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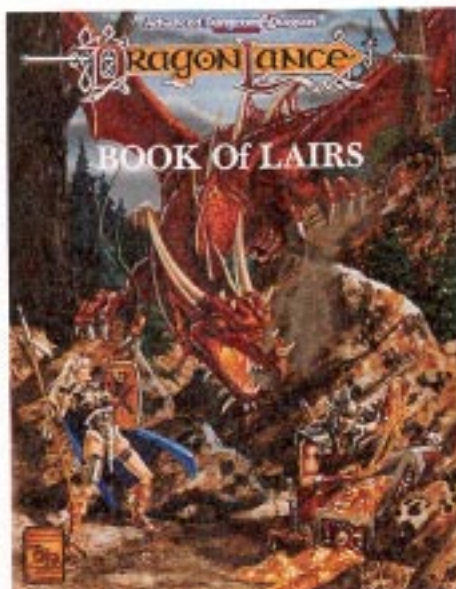
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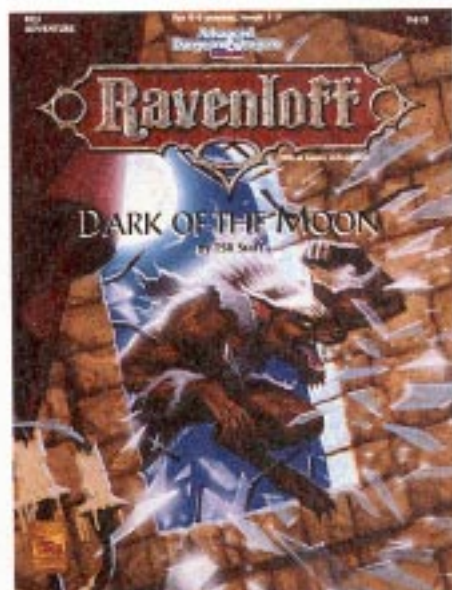
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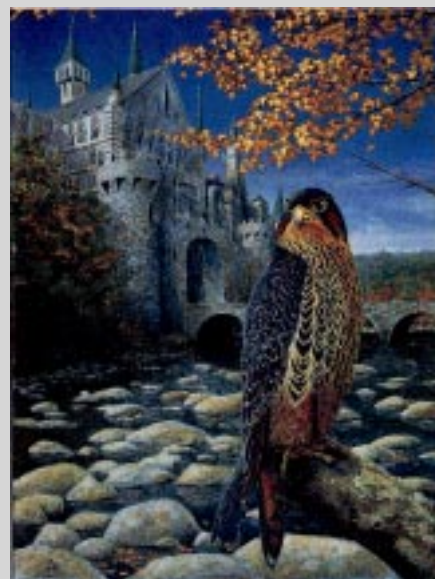
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### COVER

We discovered the painting by Mark Pool that graces this month's cover at the GEN CON® Game Fair. It's detail and majesty convinced us that it was perfect for this issue. Serendipity is a wonderful thing.

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# Letters

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In North America, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

## D&D® gamers abandoned?

Dear Dragon,

DRAGON issue #197's "Known World Gri-moire" contained the very disturbing news that the D&D® game's MYSTARA™ setting will become an AD&D® game world in 1994, and I have to voice my protest.

Why in the world is TSR making the MYSTARA setting a new campaign world for the AD&D game? Does the AD&D game need another setting?

What will D&D players do for a game world? Yes, they could use the new MYSTARA material, but all the details will have to be changed to fit the D&D rules. I suggest D&D players buy up all the currently available D&D accessories and supplements now.

It seems that TSR is neglecting the game that started the role-playing industry. By revising the MYSTARA setting, TSR is putting too much emphasis on the AD&D system. I know there are a lot of D&D players and DMs who feel the way I do. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Eric L. Artis  
U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln

*I began role-playing with the D&D system 13 years ago. Also, I edited and enjoyed Bruce Heard's D&D columns about the Known World since I came on staff four years ago. I'm a fan of the MYSTARA setting, and I'm glad that the setting will continue to receive support, regardless of the rules framework used. I don't know of any DM who uses a published game setting exactly as written. Some modifications always are made. Besides, the D&D game and AD&D 2nd Edition core rules are not so dissimilar that conversions from one to the other should unduly strain any DM worthy of the title.*

*Several innovative ideas are being applied to the "new" MYSTARA setting, not the least of which is use of audio CDs as part of the role-playing experience. The first product, designed by Jeff Grubb, is Karamaikos: Kingdom of Adventure. This boxed set will be available in August.*

## Adventures in India?

Dear Dragon,

I've always had a great interest in the culture of India. This interest was heightened by Michael J. Varhola's article on Indian weapons and armor in DRAGON issue #189 [*Rhino's Armor, Tiger's Claws*]. Now that I have Indian equipment, I'm hoping to see a campaign setting in which to use them.

Robin Dunning  
No address given

*Hmm, that sounds to me like a challenge to all the writers in our readership. We haven't accepted any more East-Indian articles, but we will certainly entertain proposals. Article possibilities include—but needn't be limited to—an East-Indian campaign setting, East-Indian spells, monsters, and magical items. Be sure to get our Writer's Guidelines before you submit any material to us. You can receive a copy of the guidelines by sending a business-sized SASE to: Writer's Guidelines, DRAGON Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.*

## A gift for storytelling

Dear Dragon,

An essay that I wrote for my freshman English course was returned to me recently with a comment from the instructor that got my attention. The comment was that I had a gift for making the reader "see" and "feel" what was happening in the essay. I had never before received such a comment, except occasionally from people I served as a DM for. I can attribute my ability only to some talent, refined over two years by acting as a DM. People used to ask me, "What do you think you're going to learn from playing a game?" It's obvious to me that I learned to tell a good story.

Kenneth I. Shirley  
Storrs CT

*Your ability to communicate well is just one of the benefits possible from playing role-playing games, Kenneth. From my playing of RPGs, I know gaming promotes cooperation, problem solving, and organizational abilities. Over the years, gaming has improved my reading ability, vocabulary, math skills, attention span, and imagination. The games have increased my interest and knowledge in mythology and history. More important than all that, gaming has brought me into*

*contact with scores of bright, friendly, clever people whom I'm proud to have met. I've made more friends through this hobby of ours than I can count. I consider several of those people among my dearest friends. In my opinion, those are some pretty good benefits from "playing a game."*

## TSR on-line

Dear Dragon,

Has TSR, Inc., ever considered putting up a BBS (bulletin-board system) that was solely for the discussion of role-playing games?

P. Matra  
New York NY

*While TSR does not have its own BBS, we do have a presence on General Electric's GENie system. The TSR Roundtable (page 125 of the system) has a bulletin board, monthly TSR guest speakers, weekly games, an on-line RPGA™ Network club, and four on-line conventions each year. The Roundtable is frequented by several TSR staff members including DRAGON's own Skis Williams (of "Sage Advice" fame) and our Fiction Editor (and the Editor of DUNGEON® Adventures), Barbara Young. GENie is accessible in most areas with only a local phone call. Call GENie's customer-service line for the number you should use: (800) 638-9636 (voice).*

## Fiction queries

Dear Dragon,

Do I need to send a query letter before submitting a piece of fantasy fiction to DRAGON Magazine? Should I send a cover letter along with the completed story? The magazine's guidelines are unclear on these points.

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## Editorial

## Responsive and accessible

Before I get to the body of this editorial, I think some introductory information may be relevant. I've been on staff for over four years, but most of you know little or nothing about me. And, since this editorial is about my personal tastes regarding this magazine, perhaps I should introduce myself.

Without boring you to tears with my life's story, here goes: I'm 27, divorced, and a lifelong resident of the state of Wisconsin. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with a degree in Communications. I grew up on *Dr. Who*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and comic books. I've been playing role-playing games (RPGs) since 1981. I still own the purple Basic D&D® box with the red-covered rulebook that opened my eyes to this wonderful hobby of ours. Among my favorite RPGs are: the AD&D® game, the GAMMA WORLD® system (first and fourth editions), Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game, West End Games' STAR WARS\* system, and White Wolf's ARS MAGICA\* game. That's enough about me—let's switch to a much more interesting topic: the magazine you hold in your hands now.

Since this is the start of the new year, now is a good time to discuss what DRAGON® Magazine is, and what it can be. Having been on staff for some time, I've some definite opinions on the matter. What I'm going to do in this column is look at what we've done with this magazine recently, and propose some thoughts on what we can do in the future. My reason for this is as follows: No matter who is listed at the top of the masthead, DRAGON Magazine truly belongs to the readers. It's the people who lay down their hard-earned money that the staff has to answer to. While it is impossible to incorporate every suggestion that every reader makes, we are swayed when a topic has a strong reader response.

One example of a strong response (both from readers and from TSR staffers) was the letter, "No Africa?" from issue #176. This letter posed the question why there was little or no published game material based on the history and myths of Africa. As far as DRAGON Magazine was concerned, we said at the time that we can't publish what writers don't submit. (Although, we did publish a large collection of African-based beasts and monsters in issue #122.) Well, since that letter was published, we've received numerous

African-based articles, and have published several. (We've got more coming up, too.) If you missed them, we ran African articles in issues #189 (two articles, in fact), #191, #195, and #200—check them out. If you haven't yet, please let us know what you thought of those articles, and whether your gaming group is making use of them.

Issue #189 is an issue I'm particularly proud of. That magazine's "Exotic cultures" theme expanded a lot of gaming horizons, and that is one of this magazine's primary goals. People pick up this magazine in order to expand their campaigns into new areas, to take their game in new directions. Whether it's an article on an exotic culture to add to your campaign, or a group of new spells or magical items for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, if an article adds enjoyment to your campaign, we have done our job.

Several new features of the magazine made their debuts in 1993. One of them, "Elminster's Notebook: debuted in issue #200, and sprang from the minds of Ed Greenwood and Gary Williams. Depicted as excerpts from Elminster's logs and diaries, this series provides useful plot hooks and characters for any fantasy campaign, not just those gamers who the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting. Give us your feedback on this recurring series.

Both the "Campaign Journal" and "Dragon Project" features were reactions to feedback we received, either from letters or from responses to the surveys we ran a while back. Campaign Journal began when readers said they wanted material on TSR's published game settings. We created the column to answer that need. Similarly, many readers requested more coverage of nonTSR games in the pages of DRAGON Magazine. Our answer was the Dragon Project. This miniseries is possible due to the cooperation the game companies we contacted gave to us. What do you think of those two columns? Let us know.

The topic of nonTSR games is one that merits further discussion. Our survey responses showed that science-fiction and horror role-playing games are quite popular with our readers. Fantasy RPGs aren't limited to only the AD&D and D&D games, either. DRAGON Magazine has always accepted well-written, imaginative articles for game systems other than those published by TSR. We'll continue to do that.

What else do we want to see? Well, I'll give a dozen broad suggestions. In no

particular order, I'd like to publish:

1. More "Ecology" articles.
2. More articles on how to be a better RPG player (such as the theme-section pieces in issue #188).
3. More articles on how to be a better game master (such as the theme articles in issue #196).
4. More articles featuring imaginative collections of spells, monsters, and magical items. (The "Bazaar of the Bizarre" in issue #200 is just the type of article I'm looking for; that article took mundane, everyday items—keys—and made them magical.)
5. More articles on popular nonTSR games.
6. More articles on painting and using miniatures in gaming.
7. More articles that detail how magic affects daily life in game-setting worlds (such as "The Enemy at the Gates" in issue #160).
8. More material that can be applied to games in general, not just one rules system (such as "Making the Most of a Module" in issue #200).
9. More races, classes, and kits for the AD&D and D&D games.
10. More "campaign based" articles: pieces that detail a relatively small area that gamers can use as a base from which adventures can be created (such as "Seeing the Sights of Skullport" in issue #172), or articles that expand campaigns into new areas (such as "The Dark Continent" in issue #189).
11. More articles on giving personalities to NPCs and villains (such as the theme articles in issue #184).
12. More articles on creating your own campaigns; or articles detailing how to customize a published game setting to your gaming group's tastes (such as the theme section in issue #175).

In other words, I'd like to publish more material that is immediately usable in gaming campaigns; material that is, in a word, accessible.

Happy New Year!

*Dale A. Donovan*

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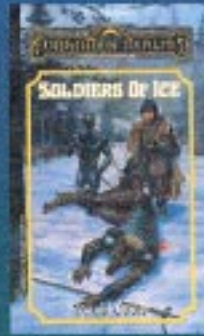
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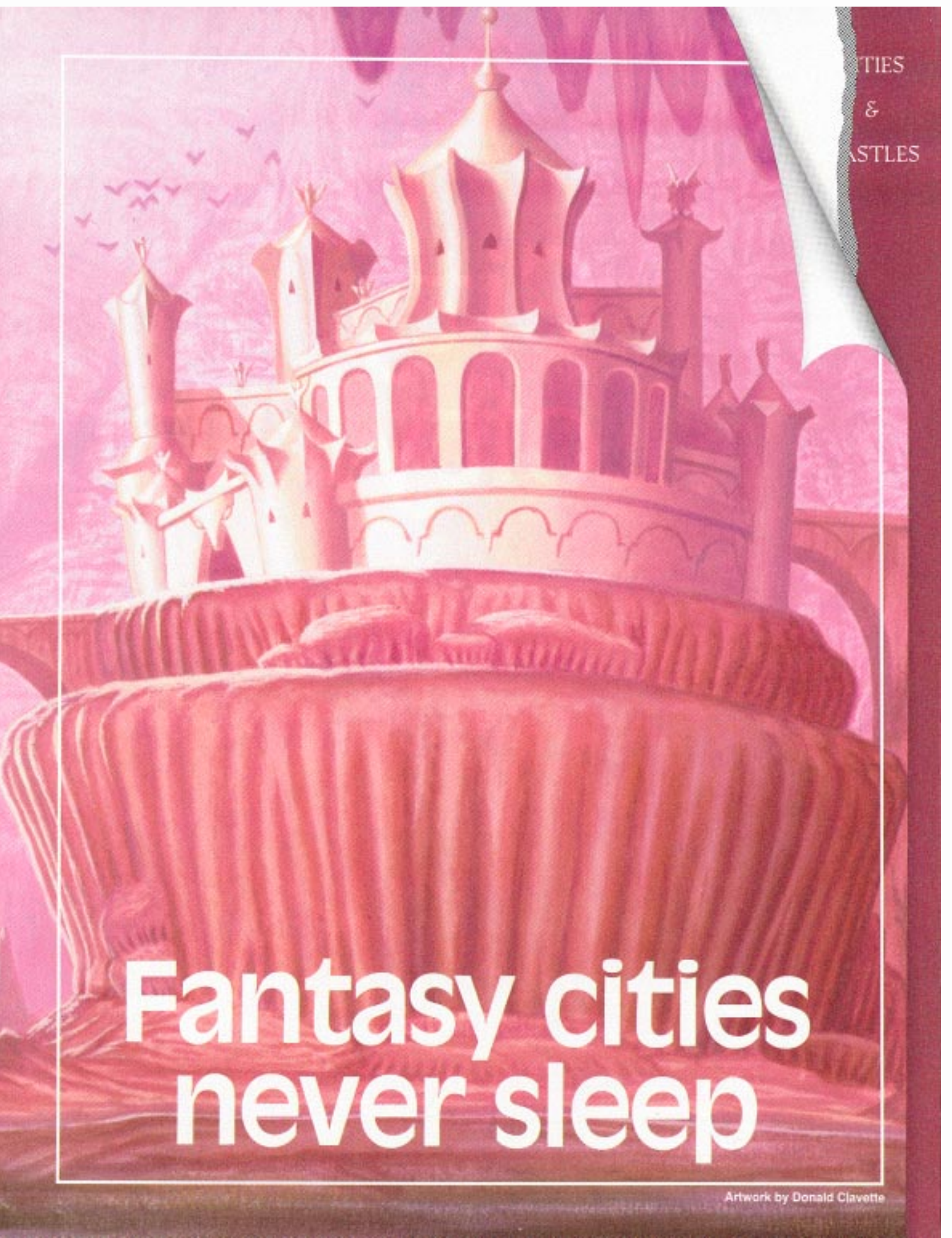
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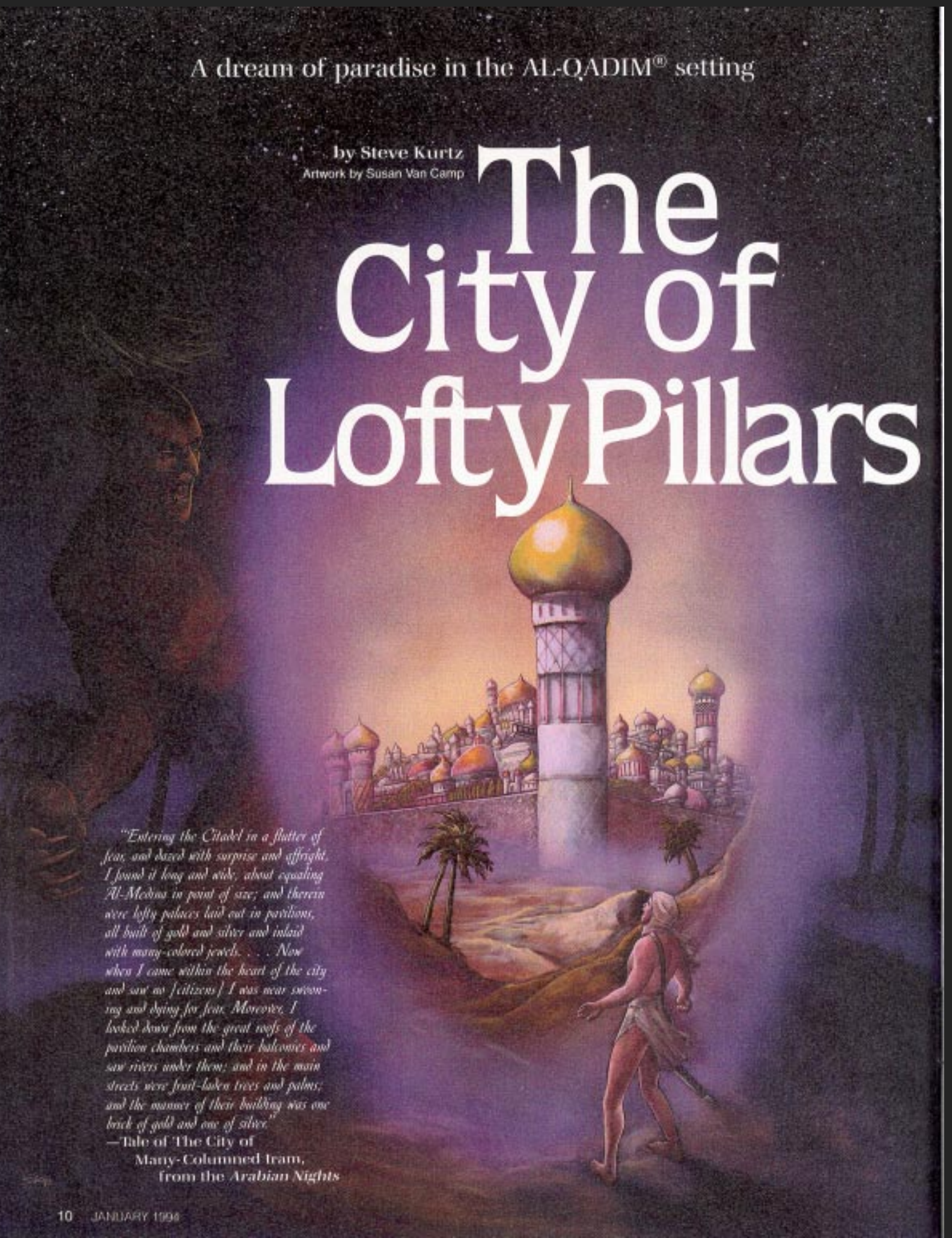
# Fantasy cities never sleep

Artwork by Donald Clavette

A dream of paradise in the AL-QADIM® setting

by Steve Kurtz  
Artwork by Susan Van Camp

# The City of Lofty Pillars

An artistic illustration by Susan Van Camp. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a simple, light-colored dress, walks across a sandy, hilly landscape. She is looking towards a distant city. The city is built on a hill and features numerous domes and minarets, some with gold-colored tops. A large, prominent minaret with a golden dome stands in the center. The sky is a mix of purple and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is painterly and evocative of a dreamlike or fantastical setting.

*"Entering the Citadel in a flutter of fear, and dazed with surprise and affright, I found it long and wide, about equalling Al-Medina in point of size; and therein were lofty palaces laid out in pavilions, all built of gold and silver and inlaid with many-colored jewels. . . . Now when I came within the heart of the city and saw no [citizens] I was near swooning and dying for fear. Moreover, I looked down from the great roofs of the pavilion chambers and their balconies and saw rivers under them; and in the main streets were fruit-laden trees and palms; and the manner of their building was one brick of gold and one of silver."*

—Tale of The City of  
Many-Columned Iram,  
from the Arabian Nights

It is said that, in the most ancient of days, a proud king named Shahraknazi the Tall, the Smile of the Gods. After returning home from his youthful adventures, Shahraknazi became dissatisfied with his own domain, which seemed bland and ordinary after all the wonders he had seen throughout Zakhara. One day, he called together his 100 most trusted sheikhs and viziers and ordered them to find the greatest architect of the enlightened world.

After a year and a day, his vassals returned with Kerbelai, the master architect of all genies. In the Sultan's throne room, Kerbelai presented his plan for a fabulous city, unparalleled in all Zakhara, surpassing even the City of Delights in its grandeur. All the architect required for his service was the king's leave to acquire materials of the highest possible quality for the project. The honor and satisfaction of building the most glorious city in Zakhara would be enough payment for the genie. The Sultan hastily accepted Kerbelai's generous proposal.

In a year and a day, the architect constructed a city beyond mortal comparison, with golden palaces supported on ruby pillars, and jeweled trees leaning over rivers of flowing milk and honey. He called the city Iram, meaning "jewel" in Jannti. After he was finished, Kerbelai presented Shahraknazi with a scroll, inscribed with the staggering cost of Iram. Upon reading the parchment, Shahraknazi laughed out loud, for the final price was far above the genie's original estimates, and quite beyond the contents of his treasury.

Shaking his head with regret, Kerbelai called his cousins among the dao and seized everyone in Shahraknazi's realm—including the king himself. To pay off his debts incurred while building Iram, Kerbelai sold the Sultan and his people into slavery in the land of the genies, where their descendants toil to this day in the vast and terrible mines of the dao.

After Shahraknazi vanished from Zakhara, Iram the Golden, the City of Lofty Pillars, also disappeared mysteriously from the face of the world. Iram has never been seen by mortals again, except in a desert

bard's songs, where jeweled trees still lean over honey streams, and high, ruby columns still glow with the rising sun.

Thus ends the sad tale of Iram, which explains how the City of Lofty Pillars was built and lost for a king's glory and pride, and why one must never laugh when dealing with the genies or their kin. Some say that the genies are still searching for the city they helped create, while others claim that they have found it already, and live there now in unparalleled delight. If the genies know where Iram lies, they have never revealed it to mortals, who shall not walk in its streets until the Destroyer of Delights, the Sunderer of Societies, comes to claim them.

### Reaching Iram

When the genies enslaved Shahraknazi, the Gods were offended, for he was a rare supporter of Enlightenment in the early, difficult years after the first Grand Caliph started the religious revolution that changed Zakhara forever. To punish the genies—especially the architect Kerbelai, who had deliberately misled Shahraknazi as to the ultimate price for his service—the Gods lifted Iram from Zakhara and placed it in a secret, mystical land.

Iram now lies in a mysterious realm of the spirit—perhaps on a demi-plane of dreams in the Ethereal mists, or in a secret pocket of reality hidden from Zakhara. The legendary city still can be reached from the Land of Fate, however, for a number of desert nomads and explorers have described seeing Iram's ruby pillars in the uncharted expanse of the wilderness. The scant number of tales vary widely, however. Some describe wandering around Iram's outer walls but never finding an entrance; others remember open city gates, admitting them to an empty city guarded by mysterious white-robed maidens.

There are a number of ways to reach the City of Lofty Pillars from Zakhara, but none of them are easy. Perhaps the most common entrance lies through a journey of the spirit, or in dreams. The most disciplined and holy men and women of the wilderness can sometimes reach Iram, seeking some sort of spiritual guidance or

revelation. After days of fasting and meditation in the forbidding heat of the desert, the City of Lofty Pillars appears to them in a vision, and the priests can talk with the elusive beings that inhabit Iram. Wounded heroes or starving travelers, stumbling and dying in the parched wastes of Zakhara, have sometimes happened across Iram and nourished themselves from the city's fabled streams and orchards. Who can say whether these visits are real or imagined? Since these travelers receive only knowledge, healing, or sustenance, there is no way to know whether their physical bodies or their winged hamas receive the benefits of visiting Iram.

It is far more difficult—but still not impossible—to reach the physical City of Lofty Pillars from the Land of Fate. A number of permanent, one-way gates still exist to Iram, established by fell, ancient sorcerers in the most secluded regions of Zakhara. These uncommon portals are almost always guarded by hideous fiends or deceiving genies, left behind to thwart pursuit into the Golden City.

Powerful heroes can reach Iram from the lands of the genies, although this is rare and difficult. The djinn arrive from the Citadel of Ice and Steel via unstable portals, which appear as a cyclones or sand storms springing up in the surrounding desert. The marid rarely visit Iram, and when they do they enter through whirlpools that suddenly appear in the city's streams and fountains, flooding its streets and plazas. Efreet from the City of Brass are common and unwelcome visitors, though they must wait for braziers or hearthfires to travel through. Only dao are barred from the city as punishment from the gods.

Finally, approximately once every decade, when the two wandering planets associated with Iram enter the Great Conjunction, Iram appears in a deserted region of Zakhara. The position of the legendary city varies with each visit, foretold and preordained by the timing of the stars and the motion of the heavens. Then—for one night only—the Realm of the Dreams brushes against the Land of Fate, and Iram the Golden may be entered and explored by the courageous.

## Inducing dreams

While some rare magical potions (such as the *potion of dreaming* from the *Land of Fate* boxed set and the sleeping potion from *Assassin Mountain* sourcebox) can artificially induce dreams that might reveal visions of Iram, the city is more often glimpsed (however briefly) by unfortunate victims of dreambliss, a potent sleep-inducing poison most common in the Free Cities, where it sells in tiny quantities for 200-500 gp per dose. The venom is available elsewhere in Zakhara for more exorbitant prices.

Victims struck by a dreambliss-coated weapon must save vs. poison to resist its potent effect. If the victim fails his saving throw, he falls into a deep, euphoric

"Sleep of Bliss" lasting 2-8 hours. The poison's onset time depends on the victim's size: S (1 round), M (1-2 rounds), L-H (2-5 rounds), or G (3-12 rounds). After waking from the poison-induced slumber, most victims remember happy, dreamlike visions that they long to re-experience.

In rich circles, indolent nobles or merchants often deliberately poison themselves with dreambliss, but the addictive poison quickly drains its victims of all wisdom (permanent loss of one point per month of repeated use) and wealth before long. The poison's effectiveness against even large creatures and monsters makes it popular among adventurers in the North. More information about dreambliss can be found in the *A Dozen and One Adventures* sourcebox.

## The realm of dreams

Iram is but a small portion of the Realm of Dreams, which consists primarily of a hauntingly beautiful wasteland, dotted with bizarre rock formations and small, hidden oases. The valley is bordered on all sides by lofty, unsurpassable mountains. All means of travel beyond these peaks is effectively blocked by terrific winds and ominous storms. Attempts to *teleport* or *plane shift* beyond the mountains fail, although a *wish* or *teleport without error* spell will launch the caster into the Ethereal plane.

Time flows strangely in Iram, compared with the rest of Zakhara. Roughly ten years pass in the Land of Fate for every year spent in the City of Lofty Pillars. The temporal shift corresponds to the ten-year cycle of the Great Conjunction, when Iram appears in Zakhara.

After leaving Iram, beings immediately revert to their natural age. For those who have spent a long time in Iram, this may prove fatal. For instance, consider a man who spends a year in the Realm of Dreams. Ten years pass in Zakhara, but the full weight of these years is only felt once the man returns to the Land of Fate.

The City of Lofty Pillars itself rests in an enchanted, bowl-shaped valley, populated chiefly by creatures of the spirit, which are drawn to its sheltering domain. The valley's primary inhabitants are the nomadic maskhi, shape-shifting beings who are deeply in tune with their physical surroundings and their own spirituality. The most gifted members of that race learn to travel between Zakhara and Iram through meditation (using the psionic talent of Dream Travel). Sometimes maskhis, sensing the desperate need of travelers in the Land of Fate, will transport other races to and from Iram, causing almost all unexplained arrivals in the City of Lofty Pillars.

## The city

**Ruler:** The most influential leader in Iram is Cha'id the Farseeing, a maskhi hakima with strange mental powers. Her wisdom is vast, her awareness of the past seems eternal, and her knowledge of the

future can be frightening. Like most maskhi, Cha'id tends to be shy and reclusive, only revealing herself when visitors try to enter Iram. She commands unquestioning respect among members of her race, and she is the leader of the Thirteen Maidens that comprise the court (see below).

**Cha'id the Farseeing** (maskhi/fP/hk/9): INT exceptional (15); AL CN; AC 2 or -3; MV 9 as animal, or 0; HD 9; hp 56; THAC0 16; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3/1-3, by weapon, or spell; SA surprise, detect truth, discern true station, detect illusions and mirages, reveal enchantments (as hakima); SD shape shifting; ML 13; SZ M; MC13; S 15, D 14, C 12, I 16, W 18 (19), Ch 17; XP 5,000. Magical items: *ring of protection* +3, *pearl of wisdom*, *rod of terror* (40 charges), *potion of human control*, *oil of obedience*, *scroll of protection from genies*. Spells: *bless*, *command* (×2), *cure light wounds* (×2), *faerie fire*, *light*, *barkskin*, *enthrall*, *hold person* (×2), *obscurement*, *withdraw*, *call lightning*, *dispel magic*, *protection from fire*, *speak with dead*, *cure serious wounds*, *protection from evil* 10' radius, *protection from lightning*, *reflecting pool*, *rain bow*.

