with a cumulative addition for Intelligence above 12. This I understand. Another sentence says there is a check based the target's level, (e.g., a 9th-level victim would have a 45% chance). Is this second check valid? Should there only be one check using the higher or lower percentage? I'm confused on the matter, and it makes a difference on a campaign we're currently playing.

A character has only one chance to detect scrying each round. The value for the subjects level or hit dice is added to the base chance, which is determined by class (treat most monsters as fighters) and Intelligence. A 9th-level wizard with an Intelligence score of 18, for example, would have a 74% chance each round (8 + 21 + 45) of noticing the scrying. Note that creatures with Intelligence scores lower than 13 have no chance of detecting the scrying without some kind of magical aid no matter what their hit dice or level.

Could you please clear up the confusion about attacks per round when it comes to unarmed combat. In particular I'm asking about the system used in *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Combat & Tactics* book? For example, if I have a 7th-level fighter with mastery in pummeling, how many attacks does he have each round? Is this figure per hand or a total of the two? A table containing figures for attacks per round for unarmed combat (including martial arts) would be nice. While we're on the subject, what bonuses do master and grand master pummelers (and martial artists) gain? What is the base phase for a pummeling or martial arts attack?

I've been resisting answering the first part of your question because it would take a lot of space to explain some pretty simple things. Hang on, we'll get there in a moment.

The base initiative phase for a pummeling or martial arts attack is the same as the attacker's base initiative phase. Some people think this means daggers and other fast weapons are actually

quicker than pummeling or martial arts attacks. Not so, because anyone armed with a weapon uses his base initiative phase or the weapon's base initiative phase, whichever is worse. Now, on to the rest of your question:

Nonproficient pummelers and martial artists can make no pummeling attacks or martial arts attacks at all.

Characters familiar with pummeling can make one pummeling attack each round using one hand. There is no such thing as familiarity with martial arts — one is proficient at a martial art or one is not.

Characters proficient in pummeling or martial arts attack once a round if they're not warriors or at the standard warrior rate if they are, like so:

Pummeling and martial arts attack rates (proficient characters)

Character	Level	Attacks/round
Non-warriors	Any	1/1
Warriors	1-6	1/1
	7-12	3/2
	13+	2

Characters who have become pummeling or martial arts experts make

pummeling or martial arts attacks at the standard (non-specialized) warrior rate. In table form, the attack rates would look like this:

Pummeling and martial arts attack rates (expert characters)

Character	Level	Attacks/round
Any Class	1-6	1/1
	7-12	3/2
	13+	2

Pummeling or martial arts specialists must be single-classed fighters unless the campaign uses the optional rules from the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book. These characters attack as specialized fighters (as do master characters, see next section). In table form, the attack rates would look like this:

Pummeling and martial arts attack rates (specialized, master, and high master characters)

Character	Level	Attacks/round
Fighter	1-6	3/2
	7-12	2/1
	13+	5/2

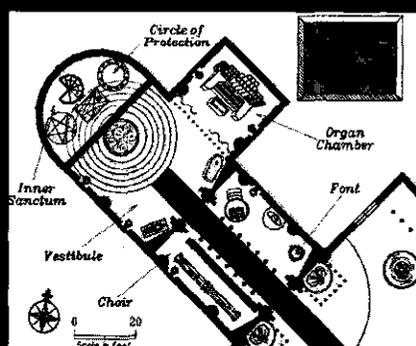
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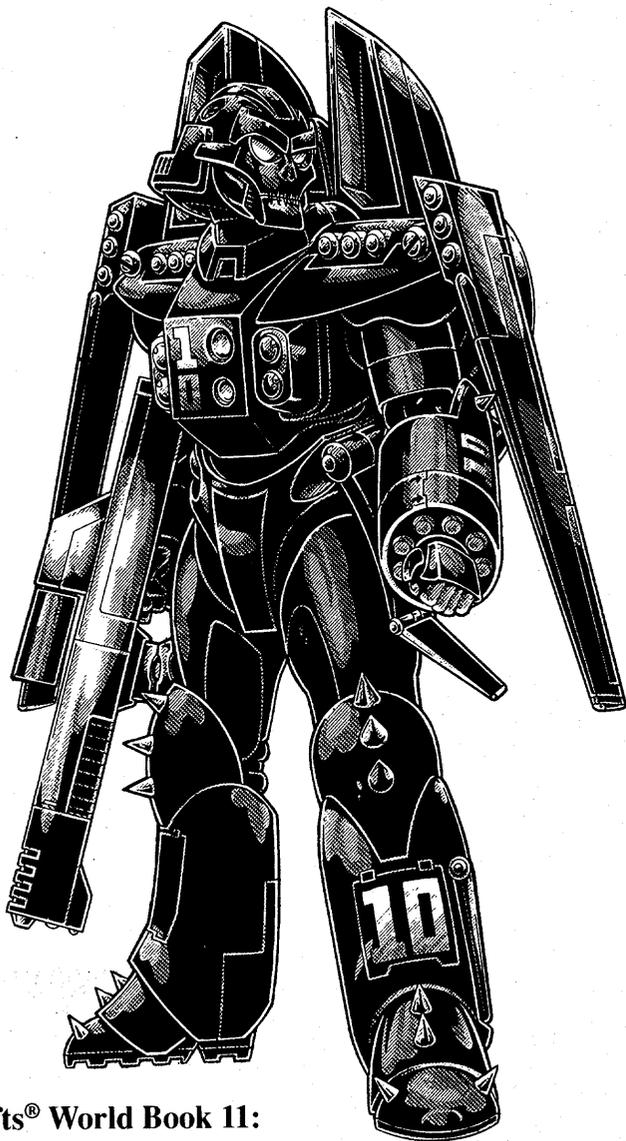
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unless the campaign uses the optional rules in the *Skills & Powers* book. As noted earlier, characters who become masters and high masters at pummeling or martial arts have the same number of attacks as a specialist does. A character who achieves grand mastery at pummeling or martial arts receives an extra attack per round, as follows:

Pummeling and martial arts attack rates (grand master characters)

Character	Level	Attacks/round
Fighter	1-6	2/1
	7-12	5/2
	13+	3/1

All the foregoing assumes attacks with only one hand. Any character making pummeling or martial arts attacks (remember that a nonproficient character can't pummel or use martial arts at all) can gain an extra attack each round by attacking with both hands, but the two-weapon penalty applies (Though martial arts styles A and B negate the penalty in some cases, see C&T, page 95).

Pummeling and martial arts masters gain all the bonuses listed for weapon master using a melee weapon in Chapter Four of the *Combat & Tactics* book. That is, an attack bonus of +3 and a damage bonus of +3. High masters (who must be at least 6th level) gain the benefits of mastery and improve their base initiative by one category. For example, a human high master making a pummeling or martial arts attack has a base initiative of very fast. (Note that no action in the C&T system can be faster than very fast.) Grand Masters have the benefits of mastery and high mastery, the extra attacks noted on the table above, and use a bigger die to determine damage. A pummeling grand master inflicts 1d3 hp damage with his bare fists and 1d4 hp damage with mailed fists. A grand master martial artist inflicts 1d4 hp damage with his bare hands or 1d8 hp damage with his feet. Further, grand masters can inflict critical hits on rolls of 16 or higher (rather than the standard 18 or higher, see C&T, page 101). Grand master pummelers and martial artists also add their +3 attack bonuses to their opposed Strength rolls when checking for knockdowns (see C&T, page 84).

Since a *wish* is a magical spell, can it be used or operate properly in an antimagic shell, a beholders antimagic ray, or in a dead magic region?

A *wish* cannot be activated in any area where magic or 9th-level spells or the type of magical item containing the *wish* do not work. However, a wish directed at such an area can affect that area, provided magic works at the user's location. For example, a *wish* could destroy an *antimagic shell* or cause a beholder's antimagic ray to cease functioning for a time (I'd suggest 3d10 rounds) if the user was standing outside the ray or shell. A *wish* also could be used to rescue a character from within a dead magic area or even allow magic to function in a dead magic region for a short time (say 5d4 rounds). A wish, however, cannot create a magical effect inside an area where magic doesn't function. While a *wish* could summon a whole party out of a beholder's antimagic ray, it could not restore that party to full hit points.