**The Court:** Cha'id is advised by twelve allies, who make up a loosely organized body of friends and confidantes. This court is collectively known as the Thirteen Maidens. Akila the Falcon, a skilled wind mage, carries the most clout among the Maidens after her sister, Cha'id. Openly contemptuous of other species, Akila's speech is laced with riddles and threats.

**Akila the Falcon** (maskhi/fW/wm/7): INT Exceptional (15); AL CN(E); AC 5 or 0; MV 9, as animal, or 0; HD 4 + 1; hp 33; THAC0 18; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3/1-3, by weapon or spell; SA surprise, wind spells inflict +1 hp/die of damage (as wind mage); SD shape shifting, +2 bonus on saves and -2 hp/die of damage against wind attacks (as wind mage); ML 13; SZ M; MC13; S 14, D 11, C 15, I 16, W 12, Ch 16; XP 5,000. Magical items: *staff of thunder and lightning* (16 charges), *ring of avian control*, *potion of clairvoyance*. Spells: *alter normal winds* \*, *charm person*, *magic missile*, *wall of fog*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *web*, *wall against noise*\*, *slow*, *wind wall*, *wind blade*\*. Spells marked with an asterisk (\*) are from the *Arabian Adventures* book.

The only nonmaskhi among the Maidens is Razikah of the Four Winds, a kind and benevolent simurgh. Unlike the other Maidens, who prefer the animal forms of eagles, owls, and falcons, Razikah likes the shape of a brilliant golden swallow, with feathers that shine like the sun. She balances Akila's presence among the Maidens.

**Razikah of the Four Winds** (a simurgh): INT genius (17); AL LG; AC 1; MV 3, Fl 48(A); HD 10 + 10; hp 63; THAC0 11; #AT 2; Dmg 2-16/2-16; SA dazzling tail (creatures in 50' radius must save vs. magic or stand transfixed until 2-5 rounds after she folds up her tail); SD see below; SZ G (20' wingspan); ML 14; MC13; XP 10,000. Magical Abilities (at 10th level of experience, 1/round, at will): *detect invis-*

bility, know alignment, infravision, shape change (small bird or human forms only), speak with animals/monsters (birds and avian creatures only).

In the past, a few wizards and fugitives from the Land of Fate have visited the City of Lofty Pillars, though usually only for a short time. Only one has remained, a sad, decrepit old man named Yahun bin Khalid al-Hahiri, who has spent so much time in this changeless realm that were he to return to Zakhara, his body would crumble into dust within a few minutes. The former grandfather of a holy-slayer fellowship, Yahun fled to Iram to escape "retirement" by his ambitious and ruthless underlings.

**Yahun bin Khalid al-Hahiri** (hmT/hs/14): AC 2; MV 12; hp 51; #AT 5/2 (scimitar) or 1; Dmg by weapon (scimitar 1d8 +6, jambiya 1d4+1); S 11, D 15, C 12, I 17, W 16, C 14; SA specialized in scimitar, backstab -5; AL N; THAC0 14; XP 11,000. Rogue Abilities: PP 45%; OL 70%; F/RT 60%; MS 90%; HS 90%; HN 70%; CW 90%; RL 70%. Magical items: *bracers of defense* AC 2, *fez of invisibility*, *slippers of levitation*, *scimitar +4*, *jambiya +1*, +3 vs. *regenerating creatures*, *dust of sneezing and choking* (six packets remaining).

**Population:** At least the Thirteen Maidens dwell in Iram, (in addition to the reclusive Yahun). Those Maidens residing in the city's parks and gardens choose a type of bird as their animal form. They ignore uninvited visitors, *polymorphing* into their bird forms to evade contact, so the total number of their race in the vicinity is unknown.

In addition, Iram and its arid environs are inhabited by a variety of faerie creatures, including ashiras, buraq, desert centaurs, nymphs, sakina, simurgh, and, of course, the occasional genie.

**Features:** From the outside, Iram seems impregnable. Lofty onyx walls, flecked with silver and shot with veins of gold, surround the city, their polished surfaces smooth and unclimbable. They are tall and thick enough to repel a host of giants. Four sets of titanic portals lead into h-am, strong enough to withstand even a genie's fury. These massive, iron-bound gates are always closed and barred from the inside by nine sturdy beams of ironwood. Each requires an elephant's strength to budge.

The black battlements are interrupted by sixteen towers of white Marble, each 100' tall and a keep in its own right. The towers are crowned by enormous domes, covered with sheets of gold and set with jewels. Reflected sunlight makes these domed towers shine with greenish flame. At sunrise, their brilliance can be spotted for miles, burning like giant lamps,

Past its daunting defenses, Iram is a delightful paradise. Even the city streets are strewn with pearls and garnets for gravel. Wide channels, lined with gold and silver bricks, contain cool flowing water. One drink from these streams washes away all fatigue and pain. A second drink

brings a night of contented slumber. Tall, verdant palms and fruit trees stand beside these streams, ever-laden with ripened fruit, more succulent than any found in Zakhara.

Iram contains a thousand exquisite palaces, pavilions, and gazebos. Even the smallest of these tall, airy structures has a vaulted electrum roof, supported by brilliant columns of ruby and chrysolite, from which the city derives its name. The palace interiors are a fragrant delight, for they are perfumed with tiny balls of musk, ambergris, and incense embedded in their marble floors and walls. A few of these incredible palaces are even built on tall, jasper columns, soaring far above the city's fountains and gardens. Their intricate carnelian balconies lean over the streets and streams, affording an incredible view of the city.

**Products:** Aside from information, healing, and sustenance, the city's obvious riches are tempting plunder to any adventurer. Jewels hang from the trees, the palaces are lined with gold and silver, and even the humblest city garden is littered with pearls and semiprecious stones. Even if a party could devise a way to transport it back to Zakhara, the wealth of Iram vanishes if taken from the realm of dreams. Only there do such riches have substance. Magical items, however, if transported out of Iram, retain their enchantment in Zakhara,

**Forces:** The Thirteen Maidens, each a sorceress or priestess of 5th-8th level, are the most active guardians of Iram. Cha'id, the Maidens' leader, could raise a legion of maskhi and other faeries from the countryside surrounding the city. However, such a defense is a needless consideration, for who can lay siege to a city in one's dreams?

**Mosques:** Each of the major Enlightened gods (Hajama, Haku, Hakiyah, Jisan, Kor, Najm, Selan, and Zann) has a magnificent and hauntingly empty mosque dedicated to their worship.

**Lore:** Most inhabitants of Iram remain hidden to the casual observer, but few are willing residents of the city. The fugitive Yahun bin Khalid is not alone in seeking to escape some dark past or mysterious background in the Land of Fate.

Not only is the fabled city almost impossible to reach, it is even more difficult to escape. Of course, the Thirteen Maidens can send home anyone they choose, but they rarely decide to provide transport for anyone they did not summon in the first place. A number of hidden gates exist in the valley beyond the city walls, but these portals are always guarded, and lead to the genie realms of Wind, Sea, and Fire, as well as to the Land of Fate. Once one has spent enough time in the Realm of Dreams, however, all that a return to Zakhara brings is an immediate, withering death from old age.

## Adventure hooks

The vast, impenetrable wilderness of Zakhara is home to countless wonders and

hidden secrets, so it should be easy for the DM to place the City of Lofty Pillars just about anywhere in the Land of Fate. While wandering near the withering border of the Great Anvil, a party of explorers might notice the tall spires and jeweled palaces of Iram gleaming along the horizon, hazy and indistinct, like a beckoning mirage. Perhaps they stumble into the Realm of Dreams during a frightening sandstorm along the Genies' Caravan. They could discover Iram nestled in the uncharted northern reaches of the World Pillar Mountains, far beyond the corrupted valleys of the insidious yak-men. The remainder of this article explores how the DM might weave an entertaining adventure around the dream city or build an entire campaign around the quest for Iram.

## A brief sojourn

When first discovered during a short adventure, Iram appears abandoned, its towering, iron-bound gates magically warded against mundane intrusion. With persistence and some carefully selected spells (or magical items), a well-equipped party of adventurers should be able to pierce the forbidding outer walls and wander about Iram's deserted bazaars and columned palaces. Sparrows, starlings, and mockingbirds dart around the high reaches of the lonely parks and towers, peering down at the new visitors with detached, alien interest. Throughout the city, the explorers discover hundreds of inscriptions, carved on walls and iridescent pillars. Written in Chun, the dead language of the Haunted-Lands, these ancient runes chronicle the tragic history of Shahraknazi's doomed capital and give the DM an opportunity to share some of the city's lore with the players. During their explorations of the ruby-pillared towers and palaces, the adventurers soon discover glittering hoards of treasure heaped beside the silent, skeletal remains of Iram's former inhabitants, some of whom perished in battle, rather than serve the pitiless dao as slaves in the Great Dismal Delve.

A few incidental encounters should keep the party on their toes and prevent the adventure from degenerating into a looting and plundering expedition. Perhaps the explorers discover a paranoid old man named Yahun in one of the golden-domed, white towers. In his dementia, Yahun mistakes his visitors for assassins, sent by his former brotherhood. Though his strength and reflexes have flagged somewhat over the years, Yahun has still maintained most of his deadly abilities. The party will have a difficult and dangerous time convincing him of their true identities. They may gain a valuable ally in the city if they are successful.

At some point during their explorations, perhaps if the party becomes too greedy, the benevolent Razikah (*shapechanged* into a beautiful woman with golden hair) pays them a visit, warning them to depart Iram before the other Maidens form a war party and forcibly evict them. If the party

rebuffs her advice, a punishing contingent of the Thirteen Maidens, led by the merciless Akila, should force a hasty retreat. Even if the explorers manage to transport some of the treasure out of Iram, their jeweled riches melt away the following sunrise, revealing their adventure to be perhaps nothing more than a fondly remembered dream.

The party may yearn to return to the mysterious city, but a search of its former location only reveals a deserted valley. Of course, if the adventurers were especially resourceful during their brief sojourn in Iram, a kind DM may let them retain a magical token of their visit. Once they return to civilization and have the talisman identified by either a powerful wizard or knowledgeable sage, this enchanted item might help them on a new quest to rediscover the City of Lofty Pillars, or it may lead them on new and more fabulous adventures in the Land of Fate.

### An epic campaign

While Iram can certainly be used as the setting for a short adventure, the city is also well-suited for a longer campaign. This section should provide the DM with enough ideas to get an epic adventure off the ground.

During the early stage of the campaign, the party first learns of Iram from a young traveling bard named Tahir, native to the Free Cities. Tahir has been searching for Iram ever since he saw the city's jeweled palaces in a dream. He has longed to return to that magical place, forsaking all his friends and former traveling companions to pursue this quest. Tahir discovered long ago that he could visit the City of Lofty Pillars by poisoning himself with dreambliss, but the price has nearly exhausted his finances and brought him no closer to entering Iram. While the bard can see the city in his dreambliss-induced visions, thus far he has been unable to pierce Iram's outer walls and walk its gem-strewn streets. In the morning, when the dreams fade and reality returns, Tahir swears that the *next* time he uses dreambliss, he will discover the hidden key to entering Iram. He couldn't be more mistaken.

Tahir might join the party for a short adventure or two, if only so the rawun can earn enough money to purchase more dreambliss and further his quest for Iram. Tahir is an experienced adventurer, and his extensive journeys have made him knowledgeable in the lore and customs of Zakhara. The DM should make him of comparable experience to the rest of the party. Soon after Tahir joins their company, the party quickly notices that each night, the rawun takes a dose of dreambliss and falls into a deep coma, mumbling incoherently to himself for the entire evening. He never awakens until dawn breaks along the horizon, regardless what transpires during the night.

Once Tahir gets to know his companions, he talks about Iram incessantly, and tells

them legends about the city. The bard reveals that he has heard rumors of a wise woman named Setara living in the hills nearby. According to the local shepherds, Setara claims to have visited a magical, walled city many times in her youth. He tries to convince the party to help him investigate this rumor, promising to share the wealth of Iram should they succeed in locating the fabled city. That night, before they arrive at Setara's village, Tahir takes his last dose of dreambliss and falls into the usual drug-induced stupor.

Entering the Realm of Dreams, the bard finds someone waiting for him outside the walls of the city, someone who is not pleased that Tahir has spoken with a group of strangers and invited them on their quest for Iram. An argument develops between Tahir and the robed visitor outside Iram. Tahir loses. Back in Zakhara, the sleeping bard lets out a horrific scream. Contorted on the ground in spasms of agony, he screams a second time and lies still. Tahir manages to whisper a cryptic warning to a new friend among the party before he dies:

"Beware of my brother!"

The bard's mysterious murderer will come after the party eventually. They have learned too much of Iram and might compromise this stranger's dark goals in that city. The assaults need not begin right away, but the attacks should be furtive and enigmatic when they come. The party should feel as though a strange and hidden enemy now plots against them. The true identity and goals of this nemesis should be slowly revealed during the campaign. Perhaps Tahir's brother is a powerful sha'ir, who seeks to gain seven legendary genie prisons that were concealed in the Realm of Dreams or Iram itself by an ancient sorcerer. These iron bottles contain the most malignant and powerful of the noble genies, each capable of granting one or more *wishes* to the clever mortal who releases them and can withstand their initial fury after centuries of imprisonment. Of course, wishes granted by genies can be extremely dangerous for mortals, as detailed in the *Secrets of the Lamp* sourcebox. At first, the party's nemesis can travel to Iram only in his dreams, but he currently seeks a way to enter the physical city so he can uncover and depart with the genie prisons.

Throughout the campaign, the DM should drop clues, which, if followed, will eventually lead the party to Iram. For instance, the party might gain more knowledge of the city from Setara, the wise woman Tahir referred to before he died. She might know the secret to finding Iram, but probably will require a service from the party in exchange for this valuable information.

### Further inspiration

There are many sources available to the DM who wishes to launch an epic quest for the city of Iram in the Realm of

Dreams. First get your hands on a copy of the *Arabian Nights*, and start with the delightful stories: "The Tale of the City of Brass," "The Keys of Destiny," and "Tale of The City of Many-Columned Iram." Locating these might be more of a challenge than it at first appears, since these obscure stories probably will not be found in the limited anthologies of the *Arabian Nights* sold today in bookstores, which typically only focus on the most popular tales, like "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," and "Aladdin and his Magic Lamp." The original compendium of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, translated by Burton, is over twenty volumes long. The library is your best bet for locating one of these multi-volume anthologies. While Burton's version will definitively have the tales (check the index), I don't recommend it for a first-time reader, because the translation can be ponderous and difficult to read. A more recent translation is usually preferable. Even if you don't find the stories you are looking for, the tales of the *Arabian Nights* are the best source material for any AL-QADIM® campaign.

For more ideas in expanding the Realm of Dreams, I heartily recommend "The DreamQuest for Unknown Kadath," a rather somber and chilling novella by H.P. Lovecraft. Del Rey publishes this tale in paperback, available in most bookstores. Also, the *Dreamlands* supplement for Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game details a campaign setting that can be reached only through dreams. This supplement was inspired by "Kadath" and Lovecraft's other early works. In the Wheel of Time series of fantasy novels (*The Eye of the World*, *The Great Hunt*, *The Dragon Reborn*, and *The Shadow Rising*), author Robert Jordan explores (among other things) the idea of an alternate dream plane that can be reached and traversed by talented individuals. These recently published books are also available at bookstores.

In these stories, you will find the seeds of a thousand adventures that might take place in the City of Lofty Pillars. A recent short play by the modern Arabic poet and scholar, Khalil Gibran, also examines the legend of Iram (you are most likely to find it in an anthology of his works at the library). According to Gibran, the city is an ancient metaphor for perfection, an ideal that can be sought but never reached. The quest for this ideal brings personal growth and development. You also may wish to develop Iram into a mythical paradise of your campaign, inspiring courageous explorers to set aside their ordinary pursuits and seek a lofty ideal. May the kind hand of Fate guide you on your journey to the City of Lofty Pillars, for we have no Fate, but that Fate which we are given! Ω

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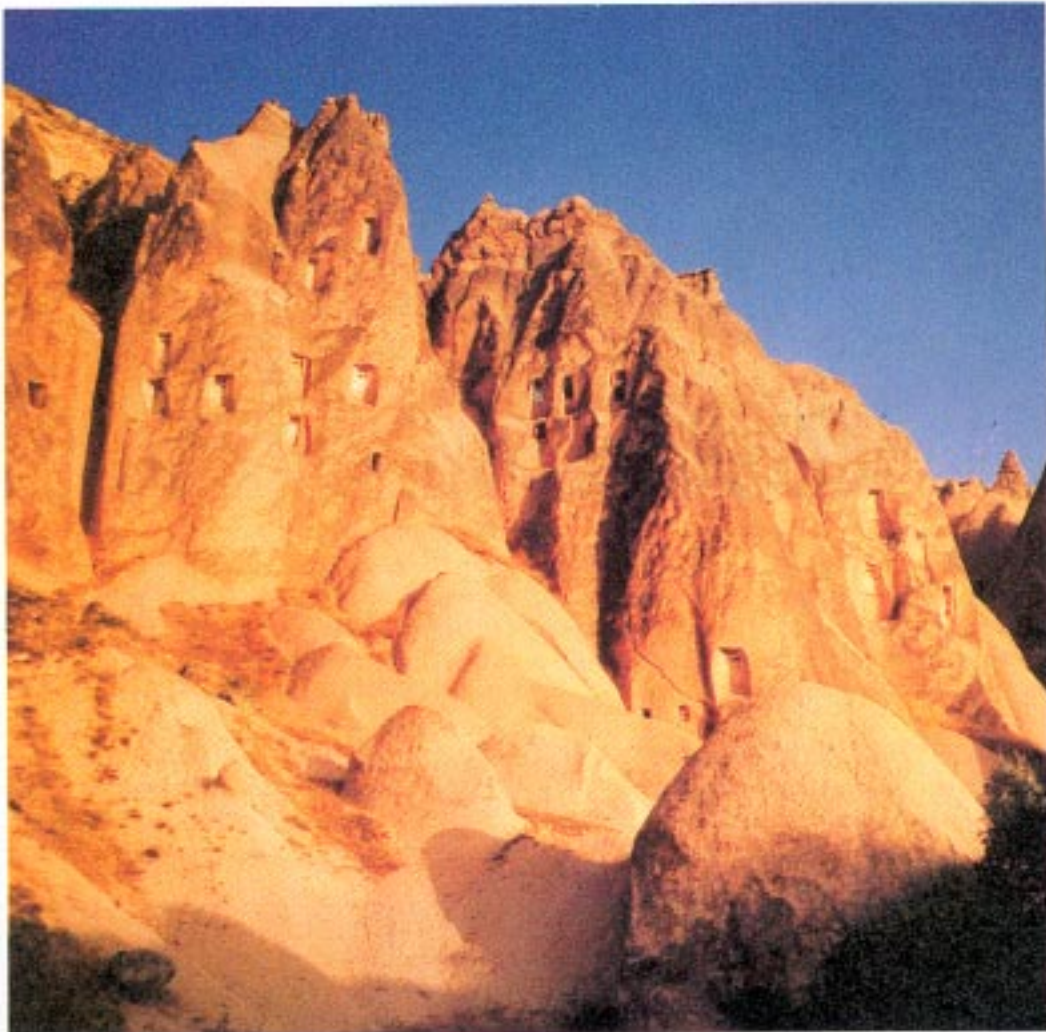
# Turkey's Underground Cities

Explore these real-world dungeons

by Allen Varney

Photography by Allen Varney

Cartography by Michael Scott



Immense underground labyrinths, home to tens of thousands of people. Multiple levels reaching deep into the earth. Low, twisting passages leading to rooms stocked with treasure. The stuff of fantasy adventures? No! I have visited such underground cities in Turkey, and you can, too. This article chronicles my tours of two such subterranean cities, and follows with what these places can teach dungeon designers. The sidebar that accompanies this piece gives advice on traveling to this region of the globe.

The cities under the ground lie in the central Anatolian (Asian) region of Turkey, 400 miles southeast of Istanbul and 100 miles north of the sunny Mediterranean coast. This area, called Cappadocia (koppa-DOE-kee-a), has hosted over a dozen civilizations from ancient times to the present, and each played its part in the history of the subterranean cities. The Turkish government has opened some of these ancient labyrinths to the public, and almost 150 more lie unexcavated and unexplored, their hidden secrets awaiting discovery.

Studying the largest of these cities, Derinkuyu, reveals plenty for dungeon designers to think about. Use this real-world model to give your fantasy labyrinths a new air of authenticity.

## History

Millions of years ago extensive volcanic activity deposited three layers of rock across Central Anatolia: first, a thick layer of ash; above it, dust that gradually compressed into the stone that geologists call "tuff"; and finally, a thin layer of lava that hardened into sturdy basalt.

Eons of weathering removed much of the basalt and carved deeply into the soft tuff, producing eerie, surreal rock formations now called "fairy chimneys." From prehistoric times until just a few years ago, the region's inhabitants carved homes in the chimneys, sometimes elaborate dwellings with many rooms on several storeys. You can see the most beautiful of these fairy chimneys in Cappadocia's Gireme (GUHR-emma) National Park. The rocky homes' built-in insulation held cool air in

during the hot summer days, and the reverse during the area's frigid winters. The underground cities began in the same way, carved from the brittle, tawny-colored tuff.

But at first these primordial cities served a different purpose; not living space but storage. The Hittites—who, as every CIVILIZATION\* game player knows, occupied Asia Minor in the second millennium B.C.—carved the oldest rooms of the subterranean cities as granaries. The constant cool temperature, 50-60° Fahrenheit, preserved grain well.

After the Hittites came the Phrygians, their origin (around 1100 B.C.) as mysterious as the Hittites' disappearance. After four centuries, Phrygia gave way to the Greek culture of the Lydians, the first society to coin money. Lydia's last king had plenty of it, too; we still remember the wealth of Croesus. Cappadocia's fertile plains brought wealth to all its rulers, but those plains proved hard to defend from rivals. So history saw a long parade of over a dozen civilizations, each in turn adding its influence to a rich mix of cultures: the Persians of the Achaemenian Empire (546-334 B.C.), Alexander the Great, the Seleucids . . .

Reading through this long sequence of debuts, conquests, and disappearances, we develop a strange, almost creepy sense of history. These conquering kingdoms commanded the greatest wealth and power in their region, sometimes for much longer spans than the age of America. Their citizens, people like you and me, worked and hoped as we do; no doubt they followed every shift of their political fortunes as closely as we follow ours. But across the gulf of 3,000 years, nothing remains of these empires but a few shards of pottery in museum cases and some stone inscriptions full of odd names: Tawannannas, Zidantas, Wassukani. One name, at least, seems familiar—Midas, a Phrygian monarch whose wealth became legendary.

But these early civilizations used their underground chambers only to store grain and, perhaps, as short-term shelter from invaders. The subterranean cities grew to their immense size abruptly—historically

speaking—during the first centuries after the time of Jesus, when persecuted Christians sought places of worship hidden from the Roman Empire. In those three centuries they carved deep into the rock, adding to their cities everything they needed: bedchambers, water tanks, flour mills, and stables, as well as other rooms equally important to them: churches, confessionals, seminaries, baptismal fonts, and even wineries.

Secreted in these labyrinths, tens of thousands of Christians practiced their forbidden religion. After the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., Roman persecution ceased. However, Cappadocians still hid in their underground cities. Armies from the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire marched out of Constantinople across this

convenient crossroads, plundering lands and pressing citizens into service on their way to frontiers in Persia, Ethiopia, and Africa. The underground shelters continued to be improved, for now the whole population of a town could evacuate below the ground and vanish.

Every home above the ground had either its own entrance to the city, or a thin air duct residents could use to talk with those below. (We know of 15,000 air ducts.) Perhaps residents then treated the cities as some householders do now, storing their possessions in a really, really big basement. In times of danger, the city maintained sentinels on the hilltops. A scout who sighted unwelcome visitors would blow a horn or otherwise signal a warning to the city. Citizens had time to

retreat below with their livestock and possessions, where they could then hide or withstand weeks of siege.

No one today knows how well this worked. Over two millennia from the Hittites through the Byzantines, it must have helped sometimes, for each successive wave of invaders took over and enlarged the cities. By the same token, the cities did not provide foolproof protection, inasmuch as successive waves of invaders took them over.

During the seventh century, the armies of Islam spread from Arabia to conquer Africa, Persia, and Asia Minor. After withstanding three severe campaigns, the Byzantines finally evacuated Cappadocia, leaving the underground cities deserted. Their presence unsuspected by the Arabs, the forgotten cities fell into disrepair.

In 1963, townsfolk in central Cappadocia rediscovered the largest labyrinth by accident. Other discoveries followed, and now we know of 150 underground sites, most still unexcavated. The Turkish government's Office for Ancient Monuments and Museums opened its first underground city to visitors in 1965, but only the recent explosion of Turkish tourism has brought the cities to wide attention. Turkey now has opened five of them, and travelers at last recognize these amazing places as authentic wonders of the world.

## Exploration

Not much would have drawn you, a tourist, to this particular spot in Turkey before it found its ancient basement. A small town of 5,000 people, 18 miles south of the central Turkish city of Nevsehir, it has many 16th- and 17th-century Greek Orthodox churches and, it claims, the world's first lunatic asylum.

Glories like these notwithstanding, this town offers little for you except the pleasant company of friendly Turks. Yet in Roman times this area must have hosted a huge population, for a few feet underfoot lies the largest, best-known, and most astonishing underground city of them all. In a past age residents called it Malagobia (Latin, "difficult existence"). It takes its modern name from the town overhead, a Turkish name meaning "deep well": Derinkuyu.

Mottled gray-brown walls, curving and uneven ceilings low overhead, pillars of rock tortuously hand-carved—Derinkuyu looks unassuming, to say the least. You crouch through hatchlike doorways and walk down steep steps seemingly cut as casual afterthoughts. Any given room makes a bland showing for this alleged wonder of the world.

Yet it goes on and on and on. One ugly rock-walled room does not excite you, but many dozens, going deeper and deeper into the earth, carved from almost a square mile of living rock by the sweat of ten thousand brows, do. The cool (50° F) air remains fresh, and sometimes, fantastically, you feel a cold breeze. Your excited



imagination conjures giant worker ants for this stupendous anthill. From the collective unconscious you synthesize memories of the people who sheltered here: farmers, thin and prematurely aged with hard work. Huge rag-tag families, toothless and louse-ridden, but with bright eyes and easy laughter. Arabian horses and hungry oxen munching hay in stone stables. You think of tense times when their owners must have hushed them, while families peered upward in nervous silence, listening to a legion's footsteps.

Before long, passing through weird chambers and down sloping tunnels, you become utterly lost. Red arrow signs point the way farther down, blue arrows upward, and you trust to these like Robinson Crusoe trusted Friday. A compass might help, but the rises and plunging spirals still perplex you. Where do you stand in relation to that room you saw five minutes ago? How far below the surface have you come?

Every so often you find an airshaft, and this answers the second question. The 52 gaping square or circular holes, each wider than a man's height, plunge 175 feet (55 meters) straight down to Derinkuyu's depths. Doorways and windows open onto the shafts at each level. Just below ground level you see the sun above and, below, a vanishing black perspective. Far beneath the surface, on Derinkuyu's seventh and eighth levels, daylight has dwindled to a bright circle the size of a thumbnail. You would see a similar view inside a factory smokestack.

Shafts like these seldom appear in fantasy dungeons, but they provided five vital services game masters should recognize: air, light, transport, communication, and water. The shafts bring fresh air everywhere in Derinkuyu, so efficiently that visitors can smoke cigarettes on the eighth level and watch the smoke swirl away toward the nearest shaft. They provide some light, and in ancient times the people may have used shiny metal reflectors to bring the light to their rooms. Many of the shafts have footholds that allow easy climbs between levels, although it must have taken courage! We almost can hear the echoes of Latin shouts ringing up and down the shafts, as in the courtyards of inner-city tenements. ("Have you got dinner ready up there?") Finally, unlike those of other cities, Derinkuyu's shafts also reached fresh water, giving the city above its "deep wells," and (even today) its water supply.

The underground cities supposedly began with these shafts. As the first step in enlarging the ancient grain cellars, a city's builders (excavators?) dug straight down, ensuring ventilation before all else. Then the workers dug each level of the city outward from the shafts. The way these workers connected their separate excavations to form each level remains a mystery.

We do know why the workers dug. Their owners ordered it. Every Mediterra-

nean culture of the time treated slavery as a fact of life. Convicts, captured pirates and brigands, children sold to pay parents' taxes, prisoners of war from the northern Black Forest frontier or from Arabia or Ethiopia to the south—they all worked away their lives burrowing for their Byzantine masters. Perhaps they, not their owners, christened Malagobia.

In wandering the twisting tunnels, you see many thick stone wheels. Big as Yap Island stone money, big as the wheels on a monster truck driven by Fred Flintstone, they rest on the ground or stand in notches beside doorways. These wheels, security doors, testify that invaders sometimes discovered Derinkuyu, and that when they did, the residents could defend themselves. They carved each wheel out of the floor of its room, then drove a hole through its center. During a battle, a team of men used a wooden pole to roll the wheel down and block the doorway. After those inside withdrew the pole, attackers faced a fearsome task in trying to push back the immense wheel. Meanwhile, besieged residents made spear thrusts through the hole.

## Sanctuary

Stone wheels guarded the most precious treasures of Derinkuyu's inhabitants. Gold? Jewels? No, although a duck-walk down a long, very low, spiralling tunnel leads to a treasure room where one or two guards could hold off an army. Instead, the ancient Christians rolled those stone wheels to protect their sacred ground.