I have found that a lot of the information in *DRAGON Magazine* is useful. However, I found some of the information in your "Sage Advice" columns to be amiss. I feel that if you are going to answer questions that you should at least spend a little bit of time looking for

the correct answer. For example there was a question about elven gestation. The answer was that there was no written information on that subject and that it was something for the philosophers. Well, the local idiot said, "I've seen something on elven gestation in the elves handbook." Naturally we didn't believe him. Much to our surprise, though, when we picked up the book there it was. Under the "Life Cycle of Elves." Co figure. I wouldn't have thought to look for something about elves in the elves handbook either. I also enjoy reading your articles in "Sage Advice" where you bash people for asking stupid questions. Now, instead of wasting space for questions about barbarians blowing up powder kegs in treasure rooms with an elven ship, I suggest that you start putting in articles that have relevance to the actual AD&D role-playing game. I would hope to see better information in the future, or I have no reason to subscribe. If the information isn't correct, it doesn't do the subscribers any good.

Actually, what I said (back in issue #228) was that there is no hard-and-fast rule in the AD&D game for the gestation periods of PC races. And there isn't. I did

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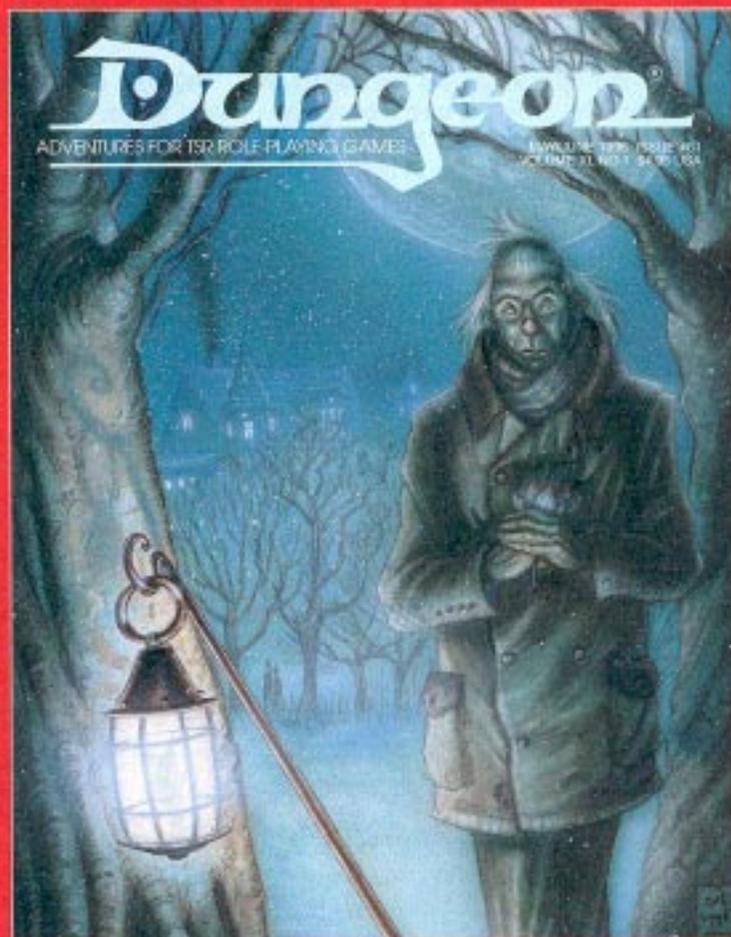
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make mention of philosophers in my answer, but that was regarding whether a lie had been told and had nothing to do with elven gestation.

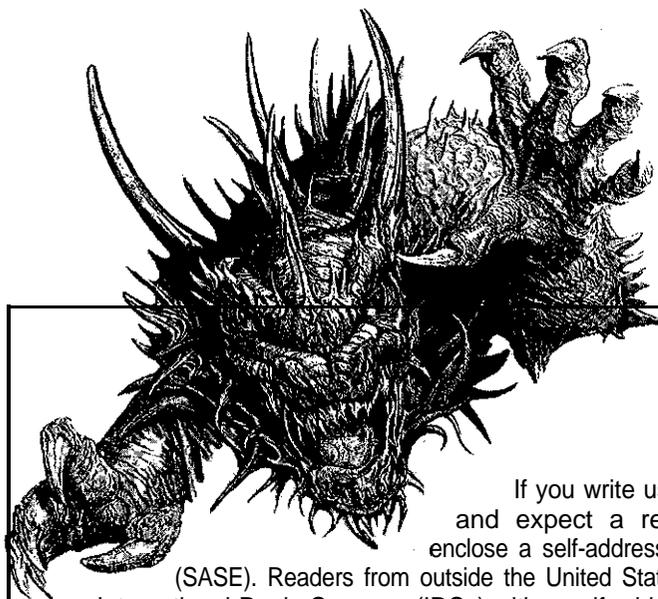
Several readers have pointed out that the *Complete Book of Elves* makes a reference to two-year pregnancies for elves. (It's on page 50, in the Rituals section of Chapter Five: Elven Society; my copy doesn't seem to have a section entitled "Life Cycle.") In any case, I don't regard that as a hard-and-fast rule. The entire book is optional, and as I explained in issue #228, any gestation period much longer than nine months is too long given an elf's body mass. In any case, this is not the kind of "rule" a DM should feel obligated to follow when a player unexpectedly pulls it out of his hat in an attempt to get the DM to change his mind about a decision he has made, which was the situation the reader who submitted the question described.

I was remiss, however, in not specifically pointing out that my suggestion contradicted an in-print rulebook (even though it is an optional one). I stand chastened, but not much.

On to the matter of the powder keg. Take another look at the cover of issue #228, where this question appeared along with the question on elven gestation. You'll note that it was the April issue. In April, I try to collect the years silliest questions; the reader who posed the elven gestation question asked it in humorous fashion, either by design or by accident. The powder keg question was pretty funny, too. I didn't bash the reader for asking the question. I felt it necessary, however, to rail against campaigns where dragon slaying and the recovery of emeralds the size of thrones supposedly are "everyday" occurrences and that feature powerful items the DM doesn't know how to use in play. The perils of out-of-control campaigns are always relevant to this column, which provides advice to DMs and players who have gotten themselves into trouble they can't readily get out of on their own.



Skip Williams rates Ishtar, Bringing Up Baby, Arsenic and Old Lace, and several other screwball comedies among his favorite movies. He always sees to it that he gets a good dose of silliness before writing his annual April column.



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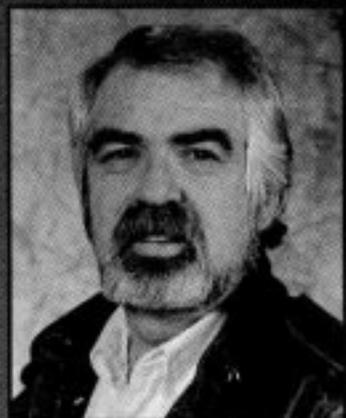
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BEFORE WE BEGIN I HAVE A LITTLE BUSINESS. **NITRO FERGUSON** HAS INVITED ONE OF US TO SIT IN ON HIS **GOth-ALMIGHTY** CAMPAIGN. ANYONE WANT TO GO?

NITRO? AAACK! DON'T MENTION THAT NAME AROUND ME.

THAT GUY IS DANGEROUS. I STILL SLEEP IN THE BATHTUB SINCE HIS "**TRIAL BY ORDEAL**" LIVE-ACTION EVENT AT GARYCON.

WELL, AT LEAST THE **GARY JACKSON RPG TOURNEY** SAW FIT TO BAN HIM FROM SANCTIONED EVENTS.

STILL, NITRO'S NEW RPG ENGINE IS CAUSING A LOT OF BUZZ DOWN AT WEIRD PETE'S.



THEY'RE RIGHT, BRIAN. WE ALL KNOW NITRO'S **REPUTATION**. HE DID **SLAP** GARY JACKSON OVER A DISPUTED RULE CALL DURING GARYCON '78.

OH, YES. "THE SLAP HEARD 'ROUND THE CON." I WAS ROLLING FOR A CRITICAL, AND NITRO HIT GARY SO HARD MY **ONE** ROLLED OVER TO A **TWENTY!**

YEAH! THAT RULED! GARY HAD A HAND-PRINT ON HIS FACE FOR THE WHOLE CON.

I WAS GLAD THEY RAN NITRO OFF THE GROUNDS. POOR GARY. HE WAS HUMILIATED.

I KNOW... I KNOW.

THOSE TWO SIMPLY BROUGHT THEIR "OFF-GAME" PROBLEMS TO THE TABLE. GARY KNEW BETTER THAN TO BREAK HIS OWN RULE (PAGE 8 OF THE HACKMASTER GUIDE, SECOND COLUMN — LOOK IT UP). LET'S FACE IT, THERE ARE RISKS INVOLVED HERE. BUT FOR ME, THE GAME IS EVERYTHING.

NITRO MAY BE ON TO SOMETHING. IT'S WORTH A CLOSER LOOK. I MIGHT NOT LIKE NITRO FERGUSON PERSONALLY, BUT I HAVE THE UTMOST RESPECT FOR HIM AS A GAMEMASTER. I'LL TAKE A FEW BRUISES AND SCARS FOR THE CAUSE. **I'M GOING IN!**

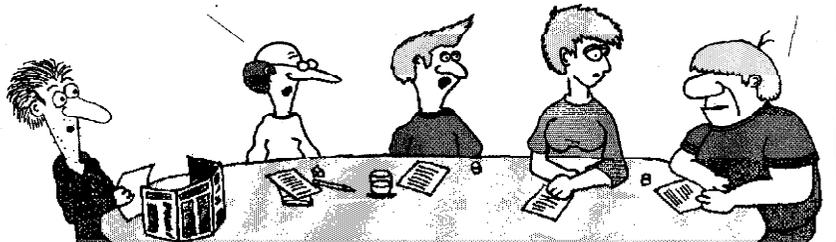


OH, BRIAN. THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT, THE MORE I THINK THIS IS A **MISTAKE**. YOU'RE AT A DISADVANTAGE. THINK ABOUT IT. FOR THE **FIRST** TIME YOU'LL BE ENTERING A **HOSTILE** GAMING ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU DON'T KNOW THE RULES. IT'S **HIS GAME!** YOUR WIT AND RAPID RECALL WON'T SAVE YOU THERE AS THEY SAY IN SPACEHACK, "YOUR SHIELDS ARE **DOWN!**"

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH IN ME, HUH? I'M A QUALIFIED **GARY JACKSON ACADEMY CERTIFIED** GAME DESIGNER. I'VE STUDIED NITRO CLOSELY OVER THE YEARS. READ **ORC-FIESTA** THREE TIMES. STUDIED HIS TACTICS. I KNOW THE ENEMY. BUT TO HIM, I'LL BE JUST ANOTHER FACE AT THE TABLE.

BUT **NITRO** IS FOND OF THE BASE D6 SYSTEM. YOUR LUCKY 10-SIDER WILL BE **USELESS!**

LOOK, I SEE YOUR CONCERN, AND IT'S WELL NOTED. I GOTTA GO IN. MY DESIGN EXPERTISE MAKES ME THE BEST CANDIDATE. SO I GO IN. NO LUCKY DICE, NO DOG-EARED RULEBOOKS, NO LAMINATED PLAYER-ADVANTAGE CHARTS. JUST **ME AND HIM.**



WELL, IT'S YOUR CALL. I'LL GIVE YOU MY DAD'S BEEPER NUMBER IN CASE IT GETS **UGLY**. YOU MAKE THE CALL, AND WE'LL COME IN FOR YOU.

BRIAN, DON'T GO! YOU **KNOW** IT'S A MISTAKE.

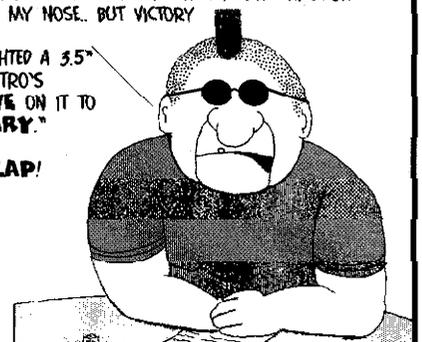
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND. WILL YOU HOLD MY DICE BAG?

TALK HIM OUT OF IT, B.A.



LATER...

THEY WERE ON TO ME FROM THE FIRST. YEAH, THEY'RE PROBABLY CELEBRATING. BUZZ-CUT MY HEAD, GAVE ME A **TATTOO**. MADE ME PUSH A PENNY THROUGH AN **EGG** WITH MY NOSE. BUT VICTORY WAS MINE! I JUST OVERNIGHTED A 3.5" FLOPPY WITH NITRO'S LITTLE **ENGINE** ON IT TO A CERTAIN "**GARY**." ANONYMOUSLY. **FOR THE SLAP!**



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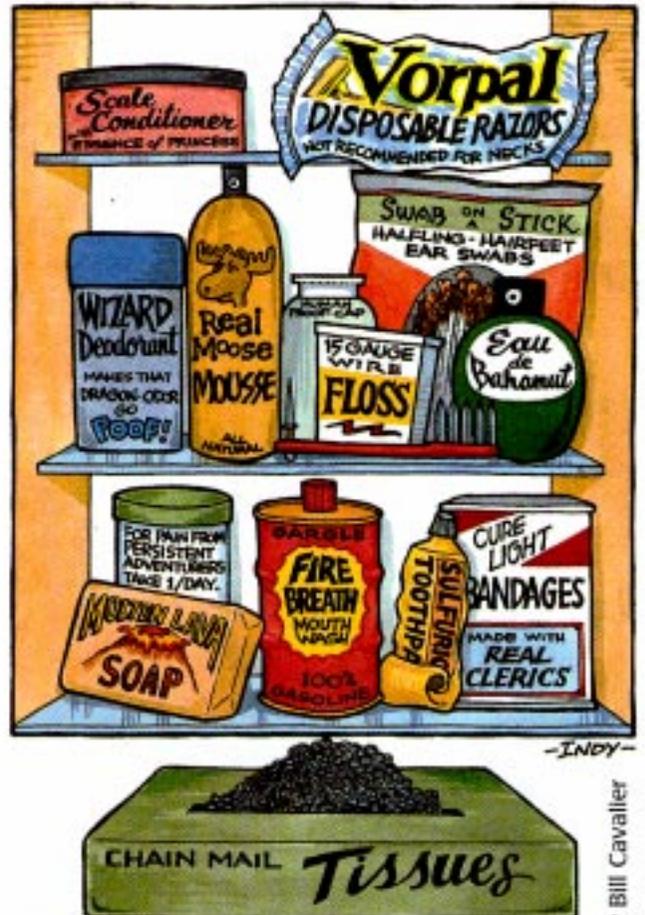
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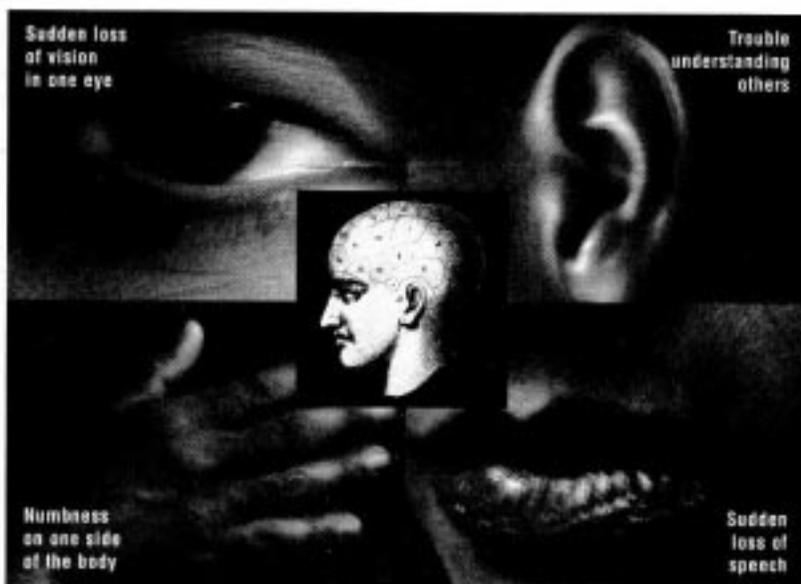
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FLOYD

Written and Illustrated
by Aaron Williams

WILL FLOYD RECOVER?

HE'LL LIVE, BUT I'LL NEED TO STUDY HIM FURTHER AFTER HIS BRAIN RE-SOLIDIFYS. I DON'T KNOW IF THE CURSE IS GONE YET.

MEANWHILE, I HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS.

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIRE AWAY

WHAT DID YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T THINK ANY NERUS AMULETS STILL EXISTED?

THEY WERE ACTIVELY DESTROYED BY THE TRIUMVIRATE IN THE YEAR 1527 A.E.

YOU MEAN IT'S BEEN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS SINCE I WAS LAST ACTIVATED?

TRY ABOUT TEN THOUSAND.

THAT LONG.

THE LOCALS CALL THIS YEAR 2650 IN RANDA'S MERCY.

NO WONDER I CAN'T GET ANY RESPONSE FROM MY NETWORK SERVER.

WELL, MY FUNCTION STAYS THE SAME. FLOYD OPENED THE AMULET, SO FLOYD LEARNS MAGIC.

POPE. POPE. POPE.

BY THE WAY, TARSLUM, DO THEY KNOW YOU'RE A...