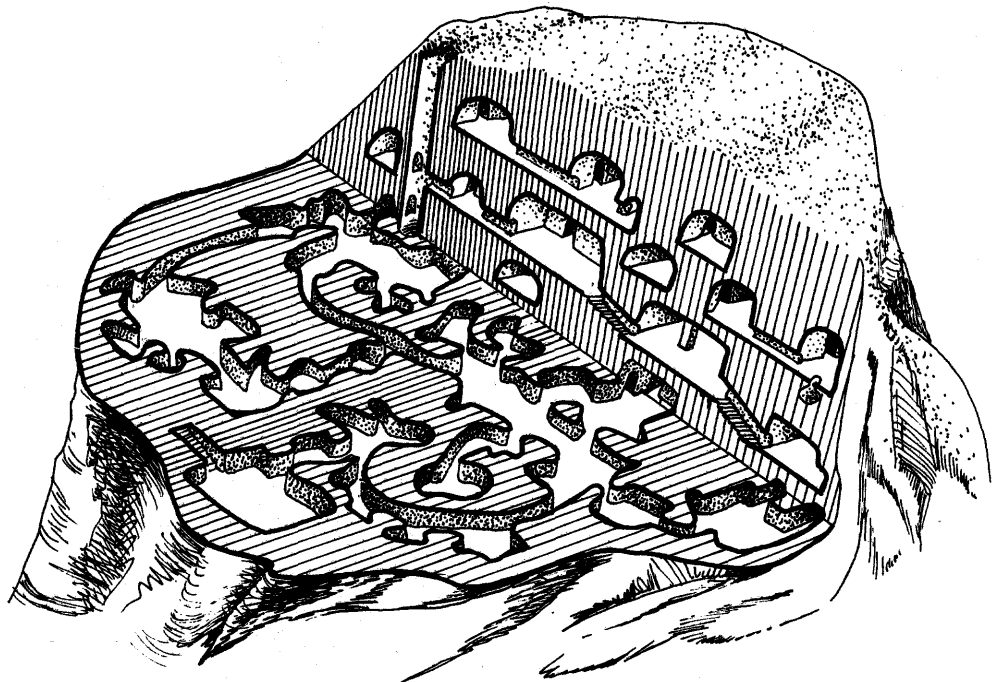
Here, beyond the barriers, you find a large room with two long stone benches carved straight out of the floor: a semi-

nary. On these benches young missionaries heard the doctrine they would risk their lives to spread. A couple of bedrooms open off the seminary. Nearby, a rounded hole indicates the font where priests baptized the infants of 17 centuries ago, quite possibly ancestors of some readers of this article.

Elsewhere, at the end of a long, scary crawl down a sloping passage, in a part of Derinkuyu that the government has not yet wired for light, you shine your flashlight around a church as big as a basketball court. It seems like a natural cavern, but this area has no caves. To make this underground church, humans carried away every rock chip and speck of gravel by hand.

Several rooms in Derinkuyu remind me of the early importance of sacramental wine to Christians. Some of the wineries near ground level have, or used to have, ceiling holes to the surface. Fresh grapes from the vineyard, poured down the holes, fell into hollows in the rock floor. There people, presumably slaves, walked the grapes into pulp. Holes in the bottom of some hollows let the juice flow down into convenient basins in a lower room, ready for the fermenting barrels.

These signs of devotion interest you in passing, but deep on Derinkuyu's seventh level you find the last and most breathtaking sign of the ancient builders' devotion. Here you enter an enormous 100'-long hall, a one-time conference room and, some believe, a torture chamber. Two of the hall's three thick columns have candle sconces—or did the residents tie prisoners there? In a nearby room excavators found a grave; apparently someone took the



Isometric view of the underground village of Kaymakli

skeleton found there to Ankara, the Turkish capital, for study.

Other rooms open off this hall, including a huge cruciform church 80' long and 30' wide, with a 12' ceiling. Some scholars, who believe the entire city predates Christianity, call this room clover-shaped, for the Hittites used the clover as an emblem of state. I have no idea how this unlikely theory explains the still larger room that opens on the halls other side. This huge L-shape ends in a short, strange tunnel, tall as a man but barely wide enough to enter, that curves in a tight "C" from one corner of the room to the adjacent corner.

You hardly could explain this odd tunnel outside a Christian context, but after some thought about churches—or perhaps with a clue from your tour guide—you realize its function. A worshipper entered one end of the tunnel, a priest the other, and they met in the middle in total darkness. Right: a confessional.

Other wonders still lurk undiscovered in Derinkuyu. Archaeologists, scholars, and (I presume) local businessmen in search of greater tourist attractions continue the excavation of this and the other underground cities. So far we know of eight levels in Derinkuyu, but some writers suspect as many as 27. "Levels" here does not mean quite what it does in a fantasy dungeon, but something more notional, for these small and uneven levels merge imperceptibly. If they went much deeper, the hypothetical lower levels would hit the water table. Still, the figures fire the imagination. With so much left to discover, we can believe the conservative estimates of Derinkuyu's population—around 20,000. Ultimately, excavation may make even

the higher population estimates (60,000 people) probable. The likelihood of these high numbers depends, I think, on connections with entire new complexes, currently unconfirmed (as far as I know) but suspected. Turkish researcher Omer Demir writes in *Cappadocia: Cradle of History*, "The tunnels form connecting links with some underground cities near Derinkuyu so that the population could save their lives by using these escape routes. We have reason to believe that one of the tunnels on the third storey is connected with an underground city at Kaymakli 5.4 miles away. The tunnel in question is wide enough for three or four people to walk upright side by side. The ventilation ducts of the tunnel, many of which have been filled with rubble or destroyed through the years, are expected to be opened in the coming years."

Such speculation may, in the end, fall short of reality, but in Derinkuyu reality already takes your breath away. You think about it, as you make the long climb back to the surface-about cohorts and maniples marching in bewilderment through deserted villages, while beneath their feet (in the 3rd-century A.D., when swamps covered Manhattan) the population density approached that of the World Trade Center.

### Lessons for dungeon designers

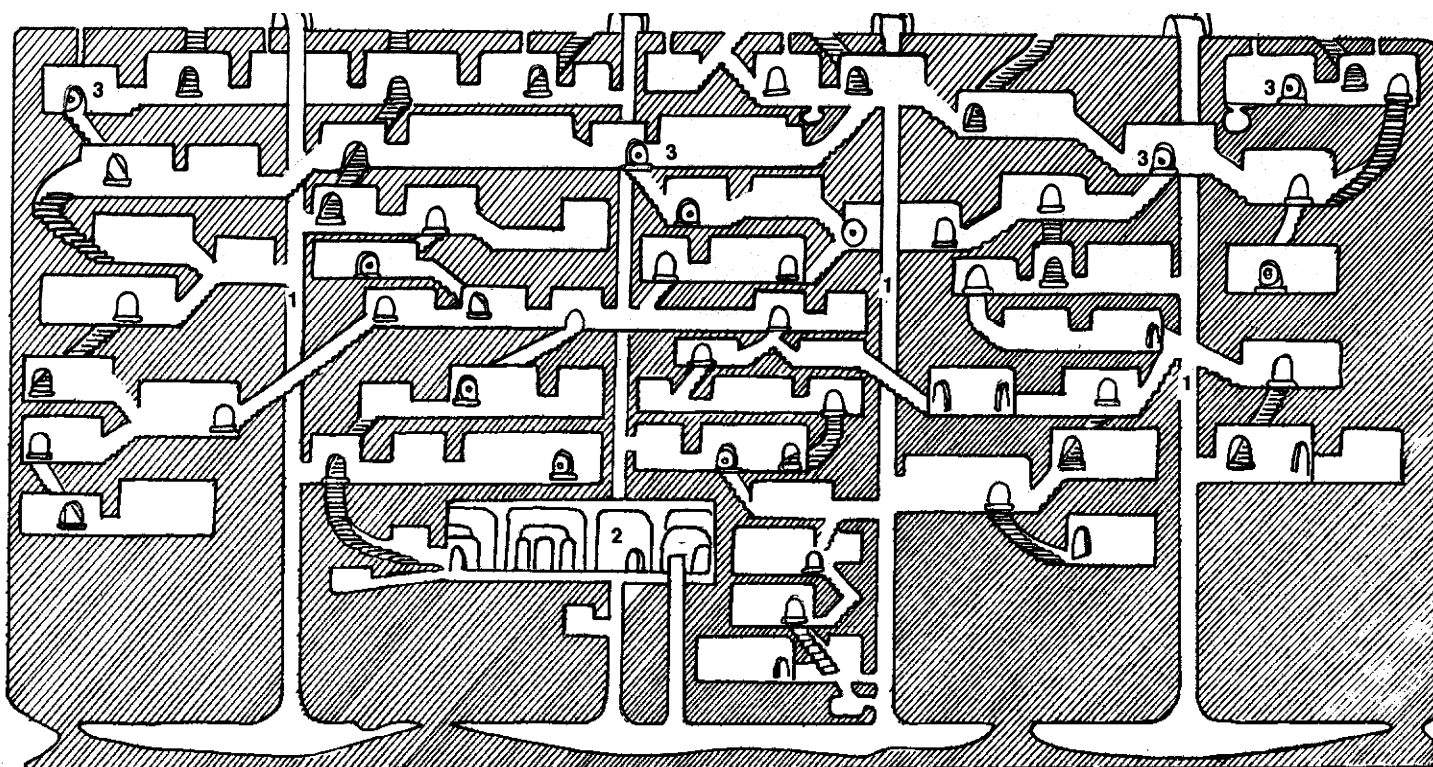
Every game master who plans an underground labyrinth can learn some lessons from Derinkuyu and the other subterranean cities. DMs can use the information above to create or expand their own dungeons and underground campaigns. Have the player characters (PCs) discover

a long-lost city beneath the campaign's base city, castle, keep, etc. (One published example of this type of campaign is *The Ruins of Undermountain* box (and *The Ruins of Undermountain II* set on sale in March) for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

Each room in most published dungeons has neat corners, and high hallways connect them with the straight regularity of graph paper. The real-world labyrinths go every which way, their rooms take on the oddest contortions, and ceilings and hallways vary alarmingly. Low tunnels served a purpose, making vital rooms easier to defend. I can testify, having slid down a claustrophobic spiral to Derinkuyu's treasure room, that no one in plate armor, carrying a torch and a sword (let alone a spear or pole arm!) could hope to get into that room alive. I also have grave doubts that a fast-moving party could ever map these places well enough to avoid getting lost. How does the last underground dwarven citadel you created or explored look in comparison?

Your fantasy dungeon diggers have magic that shatters the hardest rock. The ancients never could have carved their underground cities in anything but volcanic tuff, which conveniently remains soft during cutting but hardens when exposed to air. Perhaps dwarves would consider carving their homes in such an area to be beneath their dignity (no pun intended); but how about gnomes, halflings, kobolds, or goblins?

The fantasy magic that spirits away rubble seems less impressive than the logistical miracle the Cappadocians accomplished in disposing of a large hill's worth



Cross-section of the underground city of Derinkuyu

1 Ventilation duct and deep well 2 Church 3 Stone door



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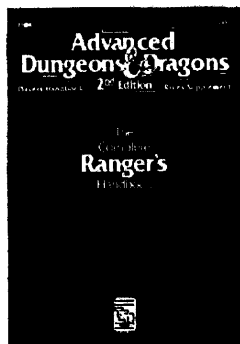
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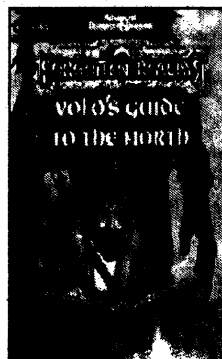
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of excavated rock. They may have created a hill west of town called Sogdele, but more likely they dumped the rubble into a couple of streams nearby, where it eventually washed away into the lakes of Anatolia. Like the one-time rulers of this area, (evil) fantasy races such as the drow or duergar likely would use slaves to perform much of the mundane labor.

Many underground-adventure designers seem unaware that if you dig deep enough, you hit water. You also need an air supply to reach that deep. Magic easily solves these problems, but the nonmagical approach offers plot hooks and logistical advantages. For instance, if the dungeon's air shafts lead to the lowest level, the PCs may climb straight down. They may think they've bypassed intervening dangers, but in fact they play right into the villain's hands. Any sensible occupants would set numerous guards, traps, and warnings in the areas surrounding the shafts.

Similarly, water levels change. So what if the old dungeon corridors were well above the water table in the ancient past? A single earthquake in a distant region can re-route an aquifer, and now the adventurers must cope with lower levels that are now underwater.

Only rarely do adventure backgrounds make use of historical context. A generic evildoer carves most generic dungeons so he can commit his generic evils. This approach misses the flavor presented by a historical dungeon similar to Turkey's underground cities. Their ancient origins and subsequent Christian expansion adapt well to any fantasy world that has seen empires rise and fall. This lets the dungeon bring the campaign world alive for the players in a whole new way. Two of the Historical Reference Campaign Sourcebooks for the AD&D® game should prove especially useful for this. HR5 *The Glory of Rome* and the upcoming HR6 *The Age of Heroes* (which details ancient Greece) both cover peoples who once inhabited this region.

Combining the information in this article with your own campaign, or with one or more published works will bring a new realism and excitement to the dungeons and underground complexes in your game world. For more information on underground adventuring possibilities, seek out DMGR1 *The Campaign Sourcebook & Catacomb Guide* for the AD&D game.

One last lesson from Derinkuyu: The showiest and most powerful spell cannot impress us as much as sheer dogged human labor. The underground cities conjure that same disbelief we feel of the pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Airlift, the Alaskan oil pipeline, and other undertakings that mix pragmatism and craziness on a grand scale. In their sheer scope, they expunge all reservations about their merits. They transcend ordinary concerns by defining what the human race can achieve.

Now that's what I call magic.

## Getting there

However much you gaze at the pictures and read the facts, nothing tells you as much about the underground cities as a visit.

I visited Derinkuyu and a smaller underground city, Kaymakli (KIGH-mock-lih), in October, 1992. At that time, the Turkish government had just opened the fifth city, and by the time you get there they may have more ready. However, I suspect that if you see one (make it Derinkuyu), you've seen them all. The cities impress not by their individuality but conceptually, by the mere fact of their existence. But don't worry—Turkey offers much more to see, and you'll find it an inexpensive and rewarding place to stay for two weeks or two months.

Before you leave, read everything you can. (I recommend the Lonely Planet guidebook, available in the travel section of better bookstores.) Get proper immunizations, including cholera, tetanus, and hepatitis A. For the hardy traveler, a membership in Youth Hostels of America or Youth Hostels International pays for itself quickly, because it lets you stay in inexpensive but comfortable hostels in many countries. (Write to: American Youth Hostels, P.O. Box 37613, Washington D.C. 20013-7613.) Buy a small flashlight, a first-aid kit, and, a compass (no kidding). You also might consider iodine tablets to purify water or a portable water filter. (Never drink the water in Turkey.)

Airfare to Istanbul from America runs under \$1000 round trip. You can find

better deals by flying to London first and shopping its many fiercely competitive discount travel agencies. Check the Travel section of the Sunday *New York Times* for many bargains. Plan to go in late summer or early fall, unless you want to hit the winter skiing season. It gets really cold in central Turkey starting in mid-October.

Rest up in Istanbul, a terrific city, before heading into central Turkey. A clean and vibrant city, Istanbul offers great food, cheap hotels and youth hostels, a hard-working tourist office with a lot of informative brochures, a couple of neat museums, and splendid sights—mosques, palaces, and riverboat tours up the Bosphorus. Don't miss the Dolmabahce and Topkapi Palaces, extravagant Ottoman structures that define opulence. The world's oldest surviving covered bazaar, the Kapalicarsi, offers terrific shopping if you know how to haggle with the world's highest-pressure salesmen.

Bus fare to Cappadocia costs about \$13 (U.S.) one-way. You might haggle a dollar off the price if you look poor and pathetic; I speak from experience. Fair warning for nonsmokers: Every man in Turkey smokes like a chimney (Marlboros) and the bus companies have never heard of nonsmoking sections.

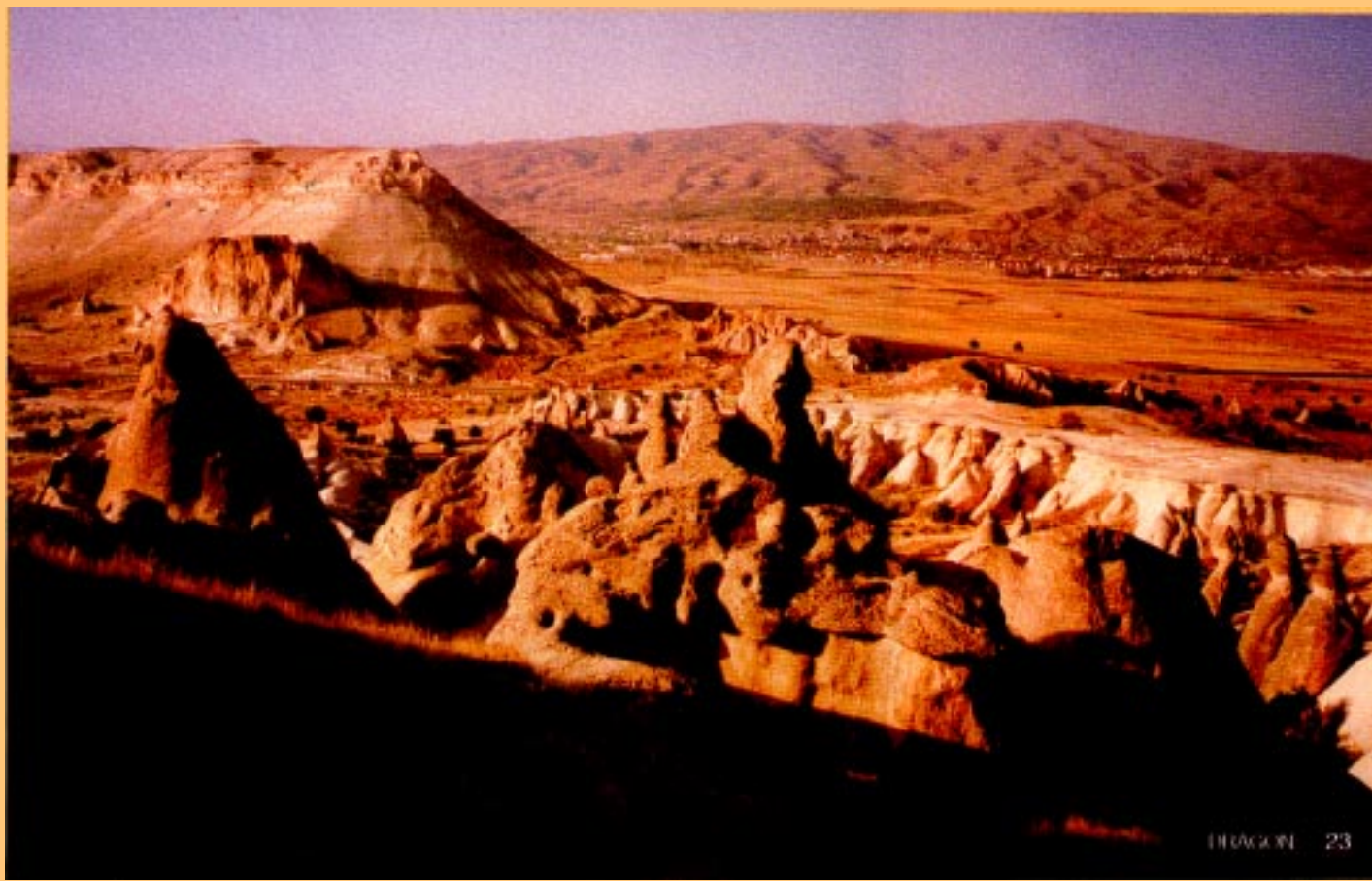
After a lung-deadening trip I arrived in Goreme, stayed at a pleasant *pansion* called Turkish House among the weird Daliesque fairy chimneys, and took a one-day tour that included an hour or so in Derinkuyu. I thought the tour well worth the \$10, but I wanted more time in the underground cities and went on my own

to Kaymakli the next day. This proved tricky, for the local buses in central Turkey do not run as often as you'd like. And although the Turks I met proved resolutely honest with money and services, I never once got a straight answer on when the next bus would arrive.

As it happened, I got to Kaymakli, had a nice long visit, then ended up stranded in the middle of nowhere. After a pleasant if uncommunicative visit with a Turkish farm family—nobody speaks English in rural Turkey, although many people speak German—I hitched a truck ride to someplace where I could get a cab (a bus station, I think). The ride cost 50,000 Turkish lire, about \$7.50—a fortune!

Remember that Turkey follows Islam, at least nominally. Prepare for early awakenings by muezzins calling the faithful to predawn prayer. Women should travel with a partner. Don't expect pork chops on the menu. That said, Turks show courtesy and hospitality to visitors, so don't worry.

As a traveler you represent your country and culture, so treat the people and the sights with respect. Tourism has proved a mixed blessing in Turkey, because tourists have irreparably damaged some of its historical treasures. For example, after leaving the underground cities and taking up open worship, early Christians carved many open-air churches in the Goreme and Soganli regions. You could still see their remarkably preserved Byzantine frescoes until a few years ago, when tourists searching for souvenirs peeled them away a paint-fleck at a time. Go, and do better.



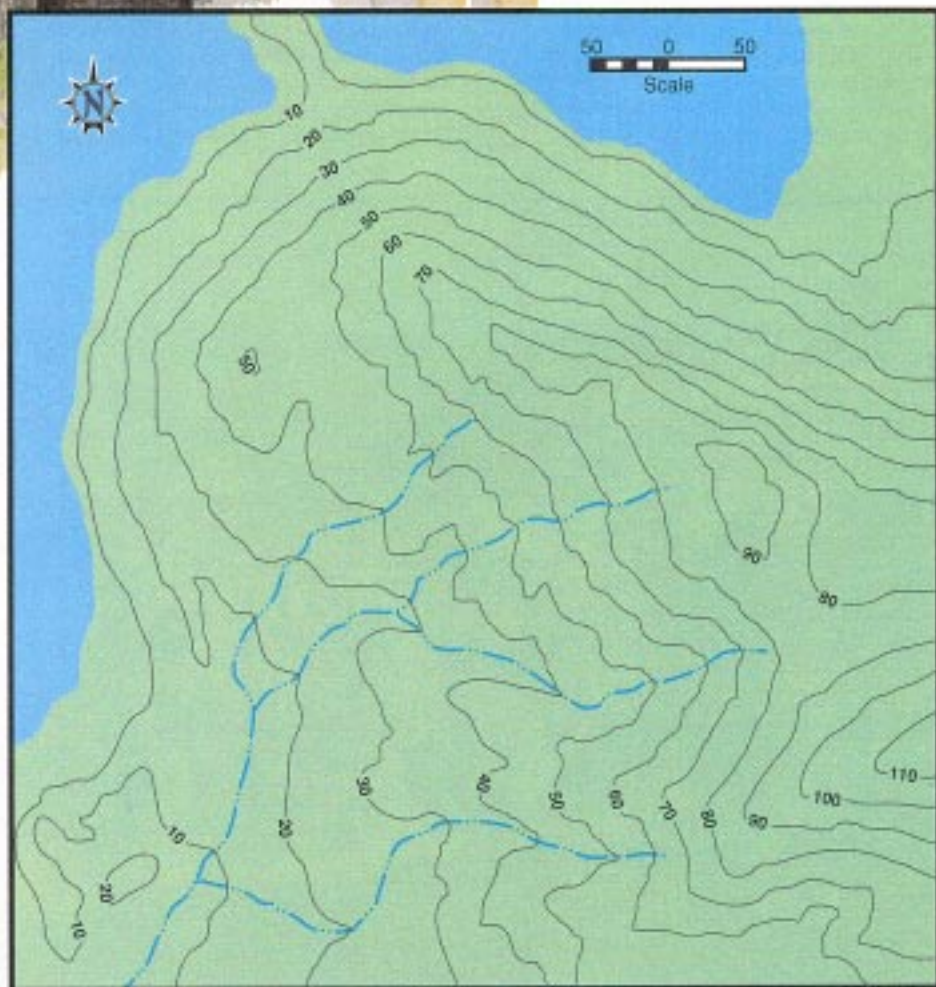
# The Of a

Get creative  
with castle design

by Thomas Reid

Cartography by John Knecht

Artwork by Anthony Miller



Map #1

# Evolution Castle

The word "castle" conjures up images of soaring stone walls looming high upon craggy pinnacles of rock, surveying the land below with an imposing presence. When we think of castles, we think of King Arthur and his knights riding forth from a magnificent castle of gold, with colorful pennants flapping smartly atop the crenelated towers, while fair maidens wave from high windows. We see a brooding, mist-covered stone gargantua vigilantly guarding a loch in the Highlands of Scotland. We

recall the many-spired, gravity-defying home of Cinderella at Disneyland, modeled after an actual Bavarian wonder of architecture.

Throughout history, the most lasting evidence handed down to us from the peoples of those times has been the fortified homes they built to withstand the attacks of their enemies. From the ancient peoples of the Fertile Crescent, who built the first walls around the first villages, to the Romans, whose legions brought engineering genius



Map #2

with them when they conquered the Gauls and Celts, to the Europeans of the Middle Ages, who constructed over the span of decades massive stone homes to protect their lands and their people from one another—modern historians have learned much about our past from these architectural marvels.

Yet, when the typical DM sits down to create an impregnable fortress, the result too often falls woefully short. Too many times, a wonderful adventure is planned around a frontier stronghold only to have that stronghold never develop beyond a few simple lines quickly scratched out on a piece of graph paper, with no real feeling or flavor. More than one new project has crossed my editing desk here at TSR with a castle or walled fortress included that fails to inspire any sense of grandeur. With all the source material that is out there to draw upon, this does not have to be the case.

This article is to help the DM plan and develop a castle, wizard's tower, or even walled city with a better eye for detail and a better grasp of just how these fortified edifices function. Although this knowledge can apply to any kind of fortification, such as walled cities and towns, Mediterranean villas, or even secret jungle temples, I am going to limit the discussion to medieval castles of Europe in order to keep the scope of this article manageable.

To understand how to create more realistic fortifications in a game setting, we need to learn more about how they developed historically. The first part of doing that is understanding the technological evolution of castles. The massive stone constructions that we think of as castles did not simply sprout one day from a feudal king's imagination. The earliest medieval constructions were nothing more than a palisade wall of cut timbers surrounding it and a ditch surrounding that built on a hill. There were various forms of this construction type, known as a motte-and-bailey construction, but it was essentially the earliest recognizable form of castle. As the years passed, knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of this type of fortification were taken into account with newer and better forms of defense. The wooden palisade wall was replaced by stone walls; the curtain wall was developed; siege engines were constructed; square towers were eventually abandoned in favor of round ones; and so on. (For more information on the styles of castle construction, see DMGR2 *The Castle Guide*.)

The second fundamental concept behind castle development is financial in nature. Because construction was such an expensive undertaking, it was rarely done all at once. A feudal lord might gather higher-

than-usual taxes for a number of years, and still be able only to construct a small motte-and-bailey style home. Perhaps his son, the next lord, would accumulate enough wealth to add to the palisade wall, or maybe even to replace the wooden building at the top of the hill with a stone one, but he certainly never considered starting from scratch with a new site and a new plan. Adding onto the original defenses was typically the only option. As a result, most castles grew in a sort of "building block" fashion, one or two sections at a time, rather than with a complete architectural plan drawn up for the final product.

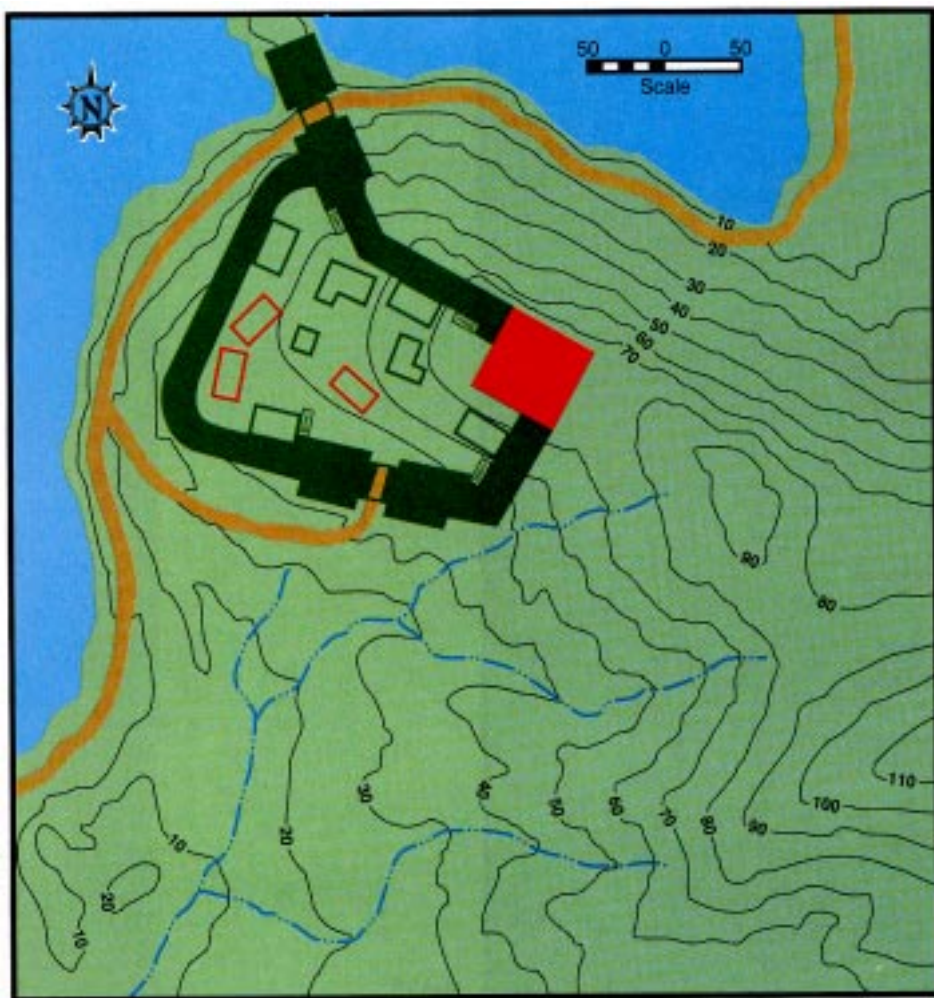
Now that we have a better grasp on how castles developed over time, let's look at another consideration in castle design, namely, using natural features prominently in the layout of the fortifications. The first of these is making certain that the castle has exclusive access to a water supply. Usually this is a well, but sometimes the castle was built around a natural spring. If neither of these was available, special pools were built on roofs and in courtyards to catch rainwater and store it. This was not as reliable as a well or spring, but it was better than letting the enemy dam or poison a stream.

The second way natural features were used was, of course, as natural defenses. Why build an artificial hill when a natural one would do just fine? Why dig a huge ditch to slow up attackers and discourage heavy siege engines when a natural barrier, such as a river, is already there? In any book on castles worth its salt, you should be able to find plenty of photographs that show castles all over Europe and England sitting on a high outcropping of rock, butting up against some water source, or both.