NO, NOT YET.

HE'S NOT WAKING UP!

NO PROBLEM.

FEELING BETTER?

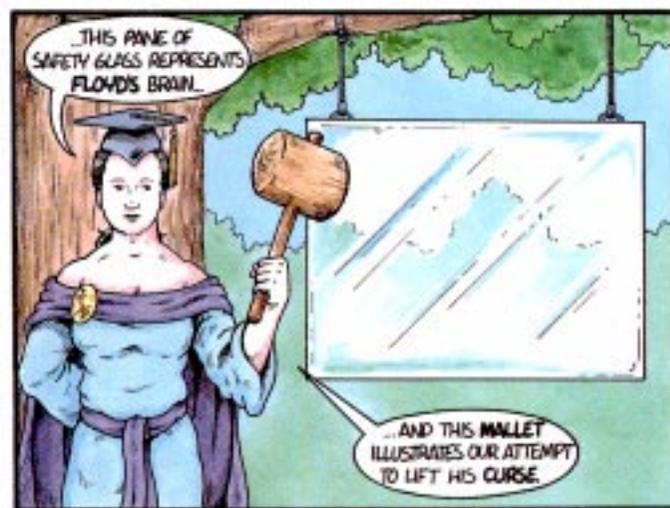
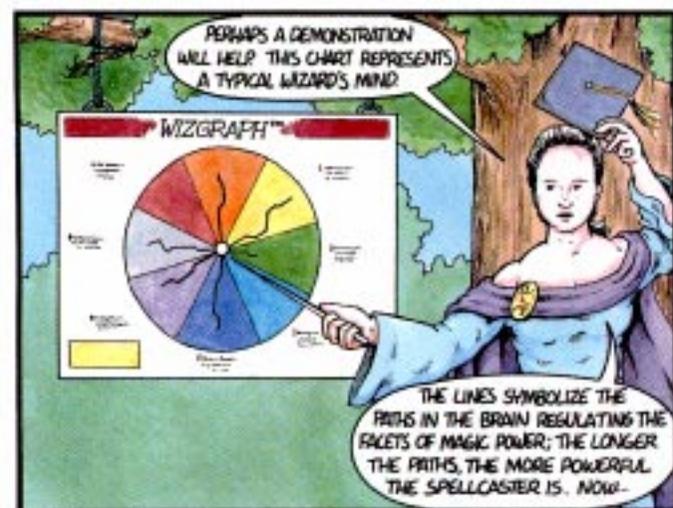
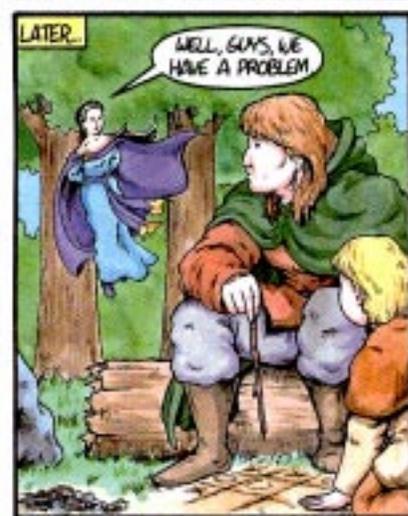
THANKS. I HATE IT WHEN MY SKINNIES GET TOO DRY.

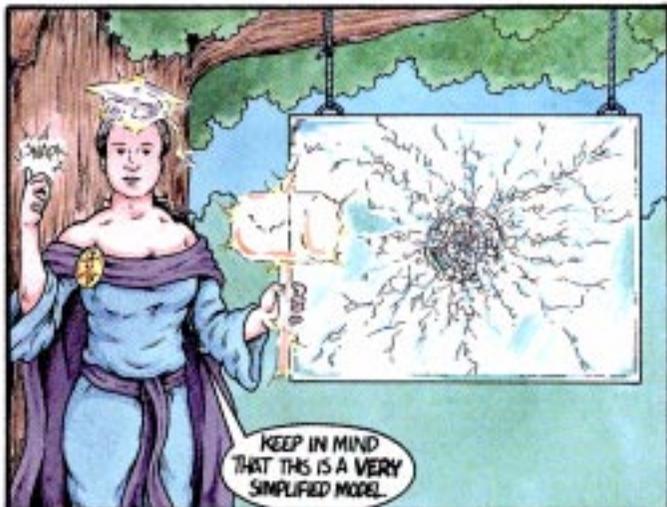
NOW YOU TWO WAIT OVER BY THE CAMPFIRE.

MEANWHILE, ME AND FLOYD WILL BE--

TUDUD TUD

WHOOOMF





QUITE SO, CHAUNCK! IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE'VE HAD HUMANS AND CHIPS.

I DO HOPE WE'RE NOT OUT OF HETZHUH!

MEANWHILE, ANOTHER THREAT BEGINS TO LOOM...

I THINK WE'VE MILKED ALL OF THE FORM ENGRAMS WE'RE GOING TO GET FROM THIS MORTAL...

...HER BRAIN IS JUST ABOUT READY FOR THE SALAD BOWL.

NOW I CAN ONLY BRING A HIVE'S WORTH OF WARRIORS BEFORE OUR MEAGER GATE COLLAPSES.

SIGH... DELAYS.

AT LEAST I WAS ABLE TO GIVE FORM TO YOU FOUR. THE VILLAGE WILL HAVE TO DO FOR THE REST OF THE TROOPS.

SO DUE TO OUR LACK OF FORCES, YOU WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR RECRUITING INDIGENOUS RACES TO OUR CAUSE.

REVADAC: SEEK OUT THE ORCS, GOBLINS AND OTHER DENIZENS OF THE DARK.

WYRME: GO TO THE GREAT BEASTS THAT MAKE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE AND ADD THEIR POWER TO OUR NUMBERS.

NOCTHA: FIND US ALLIES AMONG THE HUMANIDS WHO CALL THEMSELVES CIVILIZED. THERE ARE SURE TO BE MALCONTENTS AMONG THEM.

SYMPSONZ: YOU, YOU FRIGHTEN EVEN ME. YOU'RE MY SECOND-IN-COMMAND.

YES, ACHERON

YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS! NOW GO!

ALL RIGHT. TIME TO RAISE AN ARMY!

WHAT GET ALONG, LITTLE PROTO FORMS!

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ENHANCE YOUR DECK.



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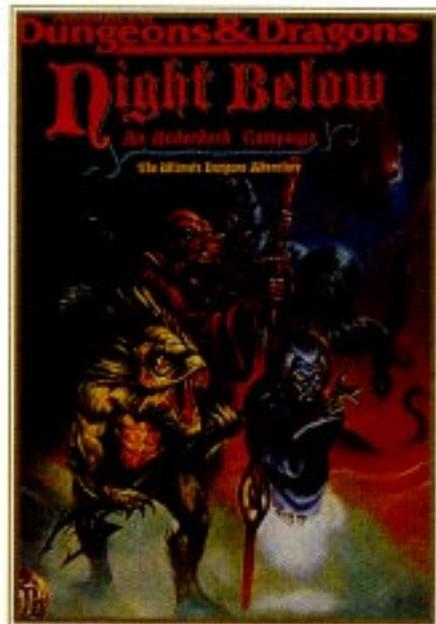
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Role-Playing

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Night Below

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game supplement

Three 64-page softcover books, one eight-page MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™ booklet, eight reference cards, 16 player handout sheets, three 21"x32" double-sided map sheets, boxed

TSR, Inc. \$30

Design: Carl Sargent

Editing: John D. Rateliff

Illustrations: Arnie Swekel, Glen Michael Angus, David Trampier, and Erol Otus

Cover: Jeff Easley

Undermountain: the

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game supplement

32-page softcover book

TSR, Inc. \$8

Design: Steven E. Schend

Editing: Bill Olmesdahl

Illustrations: Earl Geier

Cover: Alan Pollack

Ask an AD&D® game veteran about dungeon crawls, and he'll probably dismiss them as the role-playing equivalent of training wheels, useful for teaching the fundamentals, but best set-aside when you're ready to join the grown-ups. What mature role-player, after all, wants to wander around a labyrinth created by somebody with the architectural acumen of a pre-schooler? Who wants to run a gauntlet of two-dimensional adversaries whose only purpose in life is to guard the rooms they happen to occupy?

Any jerk can design a role-playing adventure. Or at least, every jerk seems to think he can. That should be evident to anyone who's ever suffered through a hastily assembled scenario barfed up by a lackadaisical publisher or the amateur hour effort of an idea-deficient friend. But a *quality* adventure, now that's a different kettle of cocoa. Quality adventures require intelligent plots, themes, and encounters, of which there is a chronically short supply.

But I've dug up some good ones for you this month, including a couple of classy dungeon crawls and a few first-rate anthologies. As for the design teams, there's not a jerk in the bunch. Uh, as far as I know.

Role-playing games' rating



Not recommended

May be useful



Fair

Good



Excellent

The BEST!



I maintain, however, that the dungeon crawl gets a bad rap for the wrong reasons. There's nothing inherently wrong with the concept. In most cases, it's the execution that's awful. An experienced designer doesn't have to knock himself out to whip up a dungeon crawl; sprinkle a few monsters, death traps, and treasures over a crossword puzzle grid and — ta daaa! — instant adventure. In other words, because dungeon crawls are easy to design, they're easy to design badly. No wonder, then, that the typical crawl is about as exciting as a stroll through a shopping mall.

Which brings us to *Night Below*, a lavish boxed set that transforms the lowly dungeon crawl into a spectacle of jaw-dropping proportions. Ace designer Carl Sargent gives a virtuoso performance, on par with his criminally underrated *From the Ashes* set for the GREYHAWK® setting (which had the misfortune to be released in 1992, when GREYHAWK was gasping for air). Demonstrating a remarkable flair for style and pacing, Sargent has concocted an adventure that eats up several years of game time, taking the PCs from level 1 all the way to level 10. In real time, he promises hundreds of hours of play, and he's not kidding. My group's been playing *Night Below* on and off for several months, and the end's still not in sight.

An adventure this ambitious deserves an opulent presentation, and TSR comes through with its most impressive package since 1993's *Dragon Mountain*. Three 63-page books, complete with color covers and evocative black-and-white illustrations, divide the campaign into manageable chunks. The introductory material includes a streamlined synopsis of the entire adventure, some smart staging tips, and a rules section that addresses a host of potential problems. It suggests, for instance, that the DM treat certain mental powers as magical rather than psionic, excellent advice in the context of an adventure this complex. Sargent's facility at the keyboard results in clutter-free text, seasoned with memorable images: clusters of spiky stalagmites known as Crab Petals, a yellow and white cavern called the Poached Egg Chamber. The player hand-outs, two dozen in all, feature an assortment of cryptic sketches and journal entries, some of them downright creepy ("Some creatures from another plane are here," reads one of the entries. "We do not know what they are..."). Only the poster maps disappoint, perfunctory outlines of cave systems devoid of interesting terrain. With a shortage of dead ends and multiple pathways — not to mention the absence of geysers, sinkholes, and other geologic obstacles — *Night Below* doesn't make for much of a maze.

The plot centers on the PCs' efforts to thwart a takeover of the surface realms by a cadre of nasty subterraneans — who, by the way, I can't name without giving away a nifty surprise. Book One, titled "The Evils of Haranshire," opens with a series of mysterious kidnappings and introduces the party to an "evil death cult (as opposed to, I guess, a benevolent death cult). Though clever touches abound — a ferocious albino eel the size of a school bus, goblinoid versions of Beavis and Butt-head — it's the weakest of the three books, mainly due to the bland rural setting and the inescapable feeling that it's all a warm-up for the goodies yet to come. Book Two, "Perils of the Underdark," is pure dungeon, an underground network of coiling passages packed with

foul-tempered creeps. Book Three, "The Sunless Sea," is a knock-out, a magic-drenched free-for-all featuring a tidal wave of supernatural thugs and a breathtaking climax.

But what pushes *Night Below* over the top isn't the sturdy plot, but the encounters, a blizzard of imaginative hazards guaranteed to dazzle the most jaded players. Some samples: On a beach of gems stands an 8'-tall statue of an elf clutching a blue stone that radiates necromantic magic; a pair of cyclopean monstrosities lurk nearby. Elsewhere, a chamber door conceals a magical ice blast, an acid bomb, and a squadron of killer gnomes. Should the party disturb a treasure-filled coffin in a lich's chamber, they'll activate a bronze chandelier that sprays them with *lightning bolts* and *magic missiles*. Admittedly, a few of the encounters could've used more development; sometimes, Sargent simply plops a monster in a room and forgoes the details, forcing the DM to come up with the monsters personality and tactics. Note, too, that the showdown at the end of Book Three is exceedingly dangerous. My group hasn't gotten there yet — I want to make sure they're at or near 10th level to give them a fighting chance — and I don't expect them all to survive once they do. But I have a feeling they'll agree that an adventure this mind-blowing is worth a few casualties.

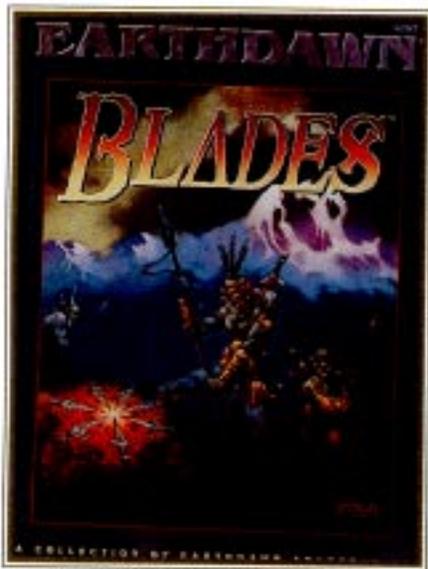
Those not up to the demands of *Night Below* but still hungry for a quality crawl can feast on *Undermountain: The Lost Level*. An adventure of modest ambition, *The Lost Level* wants only to bludgeon your PCs until they collapse, then kick 'em when they try to get up. The dungeon itself has something to do with Mellarikyn dwarves, sacred burial grounds, and a dilapidated temple, but who cares? What counts is the potential for bodily harm. Well, stock up on bandages, brother, because exploring *The Lost Level* is like diving into a pool of razor blades. I count at least two dozen exquisitely cool ways to bite the dust, ranging from crawling claw strangulation to orb beholder electrocution. To give the PCs a break between bloodbaths, designer Steven Schend throws in some tricky brain teasers, like a chamber with wall-to-wall mirrors (good luck finding the exit). And what to do about that ghostly woman at the end of the 100-foot hall? Hit her with a *fireball*? A *lightning bolt* maybe? Sorry. The hall is magic-dead. And by golly, here comes the ghost . . .



By Dana Atnip

Sure, *Lost Level* reads like an antique; kill the references to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting and it could've been published in the '70s. Sure, instead of building to memorable climax, it just sort of stops. And sure, a diet of crawls this goofy will stunt your growth. So will a diet of cotton candy. But there's nothing wrong with a little cotton candy every now and then.

Evaluation: If you're the kind of guy who thinks dungeon crawls are dumb, *Night Below* probably won't change your mind. Though Sargent insists otherwise, *Night Below* is essentially a hack-n'-slash extravaganza. But it's *smart* hack-n'-slash, requiring tactical expertise and an aptitude for negotiation, not to mention a good memory to keep track of where the heck you are. Less rewarding but still a kick, *Undermountain: the Lost Level* is old-school AD&D at its best, ideal for PCs who prefer to think with their swords. Neither *Night Below* nor *Lost Level* is what you'd call sophisticated. They're training wheels. But they're training wheels with solid gold spokes.



Blades

*Earthdawn** game supplement

104-page softcover book

FASA Corporation \$15

Design: Louis J. Prosperi, Robin D. Laws, Sam Witt, Teeuwynn Woodruff, Nicole Lindroos Frein, and Diane Piron-Gelman

Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Kent Burles and John Dollar

Cover: Steve Bryant



Super Tuesday

*Shadowrun** game supplement

112-page softcover book

FASA Corporation \$15

Design: Stephen Kenson with Tom Dowd

Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Tom Baxa, Peter Bergting, Kevin Long, and Karl Waller

Cover: Jim Nelson



Classic Adventures: Volume Three

Star Wars game supplement

128-page softcover book

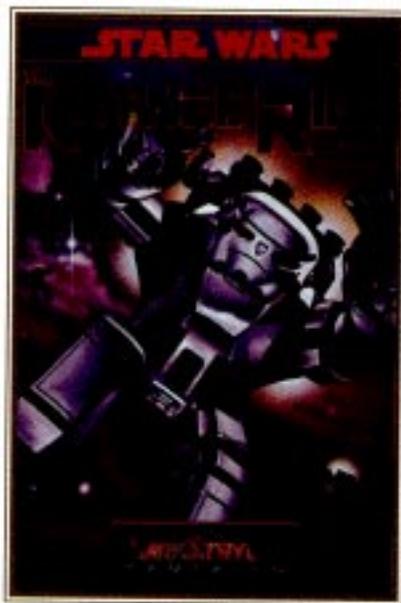
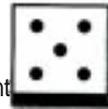
West End Games \$18