There are two benefits from putting a castle on high ground and behind natural barriers. The first is to get a great view of the surrounding countryside. The farther away the enemy is when spotted, the better. The second advantage is making it as difficult as possible for that enemy to reach those massive stone walls. Having to scramble up a steep hill with bad footing or swim or boat across a stream or lake makes a besieging army very vulnerable to attacks from the castle.

All this is common sense, right? Using natural obstacles rather than building your own also seems like a no-brainer, correct? Consider the last time you actually saw a natural rock outcropping that was perfectly symmetrical in shape, surrounded on four sides with a perfectly symmetrical river, and ready for a castle with four walls and a tower at each corner. I don't remember seeing one, in either America or Europe, and I've spent a lot of time hiking around both continents. Yet I constantly see castles designed for AD&D® or D&D® campaigns that look exactly like that.

Now we've broadened our understanding of just what a castle is and isn't. Where



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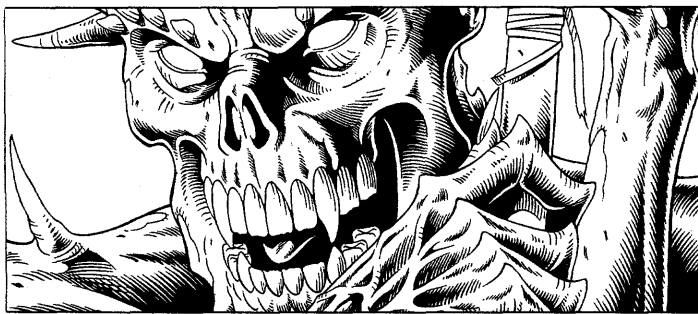
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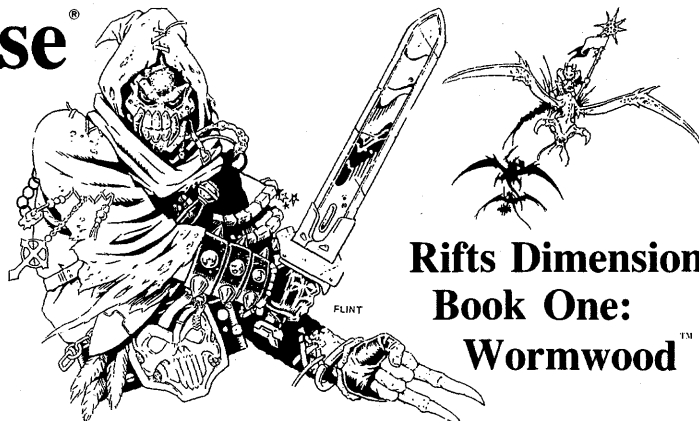
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do we go from here? We go to the world of fantasy, of course. We're ready to sit down and design that impregnable fortress that we just know the PCs can't infiltrate, or that their lord lives in, or whatever. We already have a problem, though.

In a game setting that sports powerful magic and mythical creatures, some of the tenets of castle construction no longer apply. A wizard with a *transmute rock to mud* spell can do some pretty ugly things to a castle. Even the *teleport* spell or the psionic ability *Dimensional Door* can get around castle defenses. Attacks from a flying creature, such as a dragon, make walls practically obsolete. These kinds of problems call for similar solutions. Still, for the average petty lord, or in a low-magic campaign, we can begin planning our castle. [Editor's Note: For more on fortifications in a high-magic milieu, see "The Enemy at the Gates" in *DRAGON*® issue #160.]

As we discuss how to design our own castles, let's use each step in an ongoing example. By the time we're finished, we will have a complete castle that we can plop down in practically any medieval campaign world. We can then take these steps and, with only slight tinkering, develop any castle, city, etc., for any occasion that we need, and come up with some-

thing that is both unique and realistic.

The first thing we want to do is select a site. We want a place that has hills, trees, stone outcroppings, lakes, streams—the whole gamut of geographical features. One way to do this is to make them up. This is fine, and can even be pretty cool, if you know how to do it. Picture a place and draw in some features. Just make sure that you don't have rivers running over a high hill rather than around it, and that the place isn't filled with more geological wonders than we find in all of North America. This method is good if you already have some preconceived ideas about the location of the proposed castle.

Another way to do this is to get some United States Geological Service survey maps. These things are great, showing you contours, rock outcroppings, water, trees, etc. Once you have one of those, picking a likely place for a castle can be pretty easy. Just make sure you get a map that has the type of terrain that you need. Either way, I suggest you stay away from graph paper, at least initially. All that grid is going to do is lock your mind into the idea of rigidity and symmetry. Use unlined paper instead, to allow yourself the freedom to adapt to the terrain rather than the grid.

For the example, I acquired a U.S.G.S. quadrant map of an area in Colorado. I wanted an area that was mountainous and

with a lot of contours. I photocopied an area off my map, and then I reduced the scale by a factor of 20. (In other words, each heavy contour line now indicates 10-foot increments rather than 200-foot increments, and 1" now equals 80 feet rather than 1600 feet.) On a U.S.G.S. quadrant map, the scale is actually bigger, but I used the enlarge feature on the copier to adjust everything slightly. I decided to ignore tree cover for the purposes of this example, since I decided the lord who was building this castle would just be cutting down the trees for other purposes anyway. Map #1 shows what I came up with.

Once I had my topographical map, I thought about why this was, strategically speaking, a good place for a castle. I decided that the lake sat at the foot of a valley walled in on the other sides by fairly steep mountains. There is only one way around the lake, and that is via the road that passes on this side of it—the mountains come right down to the shore everywhere else. So, this point of mountain looks down on the only reasonable way into the valley, and is therefore a great place to build our castle.

Once you have a topographical area set up, it's time to think about how a castle might start there. It's a good idea to have several photocopies of your area ready. This way, you can design the castle in

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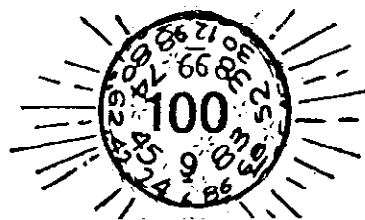
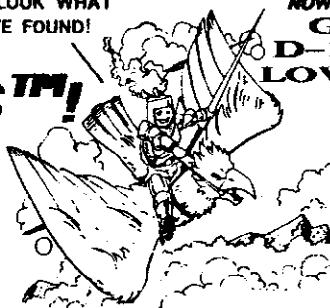
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several stages, allowing for the passage of time and showing how the castle has been modified over the years. It also will allow you to work on a trial-and-error basis without destroying your only copy of the map. Start off with something simple, like one of the motte-and-bailey plans.

In the example, I did just that. The lord of this area decided that a three-story stone tower (and one level of basement) would be about all that he could afford, so he built one on a spur of the hill, right at the edge of a steep slope that faces the road (the red square building in Map #2). A little below that on the hillside, he set up the bailey portion. There are some changes in the contour lines, reflecting the fact that some of the hill was smoothed down to a more gentle grade. Several smaller outbuildings (represented as outlined shapes) were built on this gentle grade and surrounded by a second palisade wall. The stone tower has a very common entry, an independent stair that is set 10 feet or so away from the side of the tower. A drawbridge can be lowered to the stairs, but when it's raised, the drawbridge is very difficult to assault.

This is not a major construction, but I have assumed this particular lord is a minor one, and that he rules a rather poor area in an out-of-the-way corner of the kingdom. His tower is still more than enough to guard the little road that leads into the fertile valley beyond the lake, though. At this point, a small-scale detail map of the tower's interior could be drawn. I decided, however, to wait and draw my interiors after I am finished with the castle's development.

For the second phase of development, think about how the castle could be expanded, both to gain more room and to take advantage of newer construction techniques. To minimize time, effort, and expense, try to incorporate as much of the existing structure as possible instead of tearing it down. Remember to utilize the natural terrain to best advantage.

In the example, I assumed that the original lord's grandson has been recognized as the Earl of the valley, and has been given a charter by the king to build a proper castle to protect the region. The valley itself has become more populated and prosperous, and the Earl has managed to raise sufficient funds for the task. Hiring an architect, the Earl begins his expansion.

Looking at Map #3, you can see all the changes that were made to the original design. I have left the original phase in red, while all the new construction is in green. First, a gate was built across the road leading into the valley, at a point where the land juts out a bit into the lake. A curtain wall has been built that runs down from the tower to this gate to complete the defensive wall formed by the steep hillside to the north of the castle. Now, the only way to enter the valley short of crossing the lake in boats is by passing through this gate.

Some of the original outbuildings have been torn down and the bailey has been expanded. The palisade wall has been replaced by a stone wall, with a second gate and flanking towers included. Again, changes in the contour lines show how the slope has been smoothed out, and in fact, dirt has been piled up on the inside the wall closest to the lake to make the whole courtyard even more level (any time you see contour lines merge into one line, it means a completely vertical surface exists. At some places along the walls the contour lines do this, showing higher ground on one side of the wall than the other).

From this point, continue adding new phases, pretending that changes and additions have been made to the construction over the years, taking into account new technology and resources. If you are operating within a high-fantasy setting, you might include some anti-dragon features or some traps for infiltrators using magic to get in. Throw in whatever you can think of to adapt the construction to the setting. You can do as few or as many phases as you think is appropriate for the setting.

For the example, I added one more phase. The Earl managed to marry his son off to the king's daughter, and it turns out that his grandson has ended up on the throne. Since our castle is now the traditional seat of the royal family, the new king grants himself a charter to spruce up the place once again. Furthermore, he draws upon the royal coffers to do it, so he can afford all the extras. This final phase is shown on Map #4 in purple (an appropriate color for royalty).

The original tower has been abandoned as the living area and instead is turned into a gate tower. The lord now lives in a huge edifice constructed from four joined, cylindrical towers seated near the very top of the hill—an imposing sight, indeed. Again, some of the outbuildings in what is now the outer courtyard have been removed to make room for the smaller circular tower that serves to further defend both the outer and inner gates. Round towers also have been added to all the older stone walls. Once again the contour lines are changed to reflect landscaping. Some new outbuildings have been added to both the outer and inner courtyards.

Now that we see that a typical castle is anything but typical, let's discuss just what might be found inside its walls. Recalling some of those castles that I have seen poorly designed (and yes, I have designed a few myself), one thing that sticks out is the amazing lack of creativity that went into the interior rooms. Usually, that four-walled square castle had a roof that spanned the entire thing, and underneath it were five or six huge rooms connected by doors from a central chamber. Along with this went one of the biggest castle killers of them all, the wall without width. Designers do it all the time, in most of the maps we draw. Dungeon rooms sit side by

side on a piece of graph paper with a pencil-thin line dividing them. How thick is the wall? "It doesn't really matter," we say. Wrong. Walls designed to hold up several storeys of stone tower or to withstand the pounding of heavy siege equipment were built 10, 20, or 30 feet thick. Don't overlook the spatial requirements of huge load-bearing and defensive walls when you draw up plans for your fortress.

So what goes into the spaces between those massive walls? More than you might think. Of course, there is a central hall. Every self-respecting lord had one, with a big feasting table and walls high enough to display all his spoils of war. In a tower-type construction, the main hall was usually two or even three stories high, with a balcony running around its perimeter on the upper floors. That way, even people who were upstairs could see what was going on down in that main hall.

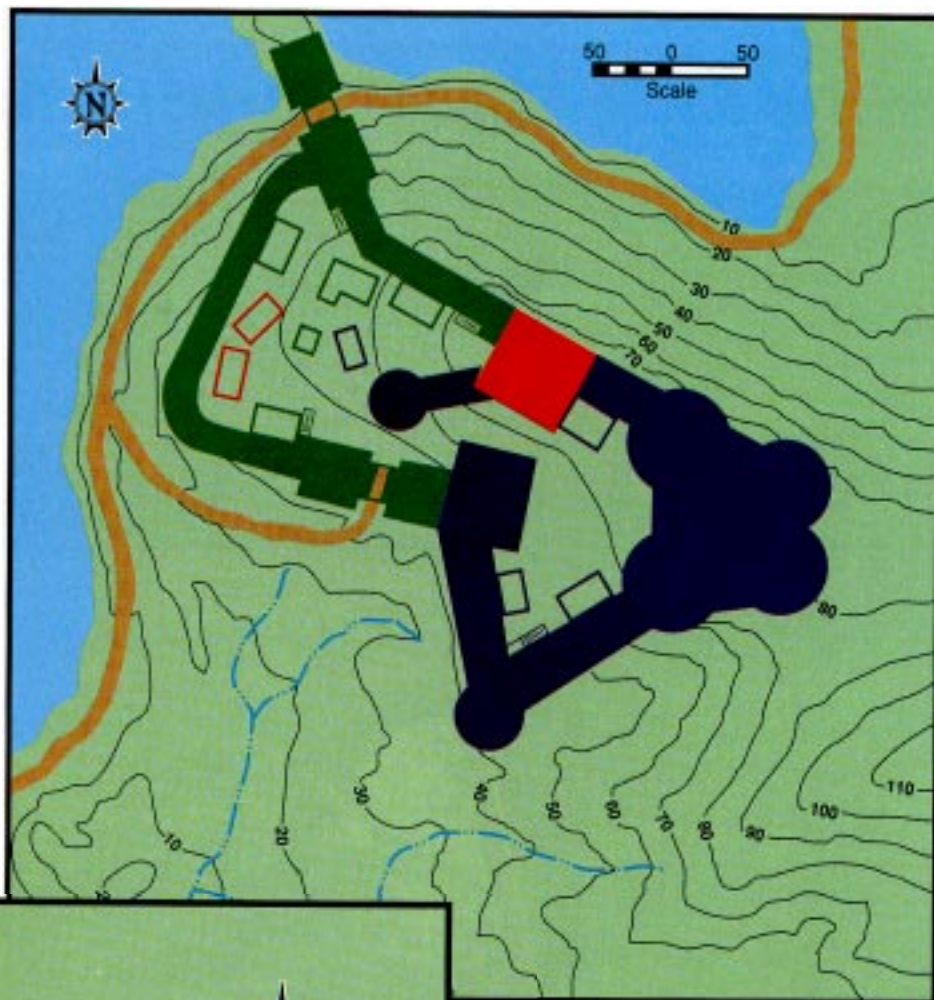
Map #5 shows the ground floor of our new tower. There are quite a few features to pay attention to in this plan. First, notice that the walls are thick (typically 5' for the interior walls and 10' for the outer ones). There's room within the walls for a fireplace in the kitchen, as well as the secret spiral stairwell off the Parley Room. Second, notice that the plan is far from symmetrical, and that there are a variety of different areas included. While far from complete, this plan does manage to include several distinct areas to make the castle much more interesting. There are several more upper floors, as well as a basement. (That spiral stairway going down from the kitchen leads to a wine cellar, for example.) The rest of the castle can be designed in the same way, incorporating any unusual features that seem interesting. While preparing this article, I decided that my water source for this castle was a *decanter of endless water* set up as a fountain in the fish pond—this place will never run out of water!

When you get the palace developed and detailed the way you want it, you can make a larger, more permanent map that can be used as a base for all your future plans, sieges, expansions, etc. You will need a map of each level, the roofs, and the basements. You can use different colors to key your map like we did. In the example, I decided that the original tower was constructed of natural fieldstone taken from the valley (with the resulting walls rougher and more uneven), but that the later two stages of work were built from granite blocks quarried higher in the mountains. The original tower also had 6.5' ceilings (that first lord was a short fellow), while the rest was at a more lofty height.

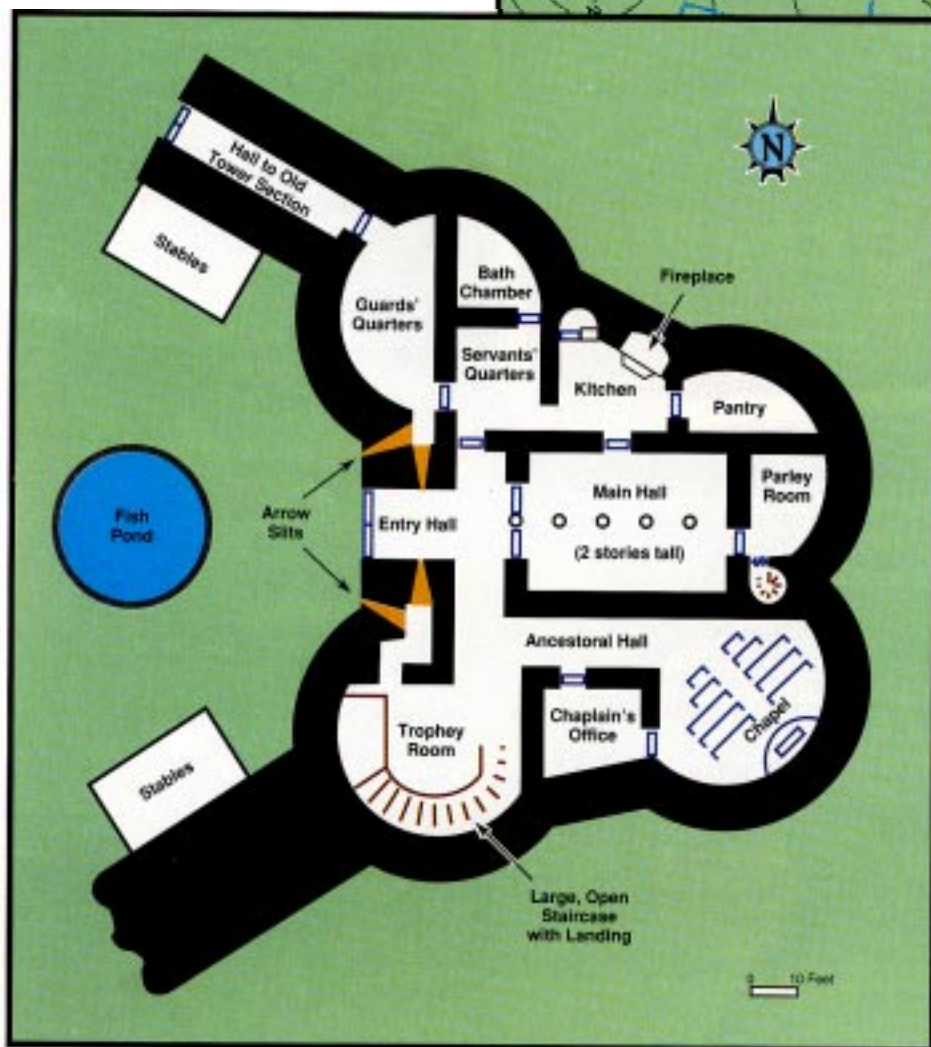
If you have access to it, you can use several mapsheets that overlay (especially if you can get some clear acetate sheets) to show more detail than would look good on one map. At this point, you also can overlay the whole onto some sort of graph paper, just to give yourself some sort of

scale. If you aren't using the overlay method but you have graph paper with lines that will reproduce when photocopied, photocopy a blank sheet right onto your map. Another option is to photocopy your map directly onto a piece of graph paper through a color copier, if you have access to one. As a last resort, you could draw the grid directly onto the map, but it's easy to make a mistake and ruin several hours worth of work.

You can apply these principles to other kinds of fortifications, too. Just take a look at a map of any of the ancient cities, like Rome or Istanbul. You will see that walls were expanded and centers of power altered and improved as the population increased. The secret is knowing that no fortification was ever built without regard for topographical features, and that no castle was built all at once.



Map #4



Map #5



NO VAMPIRE

HUNTER IN

RAVENLOFT

SHOULD BE

WITHOUT THE

INFORMATION

CONTAINED

IN THE

MEMOIRS OF

COUNT STRAHD

VON ZAROVICH...

# I, STRAHD



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# Seven Steps to a Successful Castle

Building a castle by the numbers

by L. Richard Baker III

Cartography by John Knecht

Do you plan to build a castle soon?

If you have a D & D® game character above 8th level, you should be thinking about it. The castle is often the crowning point of a character's career, the sign of prestige and power that marks her success. Every powerful wizard has his

forlorn tower, every cleric her fortified temple, and every warrior a castle to call his own. The challenge of designing and building a stronghold can add a whole new dimension to a campaign.

The castle-building system described in the following pages lets you decide just

## The Tower Plan

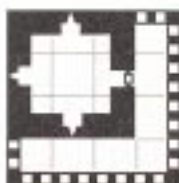
First Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor



Fourth Floor



Roof

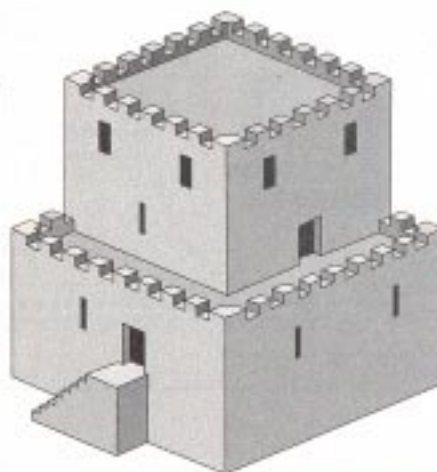


### Key

|  |            |  |             |
|--|------------|--|-------------|
|  | Wall       |  | Door        |
|  | Arrow Slit |  | Stairs      |
|  | Window     |  | Battlements |

1 square = 20 feet

View of  
Tower



how to put your character's fortress together. When you finish, you'll have a basic plan of your keep as well as an excellent idea of how much it costs and how long it will take to build. Be warned: Even the simplest castle design can cost 50,000 gold pieces! Building a castle is a serious financial proposition.

The construction rules expand on the system found in *DMGR2 The Castle Guide*. Having a copy of that book would be very helpful. Also, I'll show you how to put together five different castle designs, and give you a good start towards customizing your own designs from these basic templates. This system also includes several new castle modules that allow you to build smaller and simpler keeps, as well as add defensive features such as weapons emplacements and strengthened walls.

One more note before we get started: These castles are based on historical fortifications found in medieval Europe, but several fantastic variations have been included to reflect common stereotypes found in fantasy literature and role-playing games. Ahistorical options are clearly marked so that the DM can cross them out if he does not wish to allow them in castles built in his campaign.

### Design guidelines

This section summarizes the design rules from *DMGR2 The Castle Guide*. In addition, several new castle modules (pieces, or "building blocks" of a castle) are introduced in Table I: The Expanded Castle Modules table. The table lists four characteristics for each module: Tech, Time, Gold, and Dimensions. The various entries on the table are explained below.

Tech describes the technological level required to build a castle module of that type. Societies with crude stone-working capabilities will be very limited in what they can construct. Tech levels are rated from 1 to 8:

- 1-Early wooden construction
- 2-Advanced wooden construction
- 3-Early stone construction
- 4-Advanced stone construction
- 5-Early gatekeepers and hoardings
- 6-Advanced gatekeepers and machicolations
- 7-Grand gatekeepers
- 8-Full concentric castles

Time and gold requirements list how many man-days and how much money it takes to build one unit of the listed castle module. A typical castle will have several towers and hundreds of wall modules, so remember to multiply the listed figures by the number of modules used.

Dimensions describe the feature's size and any notes about its composition.

### Modules

Doors, windows, or arrow slits can be installed wherever the designer wants, but a good rule of thumb is that no more than one opening of any kind can pierce a 10' stretch of wall or building. Stairs are assumed to be included in any multi-story building.

All towers are two storeys, (30' tall and have a ground floor, an upper floor, and a roof. If desired, a one-level cellar equal to the half of the internal measurements of the structure can be added for free. For example, a stone tower with a 30' X 30' interior measurement can include a

15' X 15' cellar. These chambers make good storerooms or latrines.

Stone walls are assumed to be capped by a parapet. This is an open-air, crenellated battlement with an outer wall 2' thick, broken by merlons. This means that a stone wall is solid on the ground level, but part of the castle floorplan on its top.

### Stacking modules

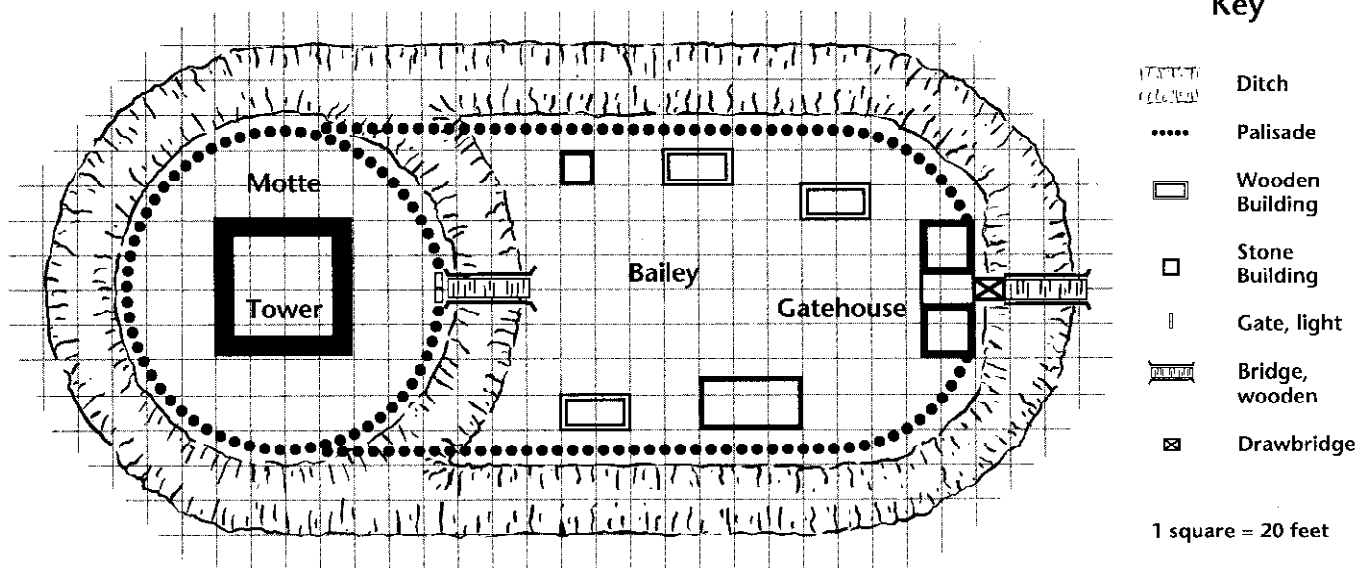
Many castles are more than one unit high. For example, a stone curtain wall module is 15' tall, but a curtain wall 30' or even 45' tall can be raised. Towers can be doubled in height by building one on top of the other. Barbicans, gatekeepers, towers, and walls can be stacked.

When walls are stacked, they require additional bracing. For each 50' length of wall, an additional wall module must be bought for each level to be stacked above it. A 30'-high wall requires one additional module per 50' length of wall, a 45' wall requires three additional modules, and a 60' wall would require six additional units.

A tower may support a second tower module of lesser size on top of it with no additional bracing, so a large round tower can support a medium stone tower. If the tower is anchored to a stone wall, it can support a second tower module of equal size. Towers cannot be stacked more than four modules high.

Barbicans and gatekeepers can be stacked by simply stacking tower modules on top of the towers that are included in the structure. A large barbican features two medium round towers, so two small round towers can be stacked on it.

## The Motte & Bailey Plan



## Definitions

**Barbican:** A barbican consists of two round towers with a building linking them together above an open archway or passage. They are often used as outworks or to guard gates. The small barbican consists of two small towers 20' apart, the medium barbican consists of two medium towers 20' apart, and the large barbican consists of two medium towers 40' apart. The barbican is two storeys tall, and its towers may include cellars or be stacked as described in the Construction guidelines below. All barbicans include a gate of the appropriate size and a portcullis at no extra charge.

**Bastion:** The bastion is a strong point in a stone wall designed to support a heavy war engine. It is basically a short, solid tower. Bastions are 30' across and may be round, square, angular, or even D-shaped. A bastion module stands 15' tall, but they may be stacked to bring them level with the surrounding wall. The bastion's price includes hoardings or machicolations to match the surrounding walls, but does not include the siege engine it is designed to carry.

**Bridge/Causeway, stone:** This is a stone or earthen roadway that is used as a road up steep hillsides, over lakes or wetlands, or even over dry ditches. A causeway module is assumed to be 10' long, 10' wide, and 10' above the surrounding terrain. Causeways can be stacked to create higher roadways, but cannot be built more than 40' tall without magical assistance.

A bridge can span an unsupported gap whose width is equal to its height, so a 40' causeway could span a 40' wide crevasse with one arch. (This is a gross oversimplification of medieval engineering, but it works for game purposes.) A causeway has to be built from the lakebed or riverbed up, so to create a causeway whose road surface is 10' above a 20' deep lake would require three causeway units to be stacked.

Like a stone wall, one extra causeway module must be allocated per 50' section for each level the causeway must carry above it. A 20' tall causeway requires one additional module per 50' section, a 30' causeway requires three additional modules, and a 40' causeway requires six additional causeway modules.

If the causeway will not leave dry ground (e.g., a road up a hillside or across a dry ditch), the embankment can be constructed from earth and reinforced with timber and stone. The cost and time requirements are reduced to 25% of their listed value if this is done. An earthen causeway can be stacked two units high.

**Bridge/Causeway, wooden:** The same considerations for a stone bridge apply, but a wooden bridge can be stacked to bridge a gap of 60'. If the builder wishes to pay an extra 50% in cost and time requirements, the wooden bridge can be rigged with a quick collapse framework

for easy destruction.

**Building, stone:** Stone buildings are assumed to have exterior walls averaging 2' thick and whatever interior partitions their builders see fit. Small, medium and large buildings stand 15' tall with one level; the greater stone building stands 30' tall with two internal levels, and the grand stone building stands 45' tall with three internal levels. The building dimensions are not required to be identical to those listed—the building can have any shape conceivable, so long as the square footage stays the same.

For an extra 25% in cost and building time, the roof of a stone building can be finished with standard battlements.

**Building, wooden:** Wooden buildings are assumed to have walls averaging 3" to 6" thick, and may be designed with any shape or interior partitioning the builder desires as long as the square footage remains the same. Great buildings and grand buildings have the same dimensions as their stone counterparts.

**Buttress/Turret:** The buttress is a tower with a 10' interior dimension (10' diameter for round buttresses, or 10' × 10' for square buttresses) and walls equal in thickness to its host tower. It creates a little extra room inside the tower, and also projects far enough from the tower's side to allow fire from the buttresses to affect enemies standing near the base of the host tower.