Design: Ray Winninger, Michael Nystul, Bill Slavicsek, and Daniel Greenburg with Eric S. Trautmann

Editing: Greg Gorden, Paul Murphy, Bill Slavicsek, C.J. Tramontana, and Eric S. Trautmann

Illustrations: Rosaria J. Baldari, Tim Bobko, Tim Eldred, Paul Jaquays, John Paul Lona, Lucasfilm Ltd., Mike Manley, Allen Nunis, Brian Schomburg, and Mike Vilardi

Cover: Tim Bobko



The Kathol Rift

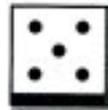
*Star Wars** game supplement

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West End Games \$15

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Editing: Eric S. Trautmann



Illustrations: Storn Cook, Jordi Ensign, Christopher J. Trevas, Christina Wald, and Mike Vilardi

Cover: Doug Shuler

Of course, not every player has the patience or attention span necessary for a *Night Below* or, for that matter, a *Lost Level*. For them, an adventure anthology — a collection of single-session scenarios geared to the same game system — might be a better alternative. Not all anthologies, however, are created equal, and most of them — how to put this? — well, most of them stink. Odor tends to be generated for three reasons:

1. Typically, an adventure anthology compiles the efforts of several designers. Because some designers are terrific and some are terrible, it's no wonder that anthologies tend to be inconsistent.

2. The limited amount of space in a short scenario doesn't give a designer much room to goof off. Every encounter, character, and plot twist has to count. One misstep can send the whole thing over a cliff.

3. Because anthologies often lack a cohesive style or theme, they're hard to fit into an on-going campaign. The first scenario might be funny and set in a swamp. The next might be serious and set in a city. Getting from funny to serious and from swamp to city requires planning and effort — and ironing out the continuity isn't every gamemaster's idea of a good time.

Once in a while, though, an anthology comes along that transcends the limitations of the format. *Blades* is not only the best-ever anthology for *Earthdawn*, it's among the best-ever fantasy anthologies, period. True, several designers had a hand in *Blades*, but they're some of FASA's top dogs. Louis Prosperi, for instance, was one of the architects of the original *Earthdawn* rulebook; Robin Laws cooked up the excellent *Parlath: The Lost City* boxed set. Considering the team's experience, it's no surprise that the characters, encounters, and other basics are handled with effortless aplomb. Best of all, a common theme unites the five scenarios: the search for the Key Knowledge of a set of magical daggers from the ancient ork kingdom of Cara Fahd. The theme is presented in such a way that the adventures can be dropped into just about any campaign with a minimum of fuss.

Settings range from the jungles of Liaj to the rugged Tylon Mountains; regard-

less of the locale, the tone remains grim, the dangers ever-present. "Bond Breaker," the opener, features a memorable wedding and an incendiary tribal rivalry. Spirits abound in "Crave Wisdom," while "A Traitor's Fate" sends the party into a tomb for a confrontation with a decidedly ungrateful undead. As the adventures unfold and the origin of the daggers become clear, the players will find themselves squirming in their seats. And rightfully so; unlocking the secrets of the daggers not only leads to an explosive climax (in the "Pure Liquids" finale), but teaches a powerful lesson about corruption.

The **Super Tuesday Shadowrun** anthology, another first-rate FASA production, benefits from an irresistible premise: the election campaign for the United Canadian and American States. A presidential candidate, such as Democrat Arthur Vogel (an Ontario dwarf) or Independent Dunkelzahn (a 7,000-year-old dragon), serves as a key player in each of the five breezy adventures. Stephen Kenson — who wrote 'em all — has an appealingly light touch, as evidenced by the off-the-wall commentary from the Macmillan Group TV show ("I think Maria underestimates Dunkelzahn's popularity, Tom. The dragon is drawing a lot of attention from the media ..."). Among the highlights: "Political Poison," which centers on a toxic shaman's grudge against candidate Vogel, and the delightful "Casualties of War," a rescue mission set in Bug City. **Super Tuesday** doesn't scale the heights of **Blades** — the routine mystery "Strange Attraction" fails to engage, the virtual reality of "Dry Run" is insufficiently surreal — it's a must for Shadowrunners with a sense of humor.

Now let's turn our attention to space opera and look at a couple of recent collections representing the dark side and light side of the *Star Wars* universe. **Kathol Rift**, the dark one, continues on the gloomy, apocalyptic course charted in the *DarkStryder* campaign box (reviewed in *DRAGON*® Magazine issue #230). As in *DarkStryder*, the PCs of **Kathol Rift** face death at every turn. The Rift itself, a vast expanse of the galaxy comprised of volatile gas, is a nightmare locale; within the Rift, weapon ranges are halved, ships are pounded by radiation vortexes, and space travelers are subject to nausea and hallucinations. Each of the five scenarios highlights a new crisis: food shortages in "Harm's Way," a mutiny in "Rogue Elements," a

deadly alien construct in "Waystation." Despite a few underdeveloped encounters and the uneven tone (a consequence, I presume, of the number of designers involved), it's a solid collection. Familiarity with the *DarkStryder* box is mandatory, however, as is a tolerance for dead PCs.

Classic Adventures, the light one, repackages a trio of scenarios from the Jurassic Age of the *Star Wars* game — that is, the era of the First Edition. I can't say I was a fan of the first two **Classic Adventures** volumes; the scenarios struck me as hopelessly dated, acceptable in their day but unworthy of reprinting. But Volume Three hits the jackpot, serving up three of the best Jurassic scenarios and updating them to the Second Edition rules. A brilliantly staged pirate raid highlights "Riders of the Maelstrom." "Death in the Undercity," a tricky whodunit, takes place on a mining outpost plagued by sabotage. "Tatooine Manhunt," the stand-out, sends the party on a search for a presumed-dead hero in the nooks and crannies of Mos Eisley, home of the infamous cantina from the *Star Wars: A New Hope* film. All are fast-paced, action-intensive adventures set in the years between *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. This time, "classic" means just that.

Evaluation: Warning: these anthologies resist translation into different systems; you can't, for instance, adapt **Blades** to AD&D without an inordinate amount of effort. And except for the entry-level **Classic Adventures**, they're best-suited for experienced players. Otherwise, forget about holding your nose. There's not a stinker in the bunch.

Short and sweet

PLAYER'S OPTION™ Spells and Magic, by Richard Baker. TSR, Inc., \$22.

The final volume in the **PLAYER'S OPTION** series turns the spotlight on spellcasters and transforms them into AD&D's most formidable characters. Think I'm kidding? Enhanced wizards can acquire spell immunities, followers, and priest abilities. Souped-up priests can learn to commune with nature spirits, speak secret languages, and backstab like thieves. And when they're not attracting followers or perfecting backstabs, these wizards and priests can tinker with dozens of fanciful new spells, like *trollish fortitude* (the caster regenerates damage and ignores dismemberment) and *righteous wrath of the faithful*

(divine madness that improves fighting skills). Yep, you can live without all this. But you may not want to, especially after you get a load of the Hit Location Table, which lets you know exactly what happens when you splatter a victim with *Melf's acid arrow*. (His face dissolves. Or — gulp — worse.)

Mirkwood, by John David Ruemmler, Peter Fenlon Jr., and Susan Tyler Hitchcock. Iron Crown Enterprises, \$25.

Another fine addition to Iron Crown's "Realms of Middle-earth" series (reviewed in *DRAGON* Magazine issue #229), **Mirkwood** looks at one of the most treacherous regions in the Tolkien mythos, home to mountain bats, fell beats, and giant spiders. As in the previous volumes, the book presents a mountain of information about the region's history and culture. A fascinating read, it's essential for fans of the *Middle-earth Role-Playing Game** game and hobbits of all persuasions.

GURPS Places of Mystery, by Phil Masters and Alison Brooks. Steve Jackson Games, \$18.

This ambitious supplement for the **GURPS*** game examines exotic locales from around the world, sizing up their potential for fantasy adventures. The itinerary includes Africa, the British Isles, and the Far East, with special attention paid to Stonehenge and Atlantis. Mostly, the designers summarize material from historical and literary sources; for instance, the Pyramids chapter features a capsule history of ancient Egypt, a floor plan of the Luxor temple, and the legend of Tutankhamun's curse. True, enterprising gamemasters could dig most of this out of the local library. But for those without access to the right books — or who've misplaced their library cards — it's a useful reference.

The Book of sigils, by Anthony Savile with Edward Bolme, Mark Schumann, Michael Pondsmith, and Michael MacDonald. R. Talsorian Games, \$17.

The Lost Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, by Edward Bolme with Mark Schumann and Michael Pondsmith. R. Talsorian Games, \$17.

One thumb's up and one thumb's down to this pair of sourcebooks for the *Castle Falkenstein** game. Thumb's up to **The Book of Sigils**, which describes the Sorcerous Orders of New Europa in tantalizing detail. Players interested in Victorian wizardry should have a ball

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with the phantom carriages conjured by the Foursquare of the Red Tower and the alchemical recipes developed by the Way of Liquid Breath. But thumb's down to *Lost Notebooks*, a collection of bizarre inventions (healing devices, weather controllers) that's beautiful to behold but not particularly useful. Nor is it much fun to read, thanks to authentic-sounding but stilted writing. ("It is now three days later, and by my observations, which you must know are most careful and studious, I have discerned indeed that the magickal lines are present once more in as great a number as any which I beheld previously.") Let Leonardo rest in peace, and go for a different Castle book instead; I recommend *Steam Age*.

Juicer Uprising, by C.J. Carella. Palladium Books, \$17.

No, this isn't about a revolution of kitchen appliances. It's an elaborate treatise on one of the Rifts* game's most popular character classes. The Juicer is one part soldier, one part psychopath who generally finds it easier to exterminate strangers than endure their stupid questions. Hardcore players should relish the new variants (Bio-Wizard Juicer, Juicer Gladiator) and weapons (pepper-box laser, napalm flame thrower). *Uprising*, however, provides more Juicer info than a casual *Rift-er* like me will ever need. But I have to admit, I loved the sports section. Anyone for deadball?

Warriors of the Apocalypse, by Tom Byrd, Ken Cliffe, Ed Hall, Todd Mayville, Ethan Skemp, Mike Tinney, and Pocahontas Firestein van Elfinburg della Escondido. White Wolf Game Studio, \$15.

A good idea, well-executed, **Warriors of the Apocalypse** builds a bridge between the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse** role-playing game and the *Rage** collectible card game. The 128-page, sumptuously illustrated book provides RPG statistics for virtually every character from *Rage*, as well as the *Umbra*, *Wyrms*, and *War of the Amazon* expansions. Thus, **Warriors of the Apocalypse** enables *Rage* Garou to be used in *Werewolf*. My initial reaction was to page through the book to see how many of these guys I had in my *Rage* collection, then run to the store and buy more boosters to fill in the gaps. Hmm . . . that couldn't possibly be what White Wolf had in mind, could it?

Uncaged: Faces of Sigil, by R.V. Vallese. TSR, Inc., \$20.

Having read every single word of every single supplement for the PLANESCAPE™ setting, I can say categorically that this Who's Who of Sigil — a compendium of more than 40 planar personalities complete with game stats and background notes — is the most entertaining entry to date. I can't say categorically that R.V. Vallese is TSR's most accomplished writer, but darned if I can think of a better one. Want proof? Here's how Vallese describes the gaze of bladeling Adamok Ebon: "[She] stares berks straight in the peepers when she's talking to them, though her own icy clear eyes of amethyst quartz register not a flicker of emotion." From the memoirs of pickpocket Neggis Ham: "I'd cooled my wings in the City Court's holding pens since antipeak two nights before, just waitin' to hear my name so's I could go before the judge, pony up my fine, and get back to peeling the Clueless outside o' Chirper's." I could quote this stuff all day. Instead, I'll urge you to snag this gem, even if you have to beg, borrow, or peel it.

Cryptic Campaigns, by Steven Brown and Mike Montesa with Greg Farshtey. West End Games, \$15.

What scares me most about this supplement for *The World of Tales from the Crypt*™ setting (for the *Masterbook** game) are statements like these: "[The game] is more about salvation than it is about damnation . . . Virtue is rewarded and evil is punished . . . It is a game about the human condition . . ." That doesn't sound like the Crypt Keeper to me. That sounds like a — shudder — literature professor. **Cryptic Campaigns** offers a plethora of thoughtful tips for staging adventures: employ vivid imagery, use flashbacks judiciously, foreshadow significant events. But "thoughtful" isn't the first adjective that comes to mind when I think of *Tales from the Crypt*. Where's the friskiness, the freewheeling anarchy that distinguishes *Crypt* from every other horror game? And what happened to the puns? Though **Cryptic Campaigns** succeeds as a book of advice (with a pretty good adventure thrown in for good measure), I'm not sure every role-slayer will need it in his diebrary.

Tarot, by Nicky Rea and Jackie Cassada with Stewart MacWilliam, Richard Thomas, and Sam Chupp. White Wolf Game Studio, \$25.

One thing's for sure: this ain't your grandma's tarot deck. The gorgeous cards, packaged in a handsome violet box containing a full-color 128-page guidebook, are regulation size and bear many of the traditional tarot symbols, such as The Fool and The Hierophant. But for the most part, they've been modernized to conform to the Gothic-Punk stylings of White Wolf's "World of Darkness" setting. Therefore, instead of The Ace of Pentacles and The Page of Cups, we get The Queen of Questing and The Knight of Primordials. The striking illustrations include a hooded motorcycle rider surrounded by giant candles, and a weirdo in a top hat eyeballing a cup made from a human skull. Designed as a play-aid for the *Mage: The Ascension** game, the cards can be used to generate subplots and nonplayer character traits. White Wolf cautions that "this deck is not intended for true readings. It is not a starter deck for would-be magicians . . ." In other words, if you're a burgeoning fortune-teller, you'll have to stick with tea leaves.

Jungle Camo 12mm Speckled Dice. Chessex Mfg., \$4 (12 dice per set).

As a rule, I'm indifferent to dice, operating under the assumption that if you've tossed one, you've tossed 'em all. But these gorgeous six-siders, with bright red pips and faces the color of jungle fatigues, are the first I've seen in a long time that I'd break down and buy. Because they look good enough to eat, I wouldn't advise getting them if you've got a toddler around the house. Unless, of course, you flat-but don't like the kid. (Information: Chessex Mfg., 2990 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702.



Rick Swan is the author of The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games (St. Martin's Press). You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply.

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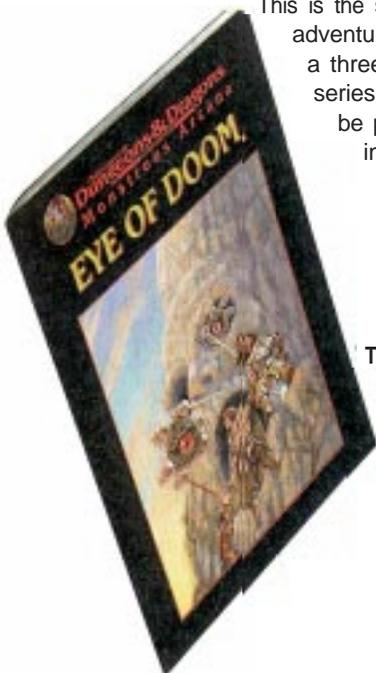
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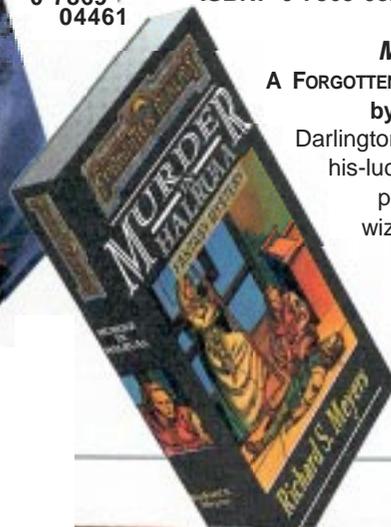
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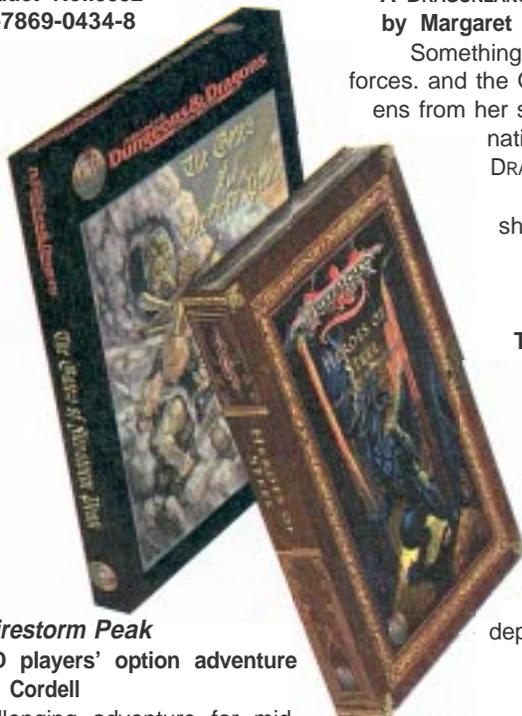
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Clack

Continued from page 120

*Throwing Stones** game) bears even remote similarity to the others.