The buttress is a supporting structure that is built into a tower to strengthen it. Buttresses may be round or square, and are usually found on the corners of square towers or evenly spaced around round towers. Buttresses can be stacked up to one unit higher than their host tower; if the buttress rises above the tower roof, it is often called a turret. Buttresses can be left unstacked or partially stacked, running only part of the way up the side of a tower.

Small towers cannot be buttressed. Other towers cannot have more than four buttresses.

**Ditch:** Each ditch module is 10' long, 10' wide, and 5' deep. It is possible to build deeper or wider ditches by doubling or quadrupling the number of modules used for a 10' length of trench.

**Gate:** Gates can be built into palisades, wooden or stone walls, and wooden or stone buildings. They are assumed to be a part of gatehouses, barbicans, and gatekeepers. Light gates are made of 6"-thick wood, bound with iron, and protected by a sturdy bar. Medium gates are made from 9"-thick wood sheathed in bronze, iron, or steel and protected by several barring devices. Heavy gates are made of 2"-thick bronze or iron plate riveted to an iron frame, with locks and heavy bars.

A gate module is 10' wide and 10' tall. More impressive portals can be created by doubling or tripling the number of modules used. All gates come with a free portcullis if the builder wishes to have

one in stalled.

**Gatehouse:** The gatehouse is a strong building that protects a set of gates. Historically, gatehouses were used to guard a castle's gates before barbicans and gatekeepers became popular. They tend to be weaker than a full gatekeep, but are also significantly cheaper.

All gatehouses consist of two towers with a narrow passage between them. A structure links the two halves of the gatehouse at their upper levels. Gatehouses are built as part of the wall defenses and do not project outward as do gatekeepers.

Gatehouses are assumed to come with two of these features: drawbridge, portcullis, or medium gate. Their towers may include cellars, as with other towers.

The small gatehouse consists of two square towers with 5'-thick walls, measuring 20' × 20' on the interior. The two towers are spaced 10' apart. The medium gatehouse consists of two small square towers set 20' apart. Lastly, the great gatehouse consists of two medium square towers set 30' apart. The medium and great gatehouse towers can be stacked, if the builder wishes to do so.

**Gatekeep:** Gatekeepers are sophisticated defenses that enclose the castle entrance within a courtyard of walls and towers. The attacker must pass within the gatekeep to get near the fortress's main gates. Gatekeepers can be assumed to contain medium gates and portcullises, if desired. The tower portions of the gatekeep can be stacked or built with cellars.

The lesser gatekeep consists of two small round towers set 20' apart, with a linking structure like a barbican. It is set 20' out from the castle's walls, with 15'-high stone walls connecting the towers to the walls to create an enclosed killing ground before the castle's gates.

The greater gatekeep is built around four medium round towers. The forward pair of towers is 20' apart and 20' in front of the castle walls, and is connected by a linking structure. The rear pair of towers is built into the castle walls. Stone walls 15' high join the outer and inner pair of towers.

The grand gatekeep uses large round towers in place of the medium towers. The outer towers are spaced 40' apart, and are 39' in front of the inner pair of towers.

**Moat/Channel:** Moats are nothing more than ditches that are finished so that they will contain water permanently. A channel is a waterway built to connect the moat with the body of water that will be used to fill it.

**Motte:** A motte is an artificial mound that provides a castle with the advantage of height. One unit of motte raises a 10' square section of earth 5' in height. Mottes must be at least twice as wide and long as they are tall.

Motte modules also can be used to create artificial islands. The lakebed or riverbed cannot be more than 20' deep. Artificial

islands double building times and costs of the motte.

**Palisade:** A palisade is a wall of wooden posts about six inches thick. It is often used on the defending side of a ditch. Each palisade module is 10' long and 5' tall. Palisade modules can be stacked up to 20' in height, but if the builder wants his troops to have a catwalk to fight from, a wooden wall module will have to be bought for each stacked palisade module.

**Reinforcement:** It is possible to build towers and other buildings extra-strong by thickening the bases and the foundations to resist the effects of sapping or bombardment. Reinforcing a structure adds 50% to the building time and cost, but adds 25% to the building's strength.

Walls cannot be reinforced, but they can be built thicker than 10' by building wall modules side-by-side. Each extra thickness of stone wall adds 50% to its strength.

**Tower, round:** Towers are used to strengthen walls and provide the defenders of the wall with extra cover and better fields of fire. They also can be used as free-standing defenses. Towers may be stacked as described under the Construction guidelines below, and may include cellars at the builder's option.

Small round towers have an interior diameter of 30', with 10'-thick walls. Medium towers have an interior diameter of 40', and large towers have an interior

diameter of 60'. Round towers provide less space than square towers, but are stronger and use less stone.

**Tower, square:** Square towers are built for the same reasons as round towers, but are less desirable because they cost more and are not as resistant to sapping or bombardment. However, people learned how to build square towers before they were able to build round towers, so the designer may be forced to use square towers.

**Square towers** can be stacked or built with cellars as described in the Construction guidelines below. Small square towers are 30' x 30' on the interior, with 10'-thick walls. Medium towers are 40' x 40' square, and large towers 60' x 60' square.

**Tunnel:** Each tunnel module represents a 10' x 10' x 10' volume worth of underground chambers. Tunnel modules can be bought to create dungeons, escape tunnels, or even as approaches to the castle.

**Wall, stone:** A stone wall's module is 10' long, 10' thick, and 15' tall. Walls can be stacked as described under the Construction guidelines section. The stone wall is assumed to include a walkway on its upper surface, with crenellated battlements.

**Hoardings** are wooden structures built at the top of a wall to allow defenders to stand over the wall's base and rain down missiles and other substances directly on enemies attacking the wall. A glacia is a

angled skirt of stone at the base of the wall that reinforces the wall against attacks by sappers or bores. A wall built with a glacia includes hoardings, if desired. Machicolations are very similar to hoardings, but are made out of stone. A machicolated wall includes a glacia, if desired.

A wall can be built to include a postern gate, which is a small doorway through which defenders can sally to launch raids and counterattacks against their enemies. Add the postern cost to the wall's normal cost.

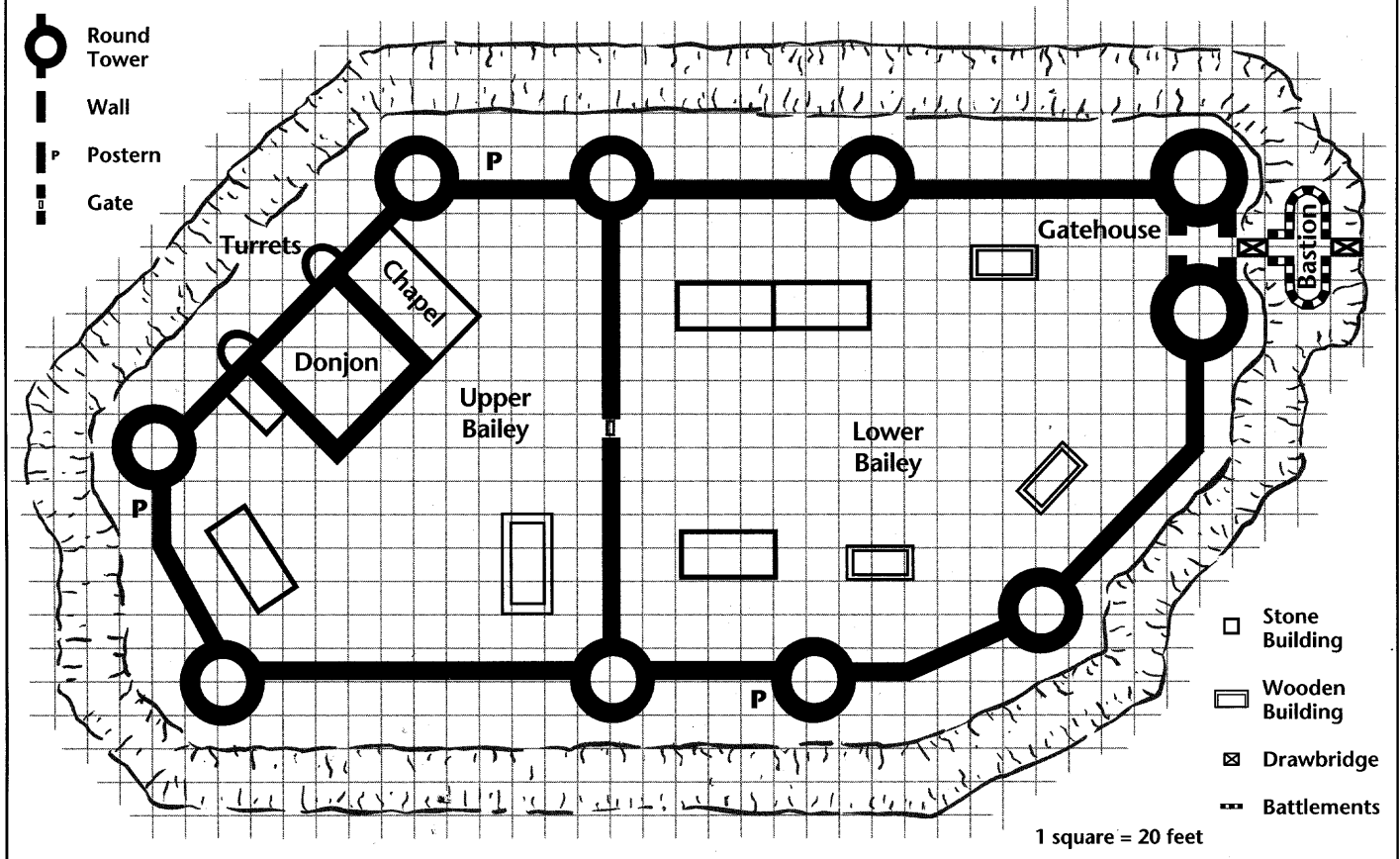
**Wall, wooden:** A section of wooden wall is 10' long, 15' high, and 3" thick. It can be stacked using the same rules for stacking stone walls. Wooden walls also can be used as flooring; each unit of wooden flooring covers 150' square feet.

## Construction guidelines

This castle-design process includes seven basic steps, from choosing the site to actually beginning construction. In regular play, a character would be expected to go to extensive trouble to secure permission to put up a castle, find a suitable wilderness to tame, and convince the locals to aid him—but we'll skip over that material here. We're only interested in showing you how to design and build your castle.

The seven steps to building your castle are:

## The Curtain Wall Plan



1. Select a site.
2. Choose a style of castle.
3. Determine approaches.
4. Customize design.
5. Finish design and add details.
6. Calculate cost and construction time of castle.
7. Build it!

By following these steps, you will be able to take your castle from untamed wilderness to the drawing board to a polished design just waiting for the first stone to be laid. Before you get started, you probably will want to have a pencil, a calculator, some graph paper, and some scrap paper handy.

## Select a site

Before you begin to lay out your castle, you should decide where you're going to put it. We will assume that your characters have already won themselves a piece of land and are pretty sure that they want to construct a stronghold there. Take note, Dungeon Masters: This is a big assumption, and you should seriously consider orchestrating several important adventures around the acquisition of a title and land to build on.

The site you select should enjoy some strategic relevance. If there is something of vital importance in your domain, such as a city, deep-water harbor, or natural resource, you probably will want to locate your fortress nearby to watch over that asset. The castle is useless if invaders choose to bypass it to go after something of greater value.

You should refer to the article by Thomas Reid, "The Evolution of a Castle," in this magazine concerning castle locations and development before you actually select your construction site.

Once you have found a site you want to build on, you need to determine how easy or difficult it will be to build a castle there. This is reflected by the Production Modifier, or PM for short. The site's terrain; geography, and climate all contribute to the Production Modifier and have a significant effect on the castle's cost and time of construction.

During this step, you will figure out your site's PM. If you come up with an astronomical modifier, you may want to consider selecting another site and trying again.

To determine the site's PM, refer to Table II: Production Modifiers table. A castle's cost will be influenced by the climate, geography, and ground cover of the building site. Another important consideration is the location and quality of resources that will be used in the castle's construction. Lastly, the workforce, society type, skill, and morale also will be included.

Make a note of the figures listed in Table II in each of the appropriate categories for your castle's building site. Multiply all the different factors together to determine the Production Modifier for a castle built on

that site.

Do this calculation as many times as you want to determine the best location. However, the DM is within her rights to charge a 100 gp survey fee for each site you "survey" (perform the calculation for). After all, someone has to go out and examine each site!

Each of these factors is discussed in detail in DMGR2 *The Castle Guide*. Table II simply repeats the PM associated with each one. If there is any debate over what kind of climate, resources, or workforce prevails at any given site, the DM gets the final word.

## Choose a style

Now that you have an idea of where this castle will be built, you should select a basic castle style. Most castles will fall into one of five different categories. These are: the tower; the motte-and-bailey; the curtain-wall defense; the enclosed keep; and the concentric castle.

### The tower

The cheapest castle to build is one with only one piece. A simple stone tower can resist small-scale attacks and provide a safe home for a party of adventurers. The tower provides no defense for any out-buildings or surrounding land, cannot house a large garrison, and has limited stores. On the other hand, it's cheap compared with the other designs.

Inside the tower, it was customary to design the entrance hall as a last-ditch defensive position. The room would have only one exit, and sometimes was built with arrow slits or murder holes facing into it so that the defenders could attack invaders who made it past the front door. These features are optional.

Take a look at Diagram #1, the Tower Plan. Naturally, this is a very simple layout. Simply pick the place where you want to build the tower, and place it there. Since this is the entire castle, we'll assume you want to build a large square tower, with a medium square tower stacked above it, for a total of four interior levels plus a cellar and the roof.

The tower's roof is assumed to open and battlemented. Each of the first two floors is 60' × 60' on the interior, and the 10' stone walls make the castle 80' × 80' at its base on the ground. The upper two floors are 40' square. A 30' × 60' cellar is included in the price of the large tower.

Some easy options to add to this design in the next step include: surrounding it with a palisade or ditch; adding turrets or buttresses; changing the tower from square to round; or building in a drawbridge to help protect the entrance.

Tower components: large square tower, medium square tower.

Cost: 25,800 gp.

Time required to build: 1,950 man-days.

### The motte-and-bailey

This design uses a stone tower or a shell

keep as its donjon, or strongpoint, and surrounds the tower with a sturdy palisade. An adjacent area known as the bailey was enclosed in a second stockade. The bailey was often a small village, with stables, barracks, armories, smiths, and craftsmen. Usually, the gate to the castle led into the bailey, and a second gate led into the donjon or centerpoint. The donjon was usually raised on an artificial hill known as a motte.

This design is stronger than a simple tower and provides for a larger garrison. It provides good protection for the surrounding lands, since the bailey can house a number of people in time of war. Its downfall lies in the fact that its defenses do not support one another.

Refer to the Motte-and-Bailey Plan diagram. Our design uses a stone tower as the donjon, but many historical designs substituted a shell keep for a stone tower. The shell keep consisted of a curtain wall that boxed in several stone buildings. The center of this arrangement was an open courtyard. To build a shell keep, you buy as much curtain wall as you need for the exterior keep dimensions, and then buy stone buildings to fill the inside. Don't forget a gate!

Our motte-and-bailey design raises the central tower on a motte 30' high, while surrounding the entire castle with a ditch and palisade. The central donjon is exactly the same as the tower described in the Tower Plan above—a medium square tower stacked on a large square tower. As in the previous example, the builder gets a free cellar 30' by 60' in size.

In the bailey, we will assume that the designer needs to build two stone buildings (an armory and a barracks) and three wooden buildings (stables, a mess hall, and a storage building.) The entrance to the bailey is guarded by a small gatehouse and a drawbridge to span the surrounding ditch. The gates between the bailey and the keep are not protected by a gatehouse, and are considered light gates.

The ditch itself is 40' wide and 20' deep. Wooden bridges have been added to span the ditch between the motte and the bailey, and from the gatehouse to the castle approach.

Variations on this design may include: adding a gatehouse between the keep and the bailey; increasing the size of either the keep compound or the bailey; adding buildings to the bailey; replacing the tower keep with a shell keep; adding a drawbridge between the bailey and the keep. You can save a lot of time and money by finding a natural hill to build on, instead of creating your own motte.

Motte-and-Bailey components: large square tower, medium square tower, small gatehouse, light gate, small stone building, large stone building, three medium wooden buildings, 1,884 motte modules (200' diameter motte, raised 30', 2,321 ditch modules (40' wide and 20' deep), 18 wooden bridge modules (two bridges 10' wide,

20' tall, and 40' long), 145 palisade modules (1450' long palisade, 5' tall).

cost: 108,490 gp.

Time required: 12,422 man-days.

### The curtain-wall defense

The curtain-wall castle descended from motte-and-bailey designs, shifting the defensive emphasis to the outer walls. Like the motte and bailey, the castle is divided into two parts: a bailey and a keep. The two parts of the castle do not support each other. Despite this flaw, the walls themselves are quite strong and are often protected by flanking towers.

Replacing a wooden palisade with a thick stone wall and adding towers as reinforcement vastly improves the castle's strength, but also makes the curtain-wall defense quite costly.

The keep is still the center of the castle, and may rest on a tall motte or natural hill. A stone wall surrounds the keep, and towers protect the wall. One gate leads from the keep's compound to the bailey, which is also protected by a stone wall and small towers. The keep and the bailey share a common outer wall, but an attacker who captured the bailey would still have to fight his way through the partitioning wall to take the inner compound.

Refer to the Curtain-Wall Castle Plan diagram. In case you're curious, the design

is loosely based on the castle at Arques, France. Our plan takes some liberties with the proportions and the locations of the towers and buildings.

The curtain-wall plan pinches pennies by making the donjon itself double as one of the towers defending the outer wall. This works especially well if the castle builder can position the donjon so that it commands difficult terrain. The donjon consists of the same keep we've used in the previous two designs, but we've added two turrets to anchor the outside corners of the keep and included an escape tunnel. Two stone buildings have been built adjacent to the keep to add to the lords living space.

The keep's compound, or upper bailey, includes three small round towers to provide flanking fire along the walls. A medium gate guards the entrance from the lower bailey. In the lower bailey, five more small round towers and a medium barbican (acting as a gatehouse) complete the castle's defenses. A bastion (actually two bastions built back-to-back) helps guard the gate with two drawbridges. Several extra stone and wooden buildings are thrown in to provide more living and storage space.

The outer walls of the castle are stacked two modules high, and are 30' tall. They are defended by a glacia, or stone facing

along their outer bases, and hoardings—wooden fighting platforms along their battlements. The small round towers are 30' tall as well, with two interior levels and a 15' × 30' cellar in each.

The entire castle is surrounded by a ditch, crossed by only one set of drawbridges. This is a fairly sophisticated castle when all is said and done, and you'll pay dearly for this fortress.

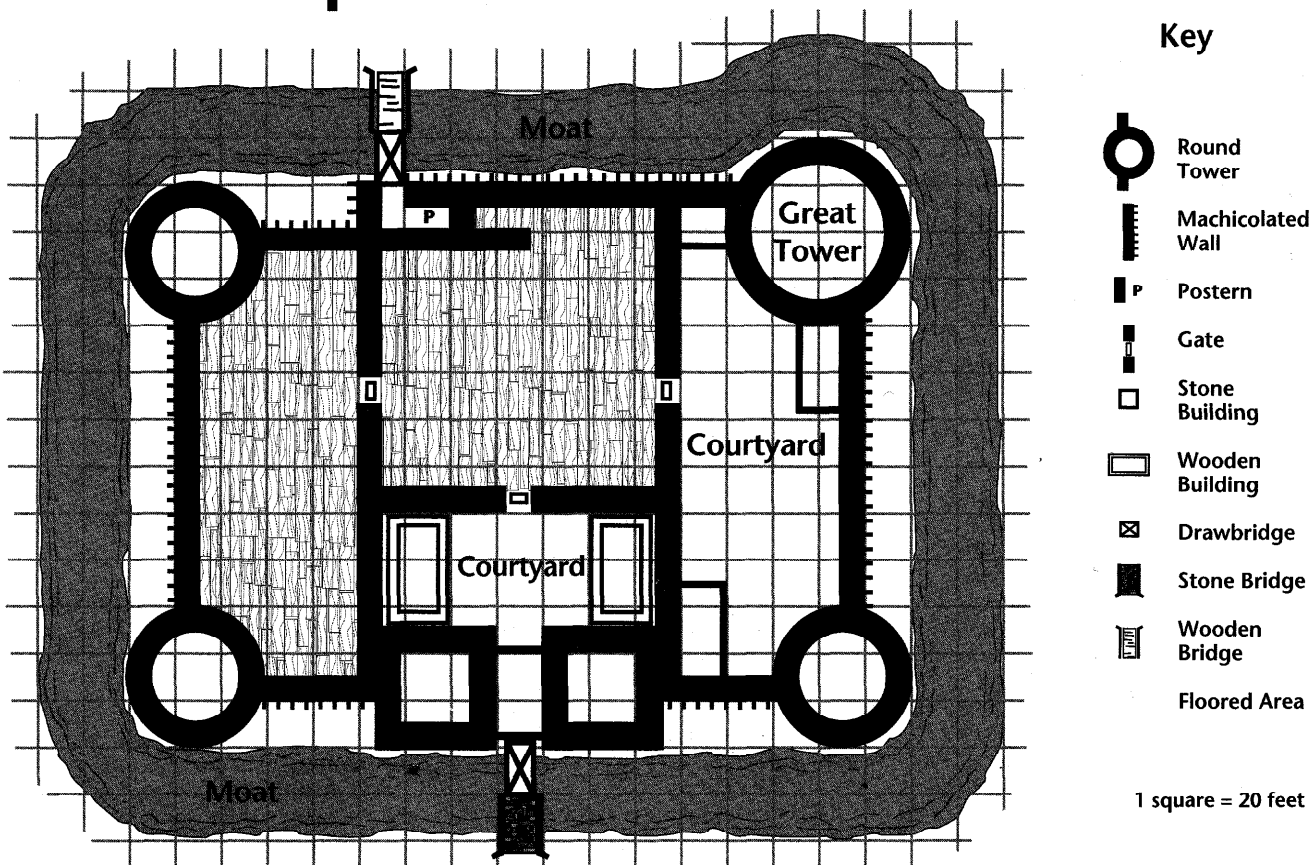
Variations on this design would include expanding the lower bailey to enclose a larger area, adding a barbican or outwork to help guard the approaches to the gatehouse, stacking the towers, replacing the wooden hoardings with stone machicolations, or replacing the barbican with a gatekeep.

Curtain-Wall Defense components: large square tower, medium square tower, six buttresses (stacked in two turrets), eight small round towers, medium barbican, two bastions, medium gate, medium stone building, four large stone buildings, one grand stone building, three medium wooden buildings, one large wooden building, two drawbridges, 119 stone wall with glacia (hoardings included), 148 stone wall modules, three postern gates, 3,264 ditch modules (40' wide, 20' deep), 50 tunnel modules.

Cost: 462,220 gp.

Time required: 32,100 man-days.

## Enclosed Keep Plan



### The enclosed keep

The enclosed keep is a design that saw very little historical use. However, it is often found in fantasy literature and role-playing games. While real-life castles usually included open courtyards (or baileys) between the outer walls and the inner defenses or donjon, the enclosed keep actually roofs over this space. The castle becomes one huge building—even though it may still include towers, gatehouses, and other structures.

The enclosed keep lacks the open spaces of the bailey and can house only a limited number of people before it becomes crowded. It is not good for area defense. However, it can be held with a minimal garrison and is perfect for an adventuring party's stronghold or a wealthy retreat. "The Castle on the Moors" from DMGR2 is of this design.

The enclosed keep has to be fairly small. If the outer walls are built to include too large an area, the cost of roofing the space between becomes astronomical. Another disadvantage lies in the lack of a second line of defense; once invaders are past the walls, they are in the castle. Even a motte-and-bailey design forces invaders to pass through the bailey before they can assault the keep itself.

On the other hand, there are advantages to this kind of design, especially in a fantasy setting. Its roof makes airborne attacks difficult. Since it is small and concentrated, it is cheaper than a curtain wall or concentric castle, while it is stronger than a simple stone tower. Its small ground area also means that it can be built in places where larger designs aren't feasible, such as small islands or steep hilltops.

Refer to the Enclosed Keep Plan diagram. Our design features three small round towers and one large round tower as the corners of the castle. An additional medium round tower is stacked on top of the large tower, and will rise two levels higher than the rest of the keep. The curtain wall linking the towers is capped by machicolations and is doubled in height to match the towers themselves.

A medium gatehouse controls access to the keep through a drawbridge and a portcullis. A postern gate at the keep's rear leads to a second drawbridge, guarded by baffled walls. Inside the main gate, the castle is partitioned into three areas by internal walls. Part of the castle consists of courtyards open to the sky, but most of the keep is roofed over with wooden wall modules.

Each of the medium towers has a cellar 20' in diameter, while the large tower has a cellar 30' in diameter. We also will include an additional dungeon area 100' square beneath the keep itself.

Since the castle is two levels high, we will need to buy wooden walls for two levels of flooring, plus a third section as a roof, for the space enclosed by the curtain walls. We will surround this keep with a

moat 40' wide and 10' deep.

Options for customizing this design might include: enlarging the keep by using medium or large round towers instead of small towers; providing a barbican to guard the gatehouse; adding turrets to the corner towers; stacking the entire castle another two levels high; or saving time and money by not building the moat.

Enclosed keep components: four medium round towers, one large round tower, medium gatehouse (drawbridge included), two large wooden buildings, two medium stone buildings, one small stone building, one drawbridge, four wooden bridge modules, five stone bridge modules, three light gates, 54 stone wall with machicolations modules (glacis included), 191 stone wall modules, one postern, 1008 moat modules (40' wide, 10' deep), 100 tunnel modules (100' × 100' dungeon), 506 wooden wall modules.

cost: 303,011 gp.

Time required: 24,622 man-days.

### The concentric castle

Representing the ultimate in castle design, the concentric castle uses two or more curtain walls to create a layered defense. The outer wall and its towers are supported by an inner wall of greater height, also reinforced by towers. The donjon becomes obsolete in this design, but may still be used as a central citadel. A well-designed concentric castle built on good terrain can be impregnable.

The size of the concentric castle allows it to support a considerable army and house a great number of people. Frequently, the cisterns and storehouses of the concentric castle are the deciding factors in its strength. If it can withstand a long siege, it may not be worth attacking.

Refer to the Concentric Castle Plan diagram. This design is loosely based on the castle at Beaumaris, Anglesey, Wales. The entire castle is built on an artificial island in the middle of a lake, so the first order of business is to buy a gigantic motte with the artificial-island option. We will assume that the lake is 20' deep and that we want the island to stand 10' above water level.

We'll begin our design at the center and work outward. Although the concentric defenses have rendered the central donjon somewhat obsolete, we'll still build an impressive central tower as a seat of government. Two large round towers are built side by side and buttressed; because they support each other, they can both be stacked three units high for a six-level tower standing 90' tall. We also will place several stone buildings and a wooden building in the inner courtyard.

The central courtyard is surrounded by a high curtain wall anchored by four double-stacked medium round towers 60' in height. The towers are joined by a stone wall with machicolations, stacked two modules high for a 30' curtain wall. This wall is pierced by two heavy gates, which

are protected by two lesser gatekeepers.

Beyond the inner wall lies the outer bailey. The bailey is surrounded by a machicolated wall 15' high, with four small round towers to protect and support it. Ten bastions are added to strengthen the wall even more. The outer wall is pierced by two gates, protected by medium gatehouses with drawbridges. Note that two bastions are built jutting out on piers to provide extra covering fire for the approaches to the gatehouses. The bailey itself is partitioned by battlemented walls that ensure that an attacker who breaches the outer wall will be contained in one small area of the castle.

Two stone causeways span the lake that surrounds the castle.

This design is extremely expensive, but would stand against a ground-based or waterborne assault for months with a small garrison. If it has a weakness, it lies in the castle's vulnerability to magical or monstrous attack—but none of the other designs can accommodate those considerations, either.

Variations on this design would include changing its size by making the towers larger or smaller or joining the defenses to a small town and surrounding the town with a curtain wall to protect it. It is possible to save an enormous amount of labor (about half of the time requirement) by building this castle on dry land or on a natural island, instead of building an island from scratch.

Concentric castle components: six large round towers, 12 buttress modules, 12 medium round towers, two small gatekeepers, four small round towers, two medium gatehouses, 10 bastions, six medium gates, four heavy gates, three medium wooden buildings, two large stone buildings, four medium stone buildings, 200 stone wall with machicolations modules (glacis included), 122 stone wall modules, two posterns, 72 stone causeway modules, 14,496 Motte modules (artificial island).

Cost: 1,241,670 gp.

Time required: 113,726 man-days.

When you finish with this step, you should have a castle plan of the appropriate style. You can copy the plan to a piece of graph paper in order to customize it in later steps, or you can leave the plans as they appear here.

If you wish to generate detailed floor plans from these overviews, feel free to improvise. You can place doors, stairwells, windows, or arrow embrasures wherever you wish, but you should remember two things: first, a section of wall or building should not have more than one opening (door, arrow slit, etc.) per 10 feet; and secondly, it's a bad idea to put windows or exterior doors on the ground floor, since they can be stormed during an enemy attack.

### Determine approaches

You now should take a look at the build-

ing site and try to imagine just how your castle will be situated on this terrain. If you are building a castle on a plain where it can be attacked from any direction, you shouldn't worry about this step—you will have to make certain that the castle can defend itself equally well on all sides. Otherwise, determine the avenues of approach that enemies are likely to take if your castle is assaulted.

Again, you may want to refer to Thomas Reid's article in this issue about castle evolution and placement. In addition to suggesting a plan for your fortress, a diagram of the surrounding area also can be useful for determining siege lines and artillery positions should your castle ever come under attack.

If desired, the castle's approaches can be altered by purchasing enough ditch, causeway, or motte modules. Excavating is easy, but the DM will have to judge any efforts to create ramps and roadways by moving earth around. Mark these improvements on a copy of your terrain diagram, and don't forget to include this in the castle's overall price.

### Customize the plan

In this step, you can alter your design to fit the exact terrain and considerations for the castle you are building. You may want

to substitute pieces to make your castle stronger (and more expensive), or try to economize by settling for smaller and cheaper components. Stone and wooden buildings can be added to the courtyards and baileys to provide for additional barracks, storerooms, and work areas. New outworks can be used to guard the approaches to the castle.

The most important consideration in this step is the castle's topography and how to take advantage of it. Does the castle sit on a natural hilltop? If it does, you probably don't need to buy a motte, but you may need to build a causeway to the castle's gates. Does one wall of the castle overlook impassable terrain, such as a gorge or a body of water? You may be able to save money by skimping on the defenses there, since it is unlikely an attacker will be able to assault the wall in question.

Very few castles sit on a flat plain that is equally vulnerable in all directions—look for ways to channel attackers toward your castle's strong points. For example, by locating your castle on an artificial island in the middle of a lake, you can guarantee that the attackers will be forced to concentrate their assault on the causeway that bridges the lake.

You can use the generic castle designs here as a guide in customizing your own

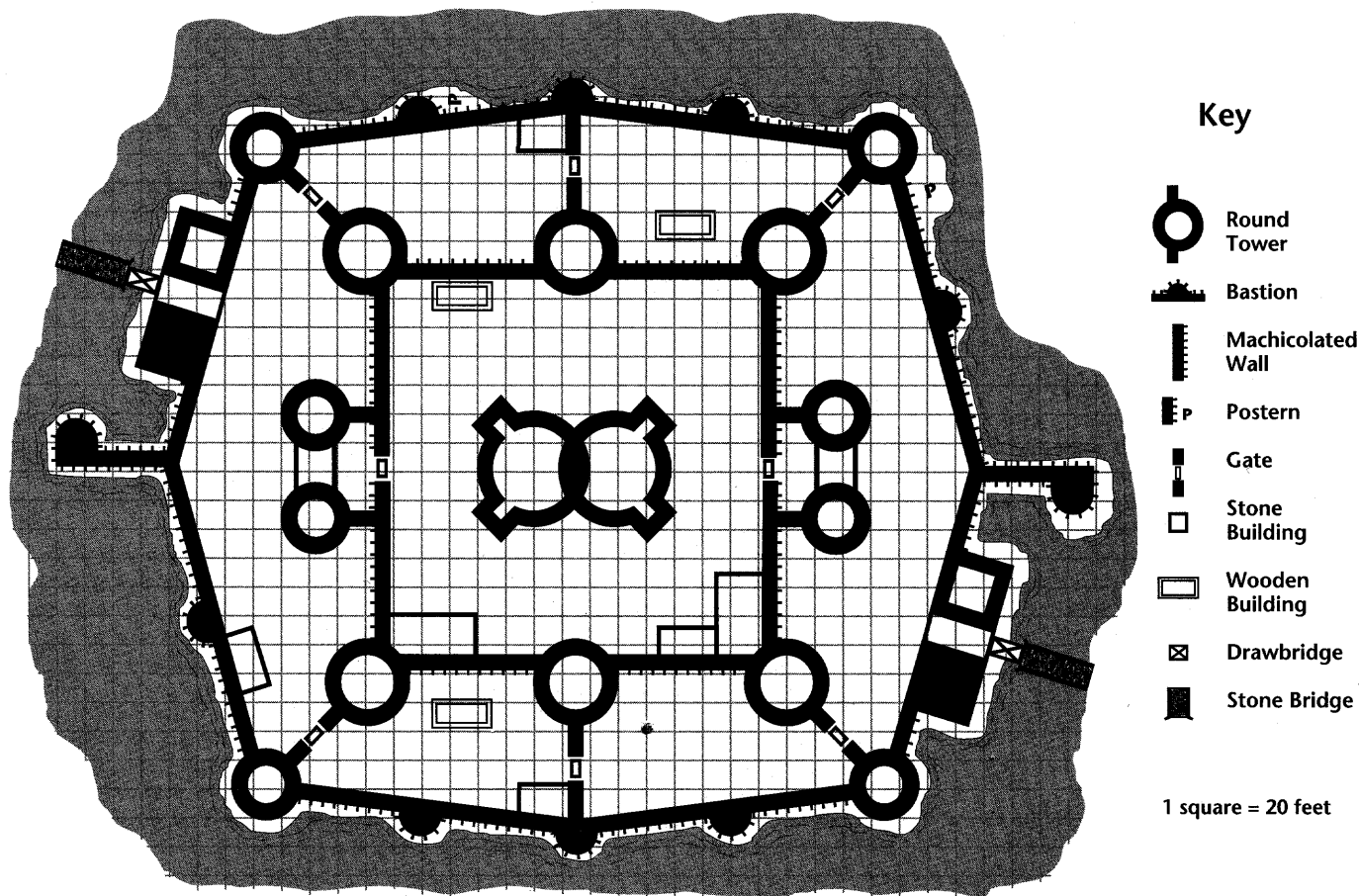
design, but don't be constrained by them. You may be able to alter the designs provided and re-calculate only the portions you changed, but don't be afraid to throw them out and start from scratch.

### Finish and add details

In this step, you should add any final details to the design that you wish to include. Are there any magical or unusual features that aren't covered otherwise, such as crocodiles in the moat or a stone golem gatekeeper? Are there any spells that will be used to add to the castle's defenses, such as a permanent *wall of fog*, *wall of ice*, *wall of fire*, or *distance distortion*? How about a landing platform for hippogriff cavalry? In most cases, the DM will have to decide what a special feature will cost and how it must be constructed.

One special note on finishing the design: The times and costs for castle components that appear in this article assume that the designer is creating a typical castle that will be used as both a fortress and a living place. The builder may skimp on all unnecessary luxuries and build a spartan keep that is suitable for use only as a military base, or he may decide that his castle should be a work of art that is pleasing to the eye. Spartan castles save the builder 25% of the normal time and gold

## The Concentric Castle Plan



costs, while extravagant castles cost 50% more than normal and require 50% additional construction time.

## Calculations

Now, add up the costs and time requirements of all the components of your castle. This represents the fortress's basic cost. Don't forget to increase or decrease this figure if you are making your castle a spartan keep or an extravagant work of art. Once you have totalled the castle's basic cost and time of building, you will need to add 10% to both figures to reflect overhead costs.

Overhead costs cover the cost of recruiting and training laborers, housing and feeding them while they're on the job, putting furniture in the castle when it's finished, and paying any architect's fees or other special charges. Overhead does not

cover the costs of hiring and equipping a garrison, paying for any unusual hirelings or services such as spell-casters, or the costs of any sabotage or disasters, although routine mishaps are considered to be part of the building process.

Take the new costs and times with overhead included and multiply these by the Production Modifier mentioned above.

This will give you the castle's actual cost and time of building.

*Example:* Eric is building an enclosed keep and decided that the basic plan was good enough for him. The enclosed keep has a base time requirement of 18,932 man-days and a base cost of 254,712 gp. The overhead increases these figures to 20,825 and 280,183 respectively. Eric already calculated his Production Modifier to be 2.34, so his final building time is 48,730 and the final cost is 655,628 gp.

To determine the workforce required to build your castle, take the final construction time and divide it by 52. This will give you the number of workmen required to build your castle in one year of continuous work. In our example above, Eric finds that his character will need to find 938 laborers to do the job. Remember, the castle and overhead costs cover the worker's wages for an average workforce.

You can increase the speed of construction by hiring more workers. Each extra worker costs 520 gp per year, including food,

**Table I: Expanded Castle Modules table**

| Name                     | Tech | Time   | Cost    | Dimensions        |
|--------------------------|------|--------|---------|-------------------|
| Barbican, small          | 4    | 1,665  | 28,600  | 50' x 120'        |
| Barbican, medium         | 5    | 2,050  | 35,200  | 60' x 140'        |
| Barbican, large          | 6    | 2,880  | 49,500  | 60' x 160'        |
| *Bastion                 | 4    | 450    | 6,700   | 30' x 30'         |
| *Bridge/Causeway, stone  | 4    | 32     | 370     | 10' x 10' x 10'   |
| *Bridge/Causeway, wooden | 3    | 6      | 20      | 10' x 10' x 10'   |
| Building, small stone    | 3    | 64     | 2,000   | 20' x 20'         |
| Building, medium stone   | 3    | 96     | 3,000   | 20' x 40'         |
| Building, large stone    | 3    | 144    | 4,500   | 30' x 60'         |
| Building, great stone    | 4    | 300    | 10,000  | 30' x 60'         |
| Building, grand stone    | 4    | 600    | 19,000  | 40' x 80'         |
| Building, small wooden   | 1    | 8      | 40      | 20' x 20'         |
| Building, medium wooden  | 1    | 12     | 60      | 20' x 40'         |
| Building, large wooden   | 1    | 18     | 90      | 30' x 60'         |
| Building, great wooden   | 2    | 40     | 200     | 30' x 60'         |
| Building, grand wooden   | 2    | 75     | 375     | 40' x 80'         |
| *Buttress/Turret         | 5    | 360    | 6,000   | 30' x 30'         |
| Ditch                    | 1    | 2      | 10      | 10' x 10' x 5'    |
| Drawbridge               | 2    | 40     | 550     | 20' long          |
| *Gate, light             | 1    | 15     | 175     | 10' x 10' high    |
| *Gate, medium            | 2    | 85     | 630     | 10' x 10' high    |
| *Gate, heavy             | 3    | 225    | 13,800  | 10' x 10' high    |
| *Gatehouse, small        | 3    | 980    | 16,500  | 70' x 30'         |
| *Gatehouse, medium       | 4    | 1,550  | 25,800  | 120' x 50'        |
| *Gatehouse, great        | 5    | 2,040  | 34,800  | 150' x 80'        |
| Gatekeep, lesser         | 5    | 1,950  | 33,275  | 70' x 120'        |
| Gatekeep, greater        | 6    | 4,625  | 40,620  | 140' x 140'       |
| Gatekeep, grand          | 7    | 6,410  | 110,800 | 200' x 190'       |
| Moat/Channel             | 3    | 6      | 30      | 10' x 10' x 5'    |
| Motte                    | 1    | 2      | 10      | 10' x 10' x 5'    |
| Palisade                 | 1    |        | 5       | 10' long, 5' high |
| *Reinforcement           |      | (x1.5) | (x1.5)  |                   |
| Tower, small round       | 4    | 720    | 12,000  | 50' exterior      |
| Tower, medium round      | 5    | 900    | 15,000  | 60' exterior      |
| Tower, large round       | 6    | 1,260  | 21,000  | 80' exterior      |
| Tower, small square      | 3    | 840    | 14,000  | 50' x 50'         |
| Tower, medium square     | 4    | 1,080  | 18,000  | 60' x 60'         |
| Tower, large square      | 5    | 1,440  | 24,000  | 80' x 80'         |
| Tunnel                   | 4    | 25     | 100     | 10' x 10' x 10'   |
| Wall, stone              | 3    | 30     | 500     | 10' x 10' x 15'   |
| Wall, stone w/hoarding   | 4    | 36     | 600     | 10' x 10' x 15'   |
| Wall, stone w/glacis     | 5    | 44     | 720     | 10' x 10' x 15'   |
| Wall, w/machicolation    | 6    | 53     | 864     | 10' x 10' x 15'   |
| Wall, stone and postern  | 4    | 5      | 100     | 10' x 10' x 15'   |
| Wall, wooden             | 1    | 1      | 5       | 10' x 15' x 3"    |

\*New castle modules (explained in text).

**Table II:  
Production Modifiers table**

### Climate

Arctic: 4.00  
Moderate: 1.00  
Sub-arctic: 2.50  
Sub-tropical: 1.25  
Temperate: 1.25  
Tropical: 1.75

### Geography

High mountains: 4.00  
Foothills: 1.50  
Moderate mountains: 3.00  
Rolling hills: 1.00  
Low mountains: 2.00  
Plains: 0.75

### Ground cover

Jungle: 3.00  
Grasslands: 0.75  
Dense forest: 2.00  
Barren: 1.50  
Light forest: 1.50  
Desert: 2.00  
Scrub: 1.00  
Swamp: 2.00

### Resource availability

Distant and poor: 2.00  
Distant and good: 1.50  
Near and poor: 1.25  
Near and good: 1.00

### Local social structure

Nomadic: 2.50  
Semi-nomadic: 1.75  
Primitive agricultural: 1.25  
Agricultural: 1.00  
Advanced agricultural: 0.75

### Workers' skill

Very poor: 3.00  
Poor: 2.00  
Average: 1.00  
Good: 0.75  
Very good: 0.50

### Workers' morale

Very poor: 3.00  
Poor: 2.00  
Average: 1.00  
High: 0.75  
Very high: 0.50

housing, and skilled supervisors. If the workforce is doubled, the construction time is cut to 75% of normal. If the workforce is quadrupled, the time is cut to 50% of normal.

You can save money by hiring fewer laborers, although this will slow construction time. Each man cut from the labor pool saves 10 gp per week of construction. If enough workers are removed to reduce the workforce to 75% of its normal value, the construction time is doubled. If the force is cut to 50% of its standard value, the construction time is quadrupled.

*Example:* Eric's character is short on money and wants to cut the workforce down to 75% of its normal value. He hires 704 men instead of 938, saving 2,360 gp per week over two full years, for a total savings of 245,440 gold pieces off the castle's final cost!

In a role-playing setting, a group of PCs also can save money by assisting in the construction. The characters need not be an actual part of the workforce, but are instead devoting their time to making sure that supplies arrive as scheduled, monsters don't trouble the workers, and so on. Each PC can replace a number of workers equal to his level, and spell-casting PCs replace an extra man per spell level that they can cast in a day. A 5th-level wizard does the work of 16 men, by this calculation.

Magical items used in construction can

count for a number of men equal to 5% of their experience-point award if they are particularly suited for construction, or 1% if they are useful but not especially so. The DM will have to decide which category any given magical item falls into.

Monsters also may be used as additional or replacement workers. If they are well-suited to the task, each monster does the work of a number of men equal to 5% of its XP award. Monsters that are only moderately useful are only worth 1% of their XP award.

Unfortunately, castles can't be worked on all year-round in most climates. Cold weather or torrential rains will put a stop to the building process until the weather clear again. To determine the actual work season available, multiply the PM for climate type and ground cover to generate a Work Time Modifier (WTM) for the construction site. Eric's castle, described above, has a WTM of 1.875. Divide 52 by the WTM to determine how many weeks are available for work in a given year. In the case of Eric's castle, the result is 27 weeks per year.

If the result is more than 52, then the work just goes that much faster—you've found an ideal place to build a castle.

Since Eric skimped on his workforce, his castle's basic building time was two years, or 104 weeks. Since 27 weeks of work can be done in any given year, it will take his character a little less than four years to build the castle.

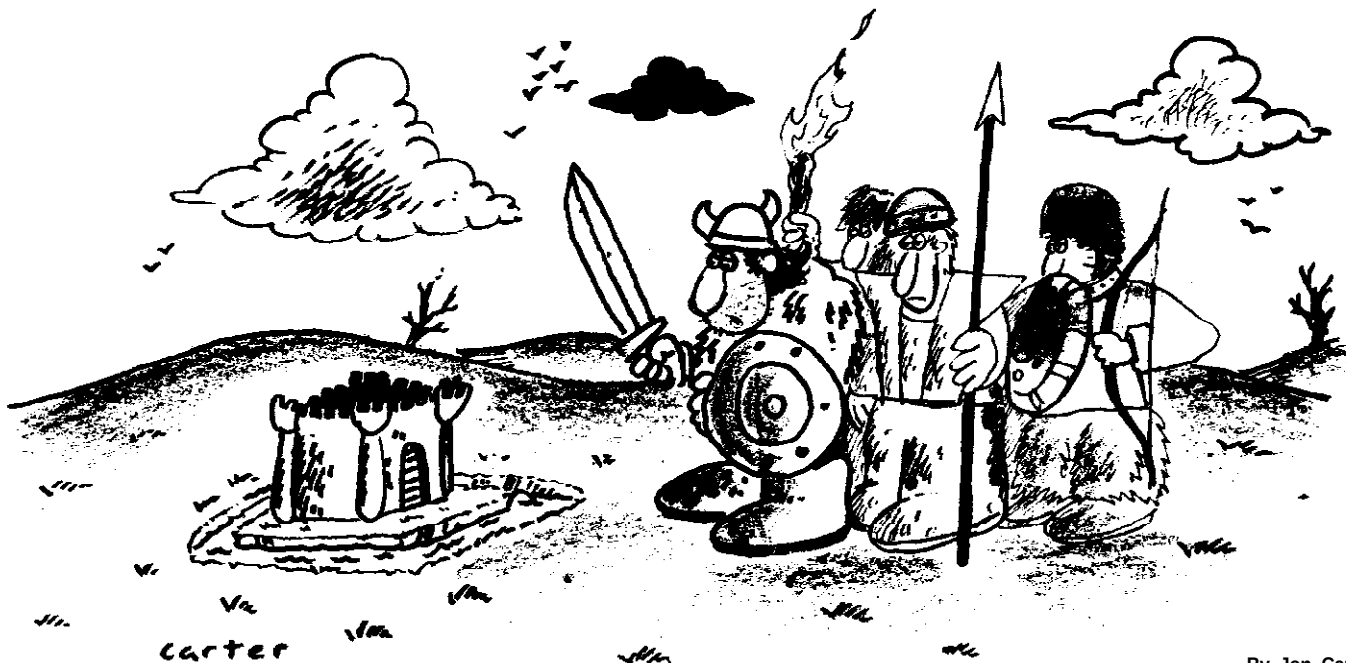
## Build the castle

Now you have a castle design, an idea of how long it will take to build it, and how much it will all cost. You're ready to begin! Of course, the campaign doesn't conveniently stop for your characters when they undertake a project of this scope. All kinds of trouble can find the PCs while they're building their fortress.

War may come before the PCs are ready for it, and the attackers may make a beeline for the partially-completed castle to tear it down before it is finished. A war on the other side of the kingdom may arise, and the lord of the land may insist on drafting some of the workers who are erecting the castle. Monstrous incursions may force the PCs to hunt down the creatures troubling their workers. Corruption and treachery also can slow things down.

While all of these things may sound like a tremendous pain in the neck, a resourceful DM can make the process of building a castle a series of exciting adventures that can sustain a campaign for quite some time. Most PCs have spent years hunting down monsters or participating in intrigues at the request of others—now they get a chance to see what it's like to defend their own people and property against such horrible threats.

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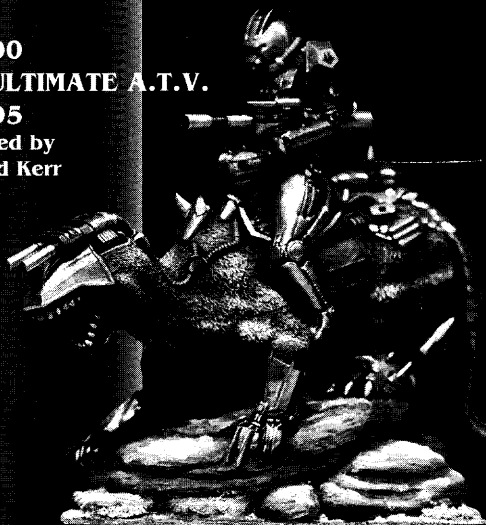


By Jon Carter

"Crud! I thought it was just really far away. . .  
Well, so much for *that* castle raid."

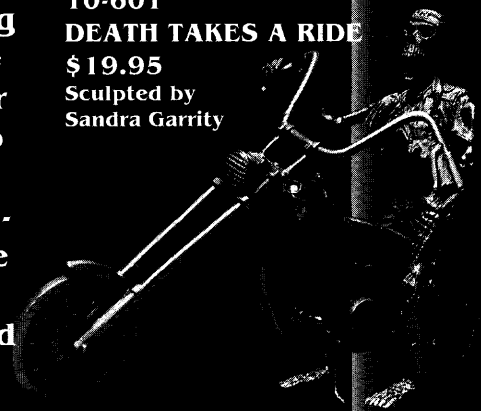
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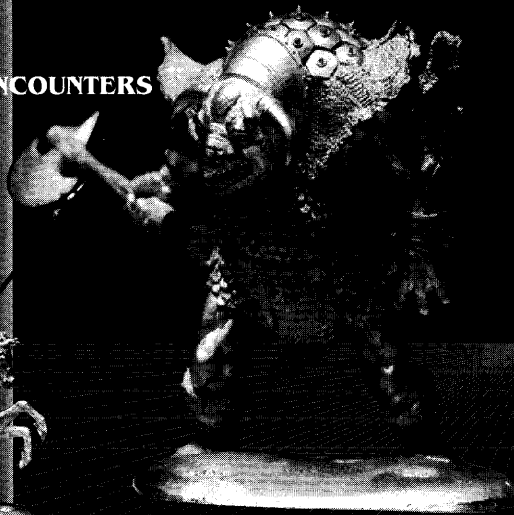


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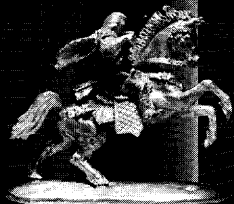
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# Sage Advice

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, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage continues his look at magic in the AD&D® and D&D® games.

**Is it possible for a character using the third-level wizard spell *wraithform* to use nonoffensive spells or psionic abilities such as *clairvoyance*? Can a character using *invisibility* use nonoffensive spells or psionics?**

*Wraithform* does not prevent spell-casting or psionics of any kind, nor does it prevent attacks. All the caster's attacks, however, must be directed at targets on the Ethereal plane. Personal spells such as *fly* or *infravision* work normally on the caster. Attack spells such as magic missile or *fireball* work, too, but, only when cast at ethereal targets. The DM must decide about spells and psionic disciplines that fall in between. *Clairvoyance*, for example, cannot cross planar boundaries and I'm inclined to suggest that a caster in *wraithform* can scry only ethereal locations. Likewise, *fly* spells can be cast, by touch, on creatures other than the caster, but the DM might rule that only ethereal creatures can be touched. (After all, a touch-delivered attack spell would have to be used against an ethereal target.)

As "Sage Advice" has pointed out before, *invisibility* does not prohibit all spell-casting, only offensive spells.

**A character affected by an Otto's irresistible dance spell must roll a 20 to make any saving throw. Do saving-throw bonuses from high ability scores or magical items apply, or does the character have to roll a "natural" 20?**

Judging from the spell description's wording (PH, page 190), I'd say the victim actually has to roll a 20 on the saving throw die, ability score and magical bonuses notwithstanding. I can think of one exception: if the victim has a *scarab of*

*protection* (see DMG, page 179). I'd allow magical bonuses to apply to all saves while the victim is dancing. Note that the *scarab* has no effect on saving throw bonuses from ability scores.

**Exactly how much damage does the defiling regeneration spell (from the DARK SUN® setting's *Dragon Kings* book) inflict on attackers? For example, if a 30th-level defiler is battling a druid, how much damage does the druid suffer for each point of damage inflicted on the defiler?**

You seem to be confusing the damage caused by casting a defiling spell with the hit points the defiler *regenerates* as result of casting the spell. The druid in your example suffers no damage at all. Creatures protected by *defiling regeneration* draw energy at the expense of the land, not their opponents. They *regenerate* at a flat rate of 2 hit points per round if damaged but still above 0 hit points, and 1 point per round if reduced to 0 hit points or less. Note that when the recipient reaches full hit points she is no longer damaged and stops *regenerating*.

The *defiling regeneration* spell produces a minor defiling effect similar to what a normal defiler spell produces, but the area is very small—no larger than the protected creature's feet. This is why a battlefield where *defiling regeneration* has been used is littered with ashen footprints instead of great circles of ash. An opponent engaged in combat with a protected creature does not suffer any pain or initiative penalties as she would if caught in the area of destruction created when a defiler casts a normal spell. I suppose an opponent could be hurt if a creature protected by this spell was *regenerating* while in flesh-to-flesh contact (as might be the case during wrestling or overbearing combat), but the only effect would be non-damaging pain and the accompanying initiative penalty.

*Defiling regeneration* is a defiling magic, however. The act of casting this spell kills all plants within 3-30 yards (depending on the terrain, see *Rules Book*, page 601, leaving an area of lifeless ash in their place. Living animals, monsters, and people within 30 yards suffer 1d6 points of damage for every experience level the caster has gained over 20 (see DK, page 44). The caster might inadvertently kill the creatures he is trying to protect with this spell unless he is careful to place them outside this damage radius.

**What happens when the owner of a *pouch of security* (from the D&D game) dies? Does the pouch scream if someone picks it up, or does the next person to pick up the *pouch* become the owner?**

Based on the item description (*Rules Cyclopedia*, page 241), I'd suggest that a *pouch of security* becomes unattached to any character after lying unattended for more than one hour. The pouch can be considered unattended if the owner is dead or more than 120' away.

**I've noticed that all the goblinoid deities in the *Monster Mythology* book are evil. Can goblin PC shamans and witch doctors worship human or demihuman deities instead?**

Of course they can! Most deities are picky about their priests' and worshippers' alignments, but very few are concerned with race. If the deity's description doesn't specifically mention a racial requirement for priests or worshippers, there isn't one. Note that the priest in question must meet the racial and ability-score requirements for the priest class. Your goblin has to have a Wisdom score of at least 9 to be a priest of any deity.

**Would it be possible for two small creatures to tear a magical cloak in half so each could benefit from it?**

Generally speaking, breaking or tearing a magical item destroys the item. The DM might allow a tailor to carefully cut a magical robe or cloak in half and use the material to make two garments, but there should be a chance that the magic will fail during the alteration. I suggest a base roll of 12 or better, modified for the item's enchantment (see DMG, page 38), I suggest a +2 or +3 for a *cloak of displacement*, for example. If your campaign uses non-weapon proficiencies, the tailor should make a proficiency check, too. If the check fails, the *cloak* is ruined. If the proficiency check is very good, say the exact number required, the *cloak* might get an additional saving throw bonus.

**I've been busy compiling a list of spells from various AD&D game products, and I've hit a snag. In several places, different books give different levels for the same spell, for example, *dispel illusion* is listed at third level in the original *Player's***

**Handbook and fourth level in *Oriental Adventures*. Which should I use? Also there are a few spells that are so similar that I don't know which to use, for example *mummy rot* from *The Complete Wizard's Handbook* and *mummy's touch* from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® *Adventures book*.**

Generally speaking, you should go with the most recently published material. Other considerations sometimes take precedence, however. In the case of *dispel illusion*, for example, you're dealing with a spell that has been written out of the current game. Illusionists in the original game got this spell as a third-level spell, and wu jen (who are generalists) got it as a fourth-level spell. In the current game, illusionists don't get Abjurations at all, so I recommend pegging *dispel illusion* at fourth level.

If you're playing a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, you probably ought to use *mummy's touch* because it was created for FR campaigns. If you use another world, your decision depends on how nice you want to be to spell-casters. *Mummy's touch* is generally more powerful than *mummy rot*, and is two levels lower to boot (magic on Toril tends to be potent). On the other hand, *mummy's touch* has a save, and *mummy rot* does not (at least when the spell is used against a human, demihuman, or humanoid). You might want to compromise and use one spell or the other as a fourth-level spell.

**Can a character who is illiterate fall victim to a *glyph of warding*, *explosive runes*, or *symbol* spell? What if the character is blind or his vision is obscured by magical darkness?**

When dealing with a *glyph of warding*, ignorance is not bliss. A *glyph* is a magical ward that fires whenever the condition the caster imposes comes to pass. It doesn't necessarily have to be read, in fact, it is seldom even seen.

*Explosive runes* are another case entirely. They are not triggered until the writing they protect is read; a character who cannot see or cannot read cannot trigger the *runes*.

A *symbol* need not be read to take effect, but it must be seen. Illiterate characters viewing the *symbol* are subject to its full effects. Creatures that cannot see the *symbol* are never affected, no matter why they can't see it: blindness, darkness (magical or normal if the creature does not have infravision), and something as simple as a blindfold all prevent a *symbol* from taking effect. The *illusory script* spell also falls into this category; the *script* need not be read, but it doesn't work unless it is seen.

**Is it possible for cities and towns in Faerun to have community deities as described on pages 46-47 of *The Complete Priest's Handbook*? I'd like to run a priest character who**

**worships such a deity, but my DM won't let me because there are no community deities mentioned in the *Running the Realms* book (from the new FR boxed set).**

There are numerous local deities throughout the Realms (see *Running the Realms*, page 45, first paragraph). These deities probably qualify as quasi-powers and the civic-deity rules from the CPH would fit them nicely. Nevertheless, your DM might not want to mess around with such deities, as the CPH itself points out. Talk this over with your DM again; if the DM still nixes your proposal, pick a main-line deity for your character.

**Were rules for half-giant clerics left out of *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water on purpose*? My group and I assume this is a mistake, because of the line on page 20 that says any Athasian race can become clerics.**

This was an editorial oversight. Half-giants have no particular affinity for any one element and have an advancement limit of 12th level regardless of the type of cleric they become.

**Is there any limit to the number of *stoneskin* spells that can be cast on a single character? Our PC group was recently set upon by a horde of foes, each protected by more than 100 *stoneskins*. Will *stoneskin* protect a character from falling damage? How may "attacks" will a protected character lose if an opponent hurls a handful of small objects (rocks or gems) at her from close range?**

The spell description doesn't give any limit to the number of *stoneskin* spells a creature can enjoy at once. This, however, can lead to tremendous abuse. (One hundred *stoneskins* each? Give me a break!) I strongly suggest that you roll only once for the number of attacks a *stoneskin* spell negates and that this number applies no matter how many spells subsequently are cast on the recipient. For example, if a 20th-level wizard casts three *stoneskin* spells on a fighter, roll 1d4 + 10 for the number of attacks negated. If the roll is a "2" the fighter is protected from 12 and only 12 attacks. Once 12 attacks negate the spell the fighter can receive a fourth spell and can make a new roll. I also recommend that you give *stoneskin* a maximum duration of one day. This prevents a wizard with time on her hands from casting *stoneskin* on every soldier in an army.

*Stoneskin* protects against physical attacks in which something is hurled or struck against the victim: cuts, slashes, blows, bites, claws, tail slaps, etc. Magical and energy attacks are not negated. One could make a case for treating a fall as a blow, but I recommend against it. The recipient becomes something like a big statue, which is generally immune to blows, but it still can shatter if it's pushed

out a window and falls to the ground. Note that the character is protected from cave-ins and avalanches, as these are situations where objects are hitting the character. Note also that magical attacks work against the character no matter how the spell delivers damage; *magic missiles*, *lightning bolts*, *ice storms*, and the various *Bigby's hand* spells go right through *stoneskins*.