Boardgames and miniatures: Mayfair Games released several English-language editions of popular German board games, including the superb *Settlers of Catan** game. A new company in Berkeley, Strange Magic Games, released its ambitious *Material World** historical strategy game, where European imperial powers carve up and loot the world. Steve Jackson Games released its *Knightmare Chess** game, a set of cards played in conjunction with a game of chess to create strange effects. *Knightmare* is licensed from a French original published over a decade ago.

Miniatures gamers got new "Silver and Steel" figures from Ral Partha. Iron Crown's *Silent Death* miniatures game, now in a new edition, bids fair to become a major hit alongside FASA's *Battletech** game and the many Games Workshop games.

GEN CON events and announcements

Wizards of the Coast had a large and stylish booth at the con. For its Saturday night party (co-sponsored with White Wolf), WotC erected a huge tent in the Hyatt parking lot, with lots of finger food and ear-splitting techno music. Attendance was terrific. TSR offered its annual invitation-only Designer's Party in a Hyatt meeting room on Friday night — a smaller, less lavish, and more sedate affair, but at least attendees escaped tinnitus.

To mark the imminent release of the X-Files card game, designed by NXT Games and published by U.S. Playing Cards, USPC rented a ballroom at the plush Pfister Hotel and distributed T-shirts and press kits to invited attendees.

TSR announced the ALTERNITY™ game, its big 1997 science-fiction role-playing system. Breaking a two-year tradition, there was no assault on the TSR Castle this year.

Chaosium held its quadrennial "Cthulhu for President" rally, in conjunction with the release of this year's election kit for the Lovecraftian monster's political campaign. ("Why vote for the

lesser evil?") Now flush with cash from the great success of its *Mythos** card game, Chaosium has acquired rights to do a trading card game based on the megahit computer game Doom.

Steve Jackson Games announced (again) that the long-delayed *In Nomine** RPG will really, truly appear this November.

West End Games dropped hints that it is pursuing a couple of major licenses. "I can't tell you what they are yet," said one staffer, as he rubbed at a spot on his X-Files T-shirt.

Notes from the field

Hogshead Publishing, which claims it is "currently the largest publisher of RPGs in Great Britain" — it has one employee, founder James Wallis — has brought Games Workshop's *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** game back into print, republished some of its best supplements, and brought out the first new *WFRP* adventure in years, *Dying of the Light*. But now Hogshead has lost two other items in its stable: Rights to the long-planned *Bugtown RPG**, based on *Those Annoying Post Brothers* and other comics by Matt Howarth, have gone to Erick Wujcik of Phage Press, designer and publisher of the *Amber Diceless Roleplaying** game.

Hogshead has also passed its journal *Interactive Fantasy* to *IF* editor Andrew Rilstone, starting with issue #5. *IF*, which takes an analytical and quasi-scholarly approach to role-playing games, will now be sold primarily by subscription. (Contact: *Interactive Fantasy* 2 Sainfoin Road, London SW17 8EP, Great Britain; if@aslan.demon.co.uk)

On July 19th the London newspaper *The Independent* featured a front-page report from an astronomers' convention in Birmingham. In discussing the psychological safeguards astronauts would need for extended space travel, Dr. JoAnna Wood suggested a crew should be "encouraged to play co-operative games, such as [the D&D® game], to reduce stress, boredom, anxiety, and depression." In posting a summary of this story to the Internet, game designer Phil Masters wondered, "What happens

when a d4 caltrop gets in the life-support feed? Or when, somewhere around the two-million-mile mark, [one player] turns out to be a scene-stealing power gamer? I think that this demands more research. Grant applications, anyone?"



Freelance game designer Allen Varney's first published novel, the *DRAGON DICE* novel *Cast of Fate*, has pages drilled to hold a *Dragonslayer* die. He's already fired of jokes about "holes in the plot." Send news to APVarney@aol.com.

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The Current Clack

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GEN CON® Game Fair draws

At the 29th annual GEN CON Game Fair in Milwaukee, WI (Aug. 7-11), the role-playing hobby showed strength and renewed vigor. The packed Exhibit Hall of the MECCA convention center offered new products and merchandise from over 200 publishers, retailers, artists, and craftspeople. Scheduled game sessions involved nearly 100 RPGs, 40 card and dice games, a full slate of RPGA® Network events, 50 board games, 25 historical war games, and 90 miniatures rules systems. The convention, sponsored by TSR, Inc., also included 150 seminars, computer gaming, a large art show, masquerade, auction, a play, live role-playing events, a miniatures painting contest, autograph sessions, entertainers, and vast tracts of open gaming tables.

The popular "Science Fiction Saturday" festival brought in actor Garrett Wang (*Star Trek: Voyager*), author Stephen Donaldson (*The Gap Cycle, Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*), and *Star Wars* novelist Timothy Zahn, as well as cast members and writers of the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* TV show. Other celebrities in attendance included Walter Koenig (*Star Trek, Babylon 5*), comic strip artist Joe Martin (*Mister Boffo*), and actors from the *X-Files* TV series.

Bursting at the seams: The GEN CON Game Fair's number of events continued rapid growth from previous years. Seminars moved to the nearby Hyatt hotel; across the street from the MECCA, Bruce Hall and its adjoining Arena are now jammed with tournament events. The hotel situation, too, grows dire; each year, Game Fair reservations fill every nearby hotel many months in advance. New convention facilities

behind MECCA are now under construction, but whether they will be ready in time for next year's convention remains unclear.

New releases at this year's show

Apologies to the publishers of new games omitted from this list; it was a big show!

The AD&D® CD-ROM Core Rules Accessory debuted at the show. TSR's David Wise carried the first copy to the TSR Castle on a black pillow, accompanied by a kilt-clad bagpiper (TSR editor Doug Stewart).

RPGs: Notable role-playing games released at the show included TSR's DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ Dramatic Adventure Game, designed by William Connors; the fourth edition of the venerable Traveller* game, now published by Imperium Games under the aegis of its original designer, Marc Miller; Pinnacle's *Deadlands: The Weird West** RPG, a horror-fantasy-historical game by Shane Hensley and Matt Forbeck; and Holistic Designs' *Fading Suns** game, a spacefaring RPG (reminiscent of Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40,000** setting) by former White Wolf Game Studio staffers Andrew Greenberg and Jeff Bridges. Both the *Deadlands* and *Fading Suns* games also have computer versions in the works. New editions of West End's *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game** and White Wolf's *Wraith** Storyteller game were popular. Gamers also showed strong interest in Chameleon Eclectic's forthcoming licensed RPG based on the TV series *Babylon 5* (the RPG is currently scheduled for October release), and in White Wolf's science fiction RPG-in-progress, Mark Rein-Hagen's *Exile** game.

Cards and dice: Trading card games, which virtually took over last year's

Game Fair, were still prominent. Licensed card games based on Monty Python & the Holy Grail, the original *Star Trek* TV series, and the *Killer Instinct* video game got their first big exposure at the con, as did *White Arcadia** card game (based on the *Changeling** RPG) and the *intriguing Dragon Storm** role-playing/card game hybrid from Black Dragon Press. A walk down any hallway led past sessions of the *Magic: The Gathering**, *Star Wars: SPELLFIRE®* and *Middle-Earth The Wizards** card games. A *hall table* demonstrating the license *Ani-Mayhem** card game drew constant crowds, for it was strategically placed near the Japanese anime viewing area. Three other card games that just missed the show — FPG's *Dark Age: Feudal Lords** game, Steve Jackson's *Dino Hunt** game, and NXT Games' licensed *X-Files** game — nonetheless drew hundreds to ongoing demos.

A supplement to TSR's DRAGON Dice™ expandable dice game, *Magestorm*, debuted at the con. The supplement features four-sided dice of a new design not the tetrahedron long known in the business, but an odd shape similar to the tiny plastic cream containers that some restaurants give with coffee. The remarkable success of the DRAGON Dice game has spawned a whole new category of customizable dice games. New at the convention was the *Chaos Progenitus** dice game by Lester Smith. *Chaos*, a fast-moving battle between multi-limbed fiends, is published by a startup company called Destination Games, owned by Smith and former TSR staffer Tim Brown. Another dice game Iron Crown Enterprises' *Dicemaster** game, just missed the con. Interestingly, none of these dice designs (including another published last year, the

Continued on page 119



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