Generally speaking, one of a *stoneskin's* protections is negated for each attack roll made against the character. A reasonable DM is going to call for one roll if a handful of pebbles is thrown at a target because all the pebbles are released at about the same time and all hit at about the same time, so this kind of attack should count against a *stoneskin* spell only once. Otherwise, a character could blow down a *stoneskin* by hurling handfuls of sand or dust. Likewise, an avalanche or cave-in negates one attack. Arrows, on other hand, come at their targets one at a time.

**You forgot to include Sune's spheres in your list of *Tome of Magic* spells for FORGOTTEN REALMS deities in issue #192.**

Oops, here they are: *Major*: Time, Thought; *Minor*: None.

**What *Tome of Magic* spells can druids cast? Your lists of spells for various specialty priests includes some deities that grant spells to druids, but the lists are never the same!**

The lists vary because each set of spells is tailored to the deity and its portfolio, not to druids in general. A druid who worships a particular deity gets access to whatever *TOM* spheres are listed for the deity. For druids not dedicated to a specific deity I'd suggest the following: *Major*: Time, Wards; *Minor*: Travelers.

#### **Pantheon of the month**

These are unofficial suggestions for using the optional spheres of priest spells from the *Tome of Magic* with the deities of the Egyptian pantheon in *Legends & Lore*:

**Ra**: *Major*: Law, Thought; *Minor*: Time, Wards.

**Geb**: *Major*: Time; *Minor*: Wards.

**Nut**: *Major*: Time; *Minor*: Wards.

**Shu**: *Major*: Time; *Minor*: Wards.

**Tefnut**: *Major*: Time; *Minor*: Wards.

**Osiris**: *Major*: Wards; *Minor*: Thought.

**Isis**: *Major*: Numbers; *Minor*: Time.

**Set**: *Major*: Chaos; *Minor*: Time.

**Nephthys**: *Major*: Numbers; *Minor*: Wards.

**Thoth**: *Major*: Numbers; *Minor*: Thought.

**Ptah**: *Major*: Travelers; *Minor*: Time.

**Horus**: *Major*: War; *Minor*: Wards.

**Anhur**: *Major*: War; *Minor*: Time.

**Bast**: *Major*: Time; *Minor*: Travelers.

# Rofocale of Hill Madyprig

©1993 by Sandy Petersen

Artwork by Robert Lessl

*We continue our miniseries of draconic NPCs with this horrid creature for Chaosium's KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON\* game. This game of epic role-playing in Arthur's Britain is highly recommended. However, the characters and situations presented here are easily adaptable to many fantasy role-playing games. Pages cited refer to the game's new 4th edition.*

Buried beneath the Hill Marlyprig was the evil dragon, Rofocale. There he lurked, sleeping on his golden hoard. He awaited the Last Trump, when the sky would roll up like a scroll, and he would rise with the rest of Satan's hordes and join in the war of the Apocalypse. Unfortunately, he has been awakened recently, long before the appointed time. He has issued forth from his foul lair and has blasted all the surrounding land.

In the dragon's territory, all is waste. Streams are clogged with ash and filth. Trees are scorched and sere. The plant life is dry, crackling underfoot. Even the air seems somehow poisoned. There are a few ruined hamlets left in the area, their destruction mute testimony to Rofocale's fury. Worse, the dragon's wasteland is not fixed in size, but constantly grows as the monster spreads his depredations farther

and farther afield.

Sooner or later, tales of Rofocale's deeds are bound to reach the ears of adventurous player-character (PC) knights. "This monster must be stopped ere he ruins all Logres!" runs the report.

Unfortunately, Rofocale's lair is deep within his ruined dominion, and visitors must traverse his land for many days, seeking the monster's lair. While doing so, they are likely to meet Brother Immanuel and Sir Gormond.

## Brother Immanuel

Brother Immanuel, a crazed monk, uncovered Rofocale's existence through his readings in ancient forbidden works. He read so many of these tomes that his brain dried up, and he decided that Englishmen were too tranquil and passive. They needed to be stirred up, reminded of

the shortness of life and the imminent Second Coming. At last, Immanuel conceived his mad plan—to release the dragon, Rofocale, to devastate the land and thus bring mankind closer to God.

Now Brother Immanuel wanders the blasted land, calling on those he meets to repent, and shrieking curses upon those whom he believes to be wicked (any show of doubt or resistance causes this madman to be convinced of your PCs' evil). If he can, he'll lead Rofocale to any party of knights. Unfortunately, killing Brother Immanuel is rather difficult for good knights, because, mad as he is, he is still a holy man, and a significant loss of glory (not to mention honor) would be the penalty for murdering a monk.

Brother Immanuel's statistics are identical to those for the "Christian Friar" in the PENDRAGON rules (page 269). However, he does not get the Christian Religion bonus, because his Forgiving and Merciful traits are both 1, owing to his long brooding on the sins of mankind. In addition, he has a passion of 30 in Obsessed with End of World.

## Sir Gormond

For all Brother Immanuel's mania, the dragon would never have been released were it not for the aid of Sir Gormond, once the lord of this land. Now—his castle, vassals, and peasants all destroyed—he wanders impoverished, seeking he knows not what. He will tell anyone he meets of his sad downfall through pride.

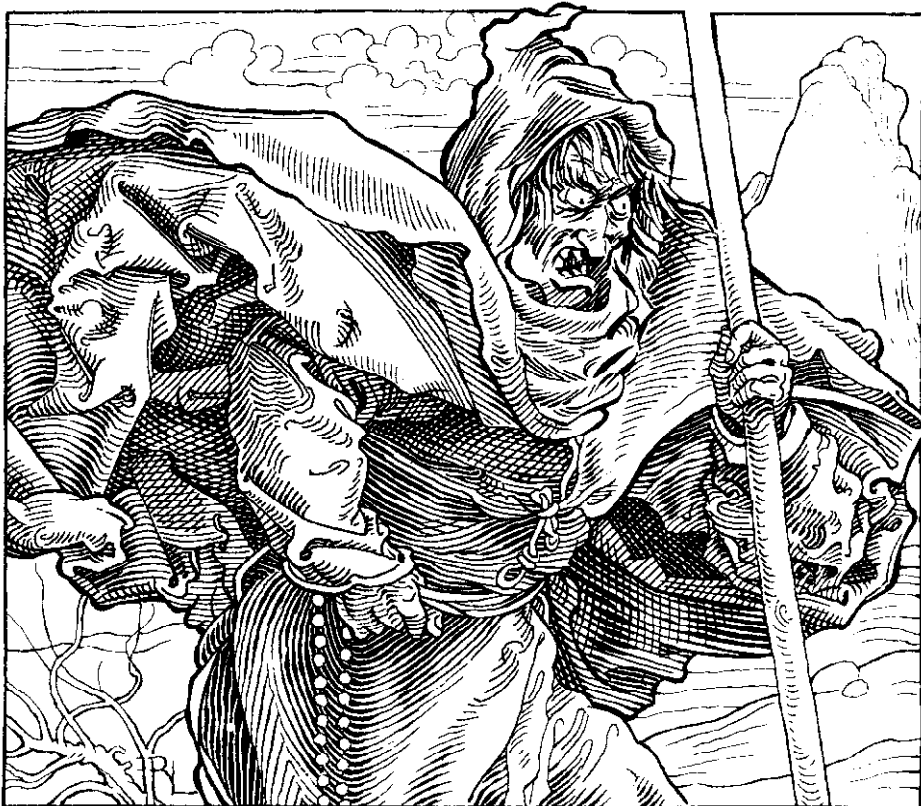
Once he was a good knight, with a lady, lands, and vassals. But he was jealous of the accomplishments of famous knights such as Ttistrum and Gawaine, and envied their fame. When Brother Immanuel told him of the presence of a dragon under the Hill Marlyprig, Gormond saw his opportunity.

He would cooperate with Brother Immanuel to release the monster. Then he would kill the dragon and gain renown throughout the land as the slayer of the serpent! No doubt he'd be invited to Arthur's court and be celebrated everywhere as the Knight of the Dragon.

Sir Gormond knew that the dragon might prove difficult to master, so he brought 24 trained crossbowmen and, of course, his squire. When the tunnel broke into the dragon's chamber, he and his men-at-arms were ready.

Sir Gormond chokes and hesitates in describing the "battle" between his men and the horror in the hill. It was no more a fight than when mice face cats. The dragon, oozing slime, issued forth from the hill and wiped out his crossbowmen with a single vomit of dripping flames. In an instant it was upon his squire, dismembering him before Gormond's eyes. Then it told Sir Gormond, "You, gentle sir, shall live, as reward for your part in setting Rofocale free before the Time!" With that, the monster fled its prison under the hill.

Sir Gormond now suffers the full cruelty of the dragon's "kindness" in permitting



him to live. His people and family are dead. His tower was destroyed the night the dragon escaped, as Sir Gormond rode back from the hill. Now Gormond is homeless, hoping someday to meet the dragon again and die in combat against the monster, thus redeeming a trace of the honor he lost to his overweening pride.

If Rofocale encounters Gormond, it won't kill him, not even if Gormond is accompanied by the PC knights. Instead, it mocks him, thanking him profusely for its release. If the monster is attacked by Gormond in the company of the PCs, it defends itself but refrains from striking back against Gormond unless in very dire straits.

Sir Gormond's statistics are those of the Notable Knight in the *PENDRAGON* rulebook (page 329).

### The dragon

Rofocale is heavily set and over 40 feet long. Its skin resembles the surface of cooling lava, black and corrugated, riddled with hotly glowing cracks. Its eyes are vast steaming pits, glowing orange with hatred. When the monster opens its mouth, a flaming glow as of molten steel emanates. Its obsidianlike fangs drip burning liquid—a venom of horrid power.

The creature steams, even in the hot sun, and its hellish combustion gives off foul vapors that choke the air and kill small animals. The tip of the monster's tail is a massive spike dripping flaming acid—anyone struck by it is infected by the monster's corruption as surely as if he had been bitten.

Rofocale has four twisted legs, a long neck, and two huge wings that are not membranous, but rather are vast armored plates.

### Dealing with Rofocale

If the dragon encounters the PC knights, it won't attack at once. Instead, it'll land before them and speak to them. It will explain the nature of dragons.

Dragons, it seems, are not as other beings. When a man is hungry he eats, and is sated. When he is sleepy he sleeps, and is rested. But a dragon's passions feed upon themselves. When a dragon eats, it becomes hungrier; and must devour more and more in a vicious cycle of frenzied destruction. When a dragon sleeps, it continues to sleep yet more soundly until it can stay comatose for centuries, unless awakened by outside forces. When a dragon gains gold, it needs more and more. Nothing satisfies it.

"You see, good knights, I am forced to ravage and plunder. That is the way God made me. I am only carrying out my duty." Any knight who succeeds at a Pious check can refute the dragon's logic. Typical arguments might be: You were not made as you are, but became that way by service to the Devil; or, that we all have appetites contrary to the will of God, but we are expected to resist these, for the natu-



ral man is an enemy to God.

Obviously, Rofocale cannot be brought to renounce its evil ways—it is a symbol of Satan's power. It is not an insensate machine of destruction at the moment, for it has gone without food for several days (having eaten everything in the area), and so is no longer particularly hungry, using the reverse logic that applies to dragons.

The dragon is one of the most horrendous monsters in England, and is nearly unkillable. However, clever knights probably can figure out a way to return the dragon to its eons-long lair under the Hill Marlyprig. If some sort of holy relic could be placed near the entrance to Rofocale's lair while the dragon was in residence, the beast might be unable to leave until the relic was removed. Of course, Brother Immanuel will try to steal the relic to release the monster once more. It is possible that, if the players were able to keep the dragon from eating anything at all (even a frog), for at least a week, it might become quiet and return to its hill, no longer susceptible to hunger.

The dragon is vulnerable to holy relics, and cannot strike at or approach someone bearing such a thing. Mere holy symbols such as crosses or icons, are nothing to the dragon—it must be a genuine relic, such as Saint Theresa's Tears or something similar.

### Rofocale's statistics

SIZ 70  
DEX 15  
STR 70  
CON 50

Move 18 (fly) 9 (crawl)  
Damage 14d6  
Heal Rate 12  
Hit Points 120

Major Wound 50  
Unconscious 30  
Knock Down 70  
Armor 40

Avoidance: 0

Modifier to Valorous: - 10

Glory to Kill: 2000

Attacks: Bite @ 25, two Claws @ 22 each; Tail Sting @ 20 (only does 7d6 damage); Dragon's Fire @ 20 (see below)

Notes: The Bite and Tail Sting each inject a terrible rotting poison. No wounds of a poisoned knight may heal at all until the poison has first been counteracted by magical herbs (obtainable only on a quest, presumably carried out by the invalid knight's friends).

The dragon's fire affects everyone within a 30-foot diameter circle. Everyone within that circle takes 3d6 damage, ignoring all armor. The dragon can vomit his fire while flying overhead, out of reach of most weapons. There exists magical armor, shields, and even salves that can reduce the effects of the monster's fiery breath.

### The lair

Inside Rofocale's lair is a huge mound of treasure. Alas, the hoard is enchanted and cursed. If any knight picks up or touches so much as a single silver cup, the hoard speaks shrilly, "Put that back!" If the knight hesitates or refuses, the hoard shrieks, "Rofocale! Rofocale!" and the dragon, wheresoever it is, hears the hoard's cry and hurries home to protect it from despoilers. If the knights tarry, they are sure to encounter the monster.

If any knight manages to get away with

some of the treasure, he receives a curse (chanted loudly by the hoard as the looter flees the cave). The exact nature of the curse is best crafted by an individual game master to her players' personalities and their characters' lives and goals. In addition, the amount of treasure stolen should affect the curse's deadliness (knights who steal less should get less severe curses). Let each knight cart off as many *libra* of golden candlesticks, plates, cups, crowns, and jewelry as his STR  $\times$  10 (or less, if he desires), but the whole time they are picking out goods, the hoard pelts them with invectives. If they take too long, of course, Rofocale comes.

Some sample curses include:

"That which you hold shall be your only riches!" When the knight returns home, he finds that his castle, home, lands, etc., have all been destroyed by a powerful enemy—the Picts, or some similar force—leaving him only the armor on his back and the gold he stole.

"You shall do one of the foulest deeds that knight ever did!" At some point in the future, arrange things so that the knight slays a member of his immediate family, a lover, or his liege lord. This can be by accident or mistake, of course. Fumbles in the Recognize skill and accidental Critical Hits in combat can be used as needed to fulfill the curse.

"You shall die a shameful death!" If the knight is killed in mortal combat, adjust the dice rolls so that he is merely incapacitated instead. Then have his enemy drag him off and hang him. Or, if he is fighting monsters or animals, have them eat him alive.

"You shall never know love!" No member of the opposite sex can ever conceive an Amor for this knight. This curse should only be invoked if the knight does not already have an Amor.  $\Omega$

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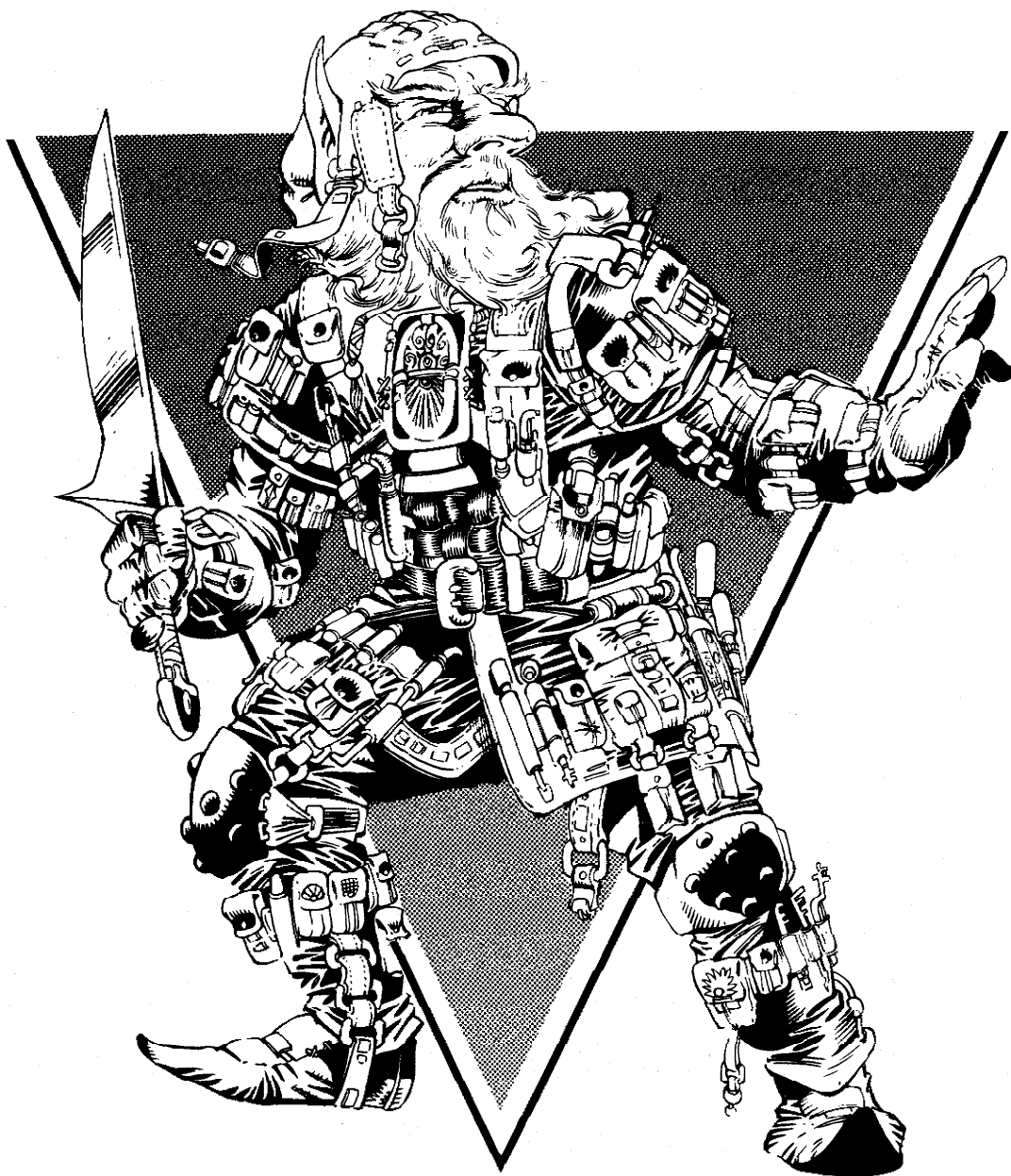
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# The Game Wizards

## New worlds in sight— the AD&D® Historical Reference Campaign Sourcebooks!

by **Roger E. Moore**

Hi. Some of you may remember me from my past life as a magazine editor. These days, I've moved into a very different field here at TSR, Inc., as the product-group leader for the AD&D® 2nd Edition game core rules and accessories. This article is about some AD&D accessories that are worth a closer look—especially if you love visiting or running new game worlds.

Over the last three years, TSR has produced a terrific series of softbound volumes called the Historical Reference Campaign Sourcebooks (the "HR" series). You'll recognize them by their distinctive green covers and gold lettering. So far, we've published five of them, with two more due out this year:

- HR1 *Vikings Campaign Sourcebook*
- HR2 *Charlemagne's Paladins Campaign Text Sourcebook*
- HR3 *Celts Campaign Sourcebook*
- HR4 *A Mighty Fortress Campaign Sourcebook*
- HR5 *The Glory of Rome Campaign Sourcebook*
- HR6 *Age of Heroes Campaign Sourcebook*  
(on sale in April)
- HR7 *The Crusades Campaign Sourcebook*  
(on sale in November)

As you can tell, we're giving Europe and vicinity a thorough workup, from the earliest days of the Greek city-states (in HR6) to the end of the Elizabethan Period,

about A.D. 1650 (in HR4)—all in AD&D game terms. Each sourcebook presents an overview of the culture at hand, the major historical events that marked it, what the lives of the citizens of that time were like, how they built their homes and fortresses, and so forth. We also give you enough information in each 96-page book to run an AD&D campaign with the special flavor of each culture and time, even giving you a poster-sized full-color map with each book that shows the culture's historical territories and world view.

That's all very nice—but what can you do with this stuff?

Let's get practical. Say, for instance, you're a player in someone else's AD&D campaign; you're not the DM. Why would you want a sourcebook about Vikings? If you're planning to start a FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign, why would you want a book about Celts? And if you're the DM of a SPELLJAMMER® or Outer Planes campaign, what use would you have for a book on the Roman Empire?

The answer is that you'll have lots of use for each of these books. In fact, you might even decide to invest in the whole set.

### The training-ground world

If you're a player who wants to be the DM for a group of other players someday, and you have some friends who like Vikings, you have an excellent reason to get HR1. This is especially true if the current DM wants to take a break and be a player herself for a while, giving her own campaign a rest.

HR1 offers what is probably the best "DM training" world, as most fantasy gamers have no trouble at all relating to longships, Norse gods, berserkers, looting and pillaging, slaying dragons, tussling with trolls, and collecting piles of gold. You



Photography by Charles Kahl



can get loads of experience in creating adventures, crafting hostile monsters and nonplayer characters (NPCs), and managing a live group of excited gamers.

Additionally, you will learn a lot about what goes into creating a game world. The HR books contain special alterations to the standard AD&D rules, to give a stronger cultural flavor to the monsters, magic, and so forth that the characters encounter. This can be slow going for novice DMs, but it also challenges the DM to study the basic rules more carefully—always a good practice.

If you decide to alter the basic structure of the Viking world—say, you wish to allow more character classes or races, or you have some changes to make to the magic system—you can do so at your leisure. You have the happy knowledge that your entire investment in the basic game world comes to less than \$20 (\$23 in Canada), and the changes you make to the world won't throw off dozens of other modules, supplements, and so on. The world is yours to shape as you please—the very core of what being a DM is all about.

If you need help in getting the campaign off the ground, we've provided some assistance. Vikingophile Wolf Baur has written up two adventures for Viking campaigns in the pages of DUNGEON® Adventures ("The Whale," in issue #35, and "The Fire Giant's Daughter" in issue #39). These give an excellent idea of what a fun-loving group of bearded, brawling, sword-wielders can expect. (Other Norse-style modules for the AD&D game from DUNGEON Adventures have appeared; issue #20 had "Ancient Blood," by Grant and David Boucher, and issue #43 had Lee Sheppard's "King Oleg's Dilemma.")

## A world of difference

Experienced gamers who want to run their own worlds but don't want to do the standard Middle-Ages-with-elves-and-wizards thing will find the HR series a lifesaver. Vibrant, exciting campaigns can be set up with little trouble, each offering a fresh change to standard themes in fantasy gaming.

Selecting a sourcebook that will appeal to your gaming group is not difficult. Aside from the popular *Vikings* book mentioned earlier, the *Celts* sourcebook could win many friends for its treatment of druidism and Irish myths. *A Mighty Fortress* offers a world with both gunpowder and spellpower, and nations embroiled in intense rivalry for power and glory. *Age of Heroes* presents an extremely rich environment of Greek myths and legends, with the familiar faces of the Olympian gods appearing to stir up adventures.

A historical-based campaign could be run full-time or as a sideline to an ongoing campaign, something to play when the main DM is tired or unavailable for gaming. HR-series DMs who really get into the subject matter can research the historical period involved and produce even more

richly detailed settings, offering a vividness that few "pure-fantasy" campaigns can match. Historical novels are a terrific resource; search them out at your local library or bookstore.

However, if you're an experienced DM who already has a campaign world, the HR guides offer the rules and guidelines you need to make existing cultures in your campaign stand out from the rest. For example, if you want to base a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign in the Moonshae Isles, which have a distinctly Celtic/druidic flavor, introduce the special rules for Celtic campaigns from HR3. If your campaign has a large island where the people worship Roman gods and are engaged in empire-building, you can introduce lots of material from HR5.

You even can use the HR series to flesh out parts of your campaign that you haven't been able to develop yet. What about a reference for building technologically advanced nations on a continent on the other side of the world from your current campaign? HR4 should fill the bill nicely, and the heroes will have their work cut out for them at a later date when they go exploring overseas!

## Planets & planes

You'll also have no trouble at all in using the HR settings as parts of alternate planes (reached by spells, magical devices, gates, cursed scrolls, etc.), alternate worlds for the SPELLJAMMER setting (replacing the Earthlike geography of the HR maps with new terrain, if you want), or foreign lands that can be meshed with your own campaign (again, replacing the given geography with your own maps). One can never have too many new lands to explore in long-running campaigns, in order to keep freshness and excitement in the game.

Being the DM for a SPELLJAMMER campaign means that you must have access to lots of material with which to build whole worlds in short order, as the player characters whip through wilderness in each session of game play. So why can't there be a SPELLJAMMER world culture modelled on the Roman Empire at its height, with its own highly aggressive spelljammer fleet? Perhaps it's an empire made up of scro or ogres, but the Roman reference is marvelous for giving that world depth in game play. And picture a moon controlled by a Dark Ages empire modelled on the material in Charlemagne's *Paladins*—but with elves instead of humans!

## Beyond the books

You can see the value in having an entire gaming world in a single book. But can a world with a historical basis sustain an entire campaign? Some people think history is pretty dry—even the Viking parts.

Well, whoever said history wasn't exciting obviously hasn't been paying attention to it. Besides, this *is* the AD&D game we're talking about here. We can fix up history just a little bit, make things a little wilder, more free, and more fun. We'll keep the

history to add spice to the mixture—but we'll dress it up a bit.

Let's tour each of the worlds presented so far and see what a mix of fantasy and history (and a even little science or science fiction) can do to liven things up.

**HR1:** There is the little matter of Vinland, Markland, and the rest of that tempting North American continent. Would someone dare found a colony there, fighting or befriending the Native Americans, and perhaps meeting monsters and finding riches that would live in legend for all time? What if frost giants really did live in Groenland and Helluland, or if Pleistocene mammals like mastodons, sabre-tooth tigers, and big Ice Age horses roamed the American plains? It isn't the America we know, but it's an America that Vikings would love!

If Vikings can use magic, why can't the *skraelingar* of the Americas? What if a Viking ship, blown far off course, encountered a Central American culture? (It's easy to produce if one has the MAZTICA™ boxed set.) What ancient ruins and fallen civilizations might Viking explorers find in out-of-the-way places in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere? Could gates to other worlds and places lie hidden in the dangerous stone monuments left over from ancient Atlantis, somewhere in the Bermuda Triangle? And who built those statues on Easter Island?

Additional material you can consult for building up your game world can be found in the Viking-style supplements for other role-playing games. TSR's D&D® game, Steve Jackson Games' GURPS\* system, Columbia Games' HARNMASTER\* rules, ICE's ROLEMASTER\* and FANTASY HERO\* games, the Avalon Hill Game Company's RUNEQUEST\* system and others have Viking rules supplements. You can consult your local library or bookstore for myths and legends of the Norsemen, with lots of diagrams on how they put together their farms, ships, buildings, tools, and more. Your world can be as rich and complex as can be imagined.

**HR2:** If you feel like it, you can add dragons for Charlemagne's paladins to fight. Where there are dragons, there are probably also dwarves, elves, and stranger folk. The entire folklore of Europe is at the DM's disposal. Evil sorcerers, faerie mounds, megalithic structures like Stonehenge (which might be magical in this universe—one never knows), and crumbling Roman ruins will challenge or tempt the heroes. You do not have to stick too closely to Dark Ages legends if you want to introduce an exciting adventure involving an island where a wicked necromancer is building a fortress manned by skeletons.

And what about the rest of the world? Note that the time periods covered by the *Vikings* and *Charlemagne's Paladins* sourcebooks overlap. Perhaps the DM can use both books to produce multicultural Dark Ages European adventures. ("So

that's a frost giant," muttered Mathfrid the Fearless to his friend Rolf. "And I always thought you were kidding me.") As noted earlier, the DM should be able to develop many more adventures and a deeper sense of Dark Ages society by doing some basic research in a local library or bookstore. (The ages may have been dark, but they sure weren't dull.)

**HR3:** This book's wealth of Celtic folklore and legend will supply a thousand adventures for a fantasy campaign. Beautiful elves, hideous giants, and treacherous monsters roam the countryside. One can fight Roman invaders, go on druids' quests, be tormented by leprechauns, and find clues to lost treasures or forgotten lands in the stories told by bards.

Across the sea are Avalon, Lyonesse, and dozens of lost faerie islands (and, yes, the Americas). In Britain is a king known as Arthur; why not visit him? Villages must be defended from the ravages of men and monsters, and druids might hunt for heroes to do the dirty work. Goblins might dwell under the earth in dark caverns, waiting for foolish humans to enter their lairs. What other beings, living and dead, would love to give the druids trouble?

It is of interest to note that the *Celts* book covers an era that predates the first two HR sourcebooks by several hundred years. It would be interesting to have old Celtic ruins and magical items (and monsters) crop up in both Viking and Carolingian adventures, no? Also note that this volume describes a time in which Romans (from HR5) can show up, too—with their own treasures, magic, and monsters.

Other games can offer material for your campaign as well. Chaosium's *PENDRAGON*\* system and White Wolf's *ARS MAGICA*\* line might supply a wealth of ideas for your campaign. You also might look at Columbia Games' *Lionheart Sourcebook* on England of A.D. 1190 for more ideas.

Research always helps. Find a copy of *The Mabinogion* and read of Annwn, a parallel plane of mystery that borders the Celtic countries—then add it and its adventures to your campaign. Willie Walsh, champion module author for *DUNGEON*® Adventures, has produced several Celtic-theme quests (see, for example, *DUNGEON* issues #21, "The Cauldron of Plenty," and #37, "The White Boar of Kilfay"). *POLYHEDRON*® Newszine ran several Celtic adventures in earlier issues; look them up. Heaven know, there are more than enough books about druids, Celtic folklore, and Irish myths on the shelves than you can reasonably count in a day.

**HR4:** Of all the historical AD&D settings, this is the most challenging to run. The complex political intrigues, world-spanning empires, and widespread use of gunpowder are going to push the DM's game-management skills to their limits.

Yet this is also the age of the Three Musketeers, Cyrano de Bergerac, Sir Francis Drake, Spanish galleons laden with gold, Caribbean pirates, and Captain Blood.

Plague threatens, the Spanish Armada is massing, a rich New World has been found, and war is always in the air. Technology is on the rise, and magic and elves and dragons are in full retreat (at least in Europe!). It is a chaotic, violent, colorful world without parallel.

Fantasy still plays a strong role here, however. Ruined castles are haunted by ghosts, battlefields by ghouls, and sorcerers' towers by skeletons. With the unchecked rise of human civilization, faeries and magical forces are leaving Europe—but where are they going? Is there an alternate world, plane, island, cavern, or other hidden locale where they find shelter? Can a few brave adventurers get there and back safely with proof of their visit?

North and South America are the lands of adventure once again—and once again things need not have turned out as they did. What if there was a Fountain of Youth, or cities made of gold? What if history was tweaked a little bit, as it was in science-fiction novels like Orson Scott Card's *Seventh Son* or Keith Roberts' *Pavane*? What if the Caribbean pirates told of in Alexander Exquemelin's *The Buccaneers of America* had been a little more organized, and had formed their own spirited, rag-tag American government? What if your players' characters were a part of it?

I strongly recommend several TSR and nonTSR gaming products for their ideas on mixing magic and gunpowder technology. Three of these (which follow) cover a world in the late 1800s in which magic or science-fantasy technology are in effect. R. Talsorian Games shortly will publish the *CASTLE FALKENSTEIN*\* game, described as a combination of Tolkien, Wagner, and Jules Verne, with a bit of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. TSR has the *AMAZING ENGINE*™ game's *For Faerie, Queen, and Country*, a Victorian-period England with faerie folk and magic. GDW's *SPACE: 1889*\* game has no magic, but offers bizarre science and many strange, new worlds (with stranger aliens) for characters to explore.

Most importantly, however, a DM should look at the *LACE & STEEL*\* game, from the Australian Games Group. This game was described in the editorial for *DRAGON*® issue #177, and the historical background and material it presents (especially the illustrations) are wonderful. Unlike the three previous games, this one has a time period of about 1640—right in line with HR4.

As a final note, picture how a world modeled along the lines of HR4 (perhaps even an alternate Earth itself) would be altered if a large spelljammer full of gun-loving giff, tinkler gnomes, and spelljammer helms were to crash-land there. Frightening, isn't it? Think about it—and try it out. (For other scary ideas, see the *POLYHEDRON*® Newszine, issues #73 and 74, for Tim Brown's two-part article series on combining the *SPACE: 1889* game and TSR's *SPELLJAMMER* campaign.)

**HR5:** You're given a grant of land on the

Imperial frontier. All you have to do it hold it against a few thousand Germanic barbarians due by in the spring. Or, you're searching the library at the Pharos of Alexandria, and you discover a scroll with a tale of a strange island and its lost treasures. Or, you're the commander of a Roman military force sent into Africa to find a new sort of monster to bring back to the Emperor's zoo—and you find a dinosaur.

The fantastic side of the Roman Empire can include a lot. In David Drake's *Killer*, an alien creature ravaging Rome itself must be caught. In L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, a time traveler introduces some remarkable inventions—and Rome never falls. Roman colonies in America have been hinted at for many years in real life, but African expeditions would be equally exciting (use the articles on African-based AD&D game additions in *DRAGON* issues #189, 191, 195, and 200). And who knows what lurks in the dark catacombs beneath the capital—undead, evil wizards, hostile cults, buried treasure? Once again, tales of Atlantis may tempt adventurers, and the whole world beckons to have the standard of the Emperor planted in its soil.

Some excellent gaming accessories that might offer more ideas for your campaign include the D&D® modules *Arena of Thyatis* and *Legions of Thyatis*, as well as Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Imperial Rome*. Certain historical guides are also highly recommended, particularly *A Roman Town*, from the See Inside series edited by R. J. Unstead, and David Macaulay's *City*. I also found L. Sprague de Camp's *The Ancient Engineers* to be of great help in detailing scientific inventions of the ancient world—and some were pretty wild! What if Hero's steam engine had been adopted for broader use? What if someone invented a printing press? Now you can find out.

## Your input helps

Is there a historical time period that you think would do well as an AD&D game setting? Write to me and let me know. My address here is: Roger Moore, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. All submissions become the property of TSR, Inc.; I'll read them carefully and use them in deciding the direction of this great series.

If you have any other thoughts or comments on the HR series, please let me know, too. I'd especially like to hear from those running campaigns in HR-series worlds. Enjoy!

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# Forum

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read, understand, and input your comments. We will print the complete address of a contributor if the writer requests it.

I am writing in response to the many letters regarding the redesign of the psionist character. Some of these letters made the point that the powers of the psionist were excessive, while others attempted to redesign the character (rework the saving throws, limit the powers, or control the order in which powers can be learned). My character is a psionist/fighter, and my DM is under the same impression as the writers of these letters. My character is forced to learn disciplines in a specific order, and many of the sciences and devotions have been reworked to make them less powerful. I feel that this is unfair because the disadvantages of this class already outweigh the advantages.

The psionist character is an attempt to give mid-level power to low-level characters while keeping that power under control with power checks and the results thereof. Let us take the Disintegrate science as an example. (My character will need to be 24th level to obtain this power, while in other campaigns it is possible to get it at 3rd level.) This science allows the psionist to destroy up to eight cubic feet of material (a save is allowed).

The power check for this science is Wis -4, which would give most reasonably proportioned psionist characters less than a 50% chance of even getting the power to work. If it works, the character will lose 40 PSPs; this should be nearly all his points at 3rd level. As a bonus, a "20" result on the power-check roll results in the power working against him. (The law of averages will do in any psionist who uses this power too often.) Also, just how much damage will the loss of eight cubic feet of tissue do to a dragon?

These are substantial and real disadvantages to this class. A wizard can cast *fireballs* by 5th level, and a fighter gets three attacks every two rounds by 7th level. These are reliable abilities; a *fireball* doesn't fail to operate half the time and have a 5% chance of exploding in your face. A wizard will one day be able to cast *wish*

spells, and a fighter will have the fighting abilities (and hit points) to take on the greatest dragon, but a psionist of comparable level will have a handful of useful mid-level powers and a flood of useless devotions (such as Ballistic Attack or Body Weaponry).

Although I agree with some of the letters that talk about the creation of psionic items to aid in psionic defense and attack, I cannot agree with any further limitations being put on this class.

Eric Pollinger  
Brooklyn NY

I would like to contribute some thoughts to the ongoing debate about how powerful psionics are compared to the "other magic systems" of the AD&D® game. First, psionics is *not* a different form of magic and should not be handled as such, as is clearly stated in the *Complete Psionics Handbook*. Some people seem to miss this fact. Psionics is a completely different approach, and this is reflected not only in its system, but also in the various power descriptions. But it should not end there. Players and Dungeon Masters alike must work toward playing the difference. This means that a player invoking a psionic power should make up his mind (no pun intended) and describe what the power feels and looks like each time he uses it. DRAGON Magazine has given helpful guidelines on this subject ("Psionics in Living Color" in DRAGON issue #182). The DM should not hesitate to tell the player exactly what he is experiencing when using a psionic power. The effect and feel of a given psionic power should differ greatly each time, depending on the user and the target. Psionics should not be something absolutely reliable, like the almost-mathematical approach of wizard magic.

Of course, most of these effects are purely role-playing and cannot be covered by the game system, but isn't this what the game is all about? Nonetheless, people complain about psionics being too-powerful. Well, let us take a look at them. First, psionics needs a power-check roll. This is a great handicap when compared with magic. Next, psionic power checks have critical success and failure results. This roll has a lot of modifiers, depending on the psionic power used. The more "powerful" (i.e., devastating, manipulating, or advantageous) the power is, the more difficult the power-check roll is to make.

For those number-lucky players out there, I have taken the time to total all psionic powers with respect to their power scores and came up with 132 powers that have a reduced power score right away, compared with a mere 20 that

use unmodified ability scores, and only one power with a positive modifier. The average power-score reduction is -4. Additionally, many powers have extensive power-score reductions within their descriptions, be it level of opponent, distance, weight, etc.

I hope you realize by now that psionic powers are not guaranteed successes. Provided that not all psionists walk around with statistics of 18 (or higher for the DARK SUN® setting), the chances for a successful power check are often around 50%. At this point, I would like to thank Mark C. Francisco whose letter in DRAGON issue #191 argued along the same lines.

That said, I would like to respond to Phillip Edwards's letter in DRAGON issue #192. He complained about not having been able to deliver a strong-enough threat to his gaming group because of their psionic powers. Let us get some things straight. First, every DM has the power to wipe out his gaming groups' party. This is not to say that he should do so, but he should not become enslaved by rules. At the very least, the DM should exert influence on what powers the players choose. There is always the solution of not allowing psionics into your campaign if you feel that your players cannot handle it. It is optional, remember?

You are wrong in your example of *dimension door*. A mage need not be 10th level to gain *dimension door*. Since it is a fourth-level spell, the mage may gain it as low as 7th level. On the other hand, a psionist can have the power *Dimensional Door* right from the start (1st level), not 3rd level. Furthermore, a mage can take others with him, as long as they do not exceed the 240-lb. limit. Whereas the mage's spell is comparatively safe, the psionic *Dimensional Door* is a haven of restrictions and hazards. Range is just one of them. A mage is able to *dimension door* over 200 yards distance, but a psionist using *Dimensional Door* has difficulties with ranges over 50 yards.

One last thing: Of course there is a way to raise psionic power scores! See page 13 of the *CPH* to learn how to specialize your character in a certain psionic power.

Similar complaints about other "too powerful" psionic powers stem mainly from player abuse. Some of those complaints and a lot of other questions could be avoided if players would read the rulebooks more carefully. As mentioned in the *CPH*, you should not rip apart psionics and plant it at various points into the soil of your campaign background. Instead, it should be seen as a complete whole, a sort of world-view or way of life. Psionists should be comparatively few (with the possible exception

of Athas, the DARK SUN world).

To put it all together, psionics and the psionist class are as balanced or unbalanced as any other AD&D character class. It is just because this is a new subject that some people experience difficulties. If you analyze psionics closely, I bet you'll find it an enriching addition to the AD&D game, not an abusively powerful "tool" to spoil campaigns.

Name & address unreadable

After reading Mr. Goodmooft's letter in issue #195 of DRAGON Magazine, I felt compelled to write on behalf of those seeking greater Christian elements in role-playing games. The game KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON\*, published by Chaosium, Inc., is worth looking into. It attempts to simulate the legends of the Round Table, in which Christianity played a large part. The religious aspects of Christianity are detailed in the game, and characters may be rewarded by living up to Christian virtues. A new edition of the game is in stores now.

Eric R. Filmer  
Savannah GA

I am writing in response to Anne Brown's article featured in the June 1993 issue of DRAGON Magazine, entitled "Dragon Dogfights." I am a Dungeon Master for a small gaming group of differing levels, from advanced (more than 12 years' experience) to brand-new (only six months' experience).

I only glanced at the article at first, as my gaming group does not use miniatures (in the interest of having some disposable income not spent on AD&D material.) However, upon a second look, I realized that the dragon battle in general would fit in very well with my current campaign: based on Krynn in the year 753 and centered around Abyssal law vs. chaos conflict, and involving many evil dragons (on the side of the good PCs, no less).

I came up with the (last-minute) idea to make my own pieces. Because I was pressed for time, I had to keep it simple, so this is what I did:

I made cardboard cutouts of flying dragons (about 3½ long, 3" wide, and colored them (although next time I'll use colored construction paper) to indicate dragon race. My campaign called for the chromatic dragons: red, white, blue, green, and black.

I attached the cutouts to very light wire, making sure that the wire lengths were in proportion to each dragon's movement rate. The length of the wire determined how far each piece could move in a round.

I attached the wire to a cardboard base, which I weighted down with coins to ensure stability (although modeling clay would work better).

I then cut out the dragons' breath weapons, also making sure they were in proportion to the dragons' bodies. I wrote in the weapon type and the damage right on the breath-weapon cutout, so that the pace of the game could move along without continually referring to *Monstrous Compendium* sheets.

This was all accomplished in about two hours (the amount of time I had before we were to play) and at a cost of about \$3.89.

In game terms, the PCs were to use the evil dragons (temporary allies) for transportation. While doing so, they were attacked by opposing evil dragons, one of whose rider had a Dragon Orb and blinded the PCs' mounts, forcing the evil dragons to rely on the PCs. This situation gave the PCs a good measure of control over their side of the battle. (Although the role-playing would be great if the dragons were in

charge, for this session I really wanted the PCs to decide the strategies.)

Well, we all had an absolutely fabulous game session!

Because the flexibility and support of the wire enabled the players to use the vertical as well as the horizontal plane for attacks, we had an evening full of diving, hiding in the clouds, and attacking from below. It was a great change of pace from the purely horizontal battles that ground creatures take part in.

The lengths of wire representing movement rates were a tactile reminder of the limitations that game-time and game-space reality imposes (which was a great gaming lesson because two of the players are novice gamers, and the visual impact carried so much more weight than a mere verbal explanation).

The game session lasted for about four hours; we played with twelve dragons, five PCs, and three powerful NPCs.

Interestingly enough, the session worked out to be only fifteen turns. This was another enlightening perspective to the night's game: this massive, intense, and extremely destructive battle occurred in only fifteen minutes of game time! The PCs truly appreciated "resting," as they all took very serious damage in the same space of time that it takes to hard-boil an egg.

In short, the idea is a really fantastic gaming option. It's a flexible concept that can be very specific and detailed (when using miniatures) or just put together for one evening's gaming. It certainly varies the routine dramatically! We all decided that we want to play more dragon-fights, so I've put together a special subcampaign so that we can indulge regularly.

So, thanks again to Anne Brown for a great idea. I'll look forward to any more articles that she writes.

Keep up the great work!

Regina Larsen  
East Setauket NY

Here are two ways to improve the use of firearms in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting:

The best way to use silver bullets against a fiend is to split the party. Lower-level members, armed with guns, should attempt to ambush the fiend. The more advanced party members draw the fiend into the open. A priest casts *silence*, 15' radius on the solid silver projectile. The guns are fired. The fiend can't hear or see the shot coming. If the PCs miss the first time, they may get another chance. Why? The fiend may not even know he has been shot at, unless he sees the projectile hit something near him.

This idea could work with any type of gun, silver grenades, or homemade claymore mines (silver pellets in sun-baked clay).

You also can add a simple tube telescope that extends the entire length of the gun barrel, much like the optics on a Civil War sniper rifle. Doing this should add +2 to attack rolls.

James P. Buchanan  
Duluth MN

I am writing in response to John F. Wherry's letter in issue #195.

I have been playing the D&D® and AD&D games for five years, mainly as a DM. I have used a computer to assist me in gaming since I began. I use a system that is, as far as I know, unavailable in the U.S.A., but the ideas and principals can be used with any computer.

Besides the usual uses of computers to produce adventure texts, maps, and diagrams, I have many other uses for my computer. First, I use a CAD package to produce record sheets (character sheets, spelljamming-ship record

sheets etc.), modified to suit my own campaign. This has the advantage that you can add extra items that you wish to record. When a sheet is worn out or damaged, it is simple to produce a replacement.

I also use my computer during gaming sessions. The first use is to record information about the various characters being played, information that the players cannot see themselves (number of charges in magical items, curses, etc.). I use a spreadsheet program for this purpose. This program is also used to keep a record of every item carried by a character. This makes it possible to keep an accurate and up-to-date check on a character's encumbrance.

A couple of programs that I wrote myself also help out during a game. The first is a "dice roller." The program will roll any number of dice in a fraction of a second. This saves a lot of time when dealing with fireball spells, for example. A second program stores records of all the monsters used in my campaign, so when the players suddenly decide to send their characters off on a dragon hunt that I wasn't expecting, I can very quickly find all the statistics on dragons that I need. The program also can produce a random treasure hoard for any monster, complete with magical items, etc.

I have also written a program that produces 8-mile hex maps (in the style of the TSR Trail Maps). My CAD program refused to position the hexes so that they were lined up correctly, so I wrote a program to perform the function for me. I use this to produce all my campaign maps. It has the advantage that every time something on the map changes it can be re-printed, thus avoiding messy scribbles all over maps.

I would be delighted if someone produced a set of programs to do some of the more tedious jobs of running a game. My computer has sped up and improved my games no end.

Andrew Benson  
South York, England

A few contributors, spurred on by David A. Casey, have suggested to the "Forum" that there are computer programs able to draw dungeon and wilderness maps. I have come across a decent Amiga program designed to be used by gamers, called "The Digital Dungeon." It consists of a package of eight disks filled with clip art that can be arranged into maps, player hand-outs, or whatever. This clip art includes icons for such RPG elements as treasure chests and monsters—the type of stuff that CAD programs aren't designed to draw.

This program is put out by Magic Matrix and sells for around \$70.00. To the best of my knowledge, it is exclusively an Amiga product, although I've been known to be wrong before. You'll find that some of this program's graphics are below normal Amiga standards, but as it is one of a kind, we gamers have very little choice—you either buy this mapmaker or you're stuck with some generic painting program.

Benjamin E. Lake  
Del Valle TX

I wanted to take this opportunity to let you, and everyone else who reads this wonderful magazine, know about a program that I have found that has helped me immensely with my games.

I first ran across "Adventure Writer" (Aw) for Windows, by Digital Alchemy, when I received a recent issue of your sister mag, DUNGEON® Adventures. I answered the ad that told me I could create maps at various scales, whether for player maps or miniatures warfare maps.

Continued on page 70

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# Rule the world in *The 7th Saga*

*Life is short; live it up.*

Nikita Khrushchev

To my way of thinking, a good role-playing campaign has four aspects to it, which must be juggled by the game master in an attempt to keep both herself and her players happy. These aspects are game mechanics (including combat, spell-casting, etc.); puzzle-solving; the story told; and the actual role-playing itself. If a game master falls down on any of these aspects, her campaign can fail.

Let's look at each of these aspects as they apply to computer games. The first, game mechanics, has been handled efficiently by computers for years. It's a natural; the computer can do the combat efficiently enough, and it knows just what the effects of all the spells are. Unfortunately, it's unlikely to fudge the results, and any good game master knows the importance of *that!*

Computer role-playing games are stupendous at generating neat puzzle-solving adventures. In a tabletop game, I writhe irascibly when the game master tries to inflict puzzles on us, but I like it in a computer game.

The third aspect of gaming—story-telling—is rare in computer games but is growing in quality. Early stories were pathetically one-dimensional, and such simplistic stuff is still common. However, the arrival of works such as *The 7th Saga* and *Final Fantasy II* show that the reign of mindless dungeon-bashing games may soon end.

There is one aspect left to describe—actual role-playing itself, and no computer game has yet managed to generate this. A few games have made attempts at it, but it always comes down to puzzle-solving or story-telling. In a tabletop game, playing a role is an end in itself. Someone who runs a hobbit in a tabletop game does so because it's fun to pretend to be a cowardly little glutton, no matter how pathetic his combat stats are. In a computer game, you'd be a hobbit only because he got special bonuses in, say, thieving. Even in the few games trying to inject a little role-playing, such as *Ultima* with its Avatar stuff, playing the role is, after all, still just an attempt to trick the computer into letting you win the game.

## Reviews

### THE 7TH SAGA

\*\*\*

Super Nintendo

ENIX America Corp.

*The 7th Saga* has some original concepts that I quite like. Its worst aspects are all inherited from previous Nintendo role-

# EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1993 by Sandy Petersen



*The 7th Saga* (ENIX)

playing games, and I wish ENIX had been courageous enough to shed more of the traditional trappings.

The basic situation presented is that scattered over the globe are seven magic runes.

Whoever acquires them becomes all-powerful and rules the world. Refreshingly, *The 7th Saga* has no evil Foozle-type wizard-supreme hiding in a big tower at the end of the game. Instead, a major part of your opposition comes from the six other guys who are also seeking the runes, so they can become all-powerful instead of you. As you quest across the planet, you frequently encounter these guys and you can talk to them, get them to join with you in a common cause, or fight them. As the game progresses and you grow in power, they do, too—some of them faster than you.

While you travel from place to place,

### Computer games' ratings

|       |                 |
|-------|-----------------|
| X     | Not recommended |
| .     | Poor            |
| ..    | Fair            |
| ...   | Good            |
| ....  | Excellent       |
| ..... | Superb          |

you frequently meet up with one of your six rivals. Be careful before fighting one of them—they're always extremely tough in a fight, and increasing your level and abilities doesn't help against these bozos. If you're a higher level, the game makes *them* tougher, too. This means that they are constantly a factor in your planning. I like this. When one of them becomes a solid obstacle in your path, and you must figure out how to beat the sucker to progress. When I beat one of them, I always felt quite exhilarated.

*The 7th Saga* has pretty good graphics and sound, comparable to other advanced cartridge role-playing games. While the advertising hype boasted of the excellence of the sound track, I did not find it to be anything special. The sound was adequate and did not get annoying after a long time. I guess it's unfair to ask for anything more—except that a few Super Nintendo games have had beautiful music. I wish *The 7th Saga* had, too.

The game uses three points-of-view: one for visiting cities, one while wandering through the countryside, and the ever-popular combat view.

In the cities, you walk about in a top-down view. The towns provide clues as well as shops in which you can purchase magical items, armor, and weapons. Most towns contain a healing "shop" that can cure you of poison and resurrect your friends. Each town also has an inn in which you can save your game, plus recover lost magic points and heal damage by resting. You can question passersby to get information, but the civilians are among the least well-informed of any game I've played. It is rare that more than 2-3 folks in a town tell you something you actually need to know. Worse, on the rare occasions one of them offers you a special deal. At least half the time, they cheat you horribly. Before you deal with a citizen, make sure you save the game, because you may not want to live with your choice.

The shops always give square deals, but they provide weapons, armor, and special items for all seven of the characters. This means that, under normal circumstances, there are very few items your character alone can purchase. If you are one of the less equipment-hungry heroes, such as the magician or the robot, you can hardly ever find anything usable.

When you leave the town, you are still in top-down view but are stuck in a barren world composed of black rock mountains, beaches, and occasional green patches. Scattered thinly through this daunting landscape are towns and dungeon entrances. As you wander, a crystal ball shows you little radar blips of monsters, which you can try to avoid, though eventually they'll track you down.

Combat is rather stylized. You see yourself from behind with the monster(s) in front. The monsters chivalrously always give you the first move in the sequence. After that, everyone takes turns, though



sometimes you get two turns in a row. (I imagine because your Speed exceeds the monster's) You can battle up to three monsters at a time, but it is quite common to encounter just a single bad guy.

Given the stylized nature of combat, you have quite a few options and tactics open to you. You can Defend, Attack, Defend and then Attack (which boosts the damage you do), cast spells, use items, etc. Soon you learn that various opponents respond best to certain tactics. It took me a long time to learn to beat certain monsters—those dang Mutants, in particular, took me an embarrassingly long time to work out. Sometimes the tactics become fairly sophisticated. For instance, to defeat Sages, I have my more combat-oriented character strike away bravely, while my magic-oriented character casts as many MPCTCHER spells as he can, in between healing both characters. This will drain the monster's magic points and eventually your foe will be reduced to mere physical attacks against you. You might tempt it into a MPCTCHER vs. MPCTCHER duel, which is safe enough for you, because at least he's not casting Firebird spells or worse at you.

Many games have MacGuffins after which you must seek. *The 7th Saga* is no exception, but the MacGuffins you're looking for—the Runes—are not just puny pieces of decoration. Instead, each Rune gives your character a major boost in power. The Wind Rune teleports you from town to town. The Star Rune doubles your defensive power in combat. The Water Rune heals you of damage. Once you've accumulated several Runes, you'll wonder how you ever survived without them. In fact, on the rare occasions you lose a Rune (always to one of your six rivals), you'll be so depressed I predict you'll restart from a saved game rather than suffer the ignominy



*The 7th Saga* (ENIX)

of having to get your Runes back (at least, I did).

*The 7th Saga* deserves some sort of award for its bizarre monster names. Some of the monsters have cumbersome names, such as Soidiek or Wyrock. But there are also monsters whose names are English words; Hermit, Despair, Defeat, Flame, Trick, Sage, etc. Then there are monsters with inexplicable names. These are the ones that really make this game unique—Wyvern, Chimera, Griffin, and so forth. What's so odd about those? The Wyvern is a large hawk. The Chimera is a tall skull-faced wraith. The Griffin is a human with pythons for legs. In no case does a monster resemble its mythological namesake.

*The 7th Saga* permits only three saved games, which is probably enough for most users. It seems somehow wrong, though. I wish the game had seven slots for saved games, so I could try out each of the seven different heroes simultaneously.

To teach yourself *The 7th Saga*, open the map enclosed in the box. The map itself is nearly useless, since it displays no cities or dungeons. However, on the map back you'll find descriptions of the spells and magical items, which are good to know,

clueless. (Quick! What does "HPCTCHER" make you think of?) Then start wandering around.

The game isn't bad, but it has one fairly serious flaw. I was stumped several times and could not continue. Unlike some games, when you're stumped in *The 7th Saga*, there's almost nothing you can do except wander aimlessly while fighting monsters until the solution comes to you or you find a city. In other words, the game experience is broken up with periods of tedium. If you demand fun during every moment of playing a game, *The 7th Saga* is probably not your cup of tea.

So far, ENIX has produced consistently interesting game ideas, with good but inconsistent game play. I look forward to their next release, *Actraiser II*.

### Game tips

1. When you come into a strange town for the first time, look in every nook and cranny. Often chests with valuable prizes are there for the taking. Not every town has these, but they're nice when you find them. Don't worry about the guys who order you off the premises—they never do anything.

2. When you're fighting a magic-using monster that is tough to beat, and you possess the MPCTCHER spell, cast that spell as often as possible. The foe often responds by casting MPCTCHER in return, which means he's not damaging you. Soon he'll be worn down, out of magic, and easy meat.

3. To beat Pison, the bounty hunter, buy as many healing potions as you can. In the first round of combat, cast a Defense spell, use a bottle of defense, or something similar. When he hits you, drink a potion to heal your wounds. When he misses, smack him with your attacks. He never heals, so as long as you can keep his colossally-damaging attacks from knocking you too low, you can beat him. By the time you meet Red Pison, you should have two party members—the guy Pison hits can heal while the other guy whacks away.

### MIGHT & MAGIC: THE WORLD OF XEEN \*\*\*

(comprising CLOUDS OF XEEN and DARK SIDE OF XEEN)

IBM compatibles New World Computing  
*Designed and directed by:* Jon Van Caneghem

*Programmed by:* Mark Caldwell, Dave Hathaway

*Computer graphics:* Jonathon P. Gwyn, Bonnie Long-Hemsath, Julia Ulano, Ricardo Barrera, Louis Johnson

*Clouds of Xeen* and *Dark Side of Xeen* are a pair of games that can be linked together to make up what New World Computing titles the *World of Xeen*. If you remember the good old *Might & Magic* game, these are the fourth and fifth games in that series. *Clouds* is the first of the two, but is not noticeably inferior to *Dark Side*.

*Beholder* style game, with a first-person view. Your characters' faces are displayed along one screen edge, and access to a separate screen shows what your characters carry.

The graphics for *Xeen* are adequate. They're nothing spectacular, but they get the job done. They do have one great virtue that I wish more games emulated; they are quite funny sometimes. When one of your characters is poisoned, he doesn't just turn green, or have a little skull-and-crossbones appear by his name. He crosses his eyes, gags, and even inflates his cheeks. Maybe I'm easily amused, but the gritty, grim world of most computer role-playing games can use all the humor it can get. When you smack a monster, he always reacts in a satisfyingly pained manner, too, sticking out his tongue, crossing his legs, etc. I love it. Many of the graphics might be considered a bit cartoony by some people, but I don't mind that. The sound was also fine, if once again nothing worth stopping the presses for. The digitized sound was excellent, clearly audible and understandable even using terrible IBM beepatronics.

In theory, there is an overriding quest in *Xeen*. However, you soon lose track of the *uber* -quest because you must continually go on scores of little missions. This is fine, because there are enough of these missions to keep you occupied for many hours. You must wander cross-country, rid towns of pestiferous monsters, explore sewers, dig up gems, seek Monga Melons, and traverse Cloud Paths.

Combat is simple. You can see the monsters coming from some ways ahead, so you can shoot missiles or cast spells before they close with you. Of course, they can do the same if they have those capabilities. Once the monsters are at hand, your party members take turns wailing on them, and the monsters politely wait their turns, too. It's a bit of a relief to outnumber the monsters for a change—in *Xeen* your party contains six members, while the number of monsters is only two or three.

Solving the little quests of *Xeen* usually produces both money and experience points, sometimes in stunningly huge quantities (I got 50,000 points just for figuring out a word puzzle). You also get titles, such as "Fed Nibbler" or "Taste Tester Royale." They may lack grandeur, but I was tickled to earn them. When you get enough experience points, you must find a town and train your characters. This is one way to spend your cash. Buying swords and armor is another way, but you can usually find better weapons out in the wild than you can buy in town. Purchasing spells eats up a little cash, as does buying skills. In general, however, you'll find yourself accumulating more money than you know how to spend. That's not particularly good, but I guess it's better than being dirt-poor all the time. But I have to admit that it felt like the game's

between experience, money, and gems.

To cast spells, you spend Spell Points, which are generated by magic-using characters. All the really good spells also require gems, which can be found in large quantities throughout the world and, like money, represent an economic limitation that is never really a threat except very early in the game. The game in general seems to suffer from inflation. There are monsters who deliver hundreds of points of damage, and who possess tens of thousands of hit points. Sometimes I had the feeling I was playing in a Monty Haul campaign run by a precocious twelve-year-old.

There are lots of folks to talk to in the towns (and outside them). Some sell you stuff, some give hints, some give experience points or money if you've solved their quest.

There are also plenty of monsters, magical items, and spells. In fact, this game has it all, though it does have some rather peculiar items such as quartz boots, leather swords, and wooden plate armor. The magical items are just as puzzling. I pondered for a long time as to whether a seething sabre was preferable to a toxic helm, and whether I really dared put on the toxic helm in the first place. (Despite its ominous name, it proved to *protect* me against poison.)

Saving and loading games is painless and easy. The only real disadvantage here is that the saved games are colossal in size: 380K for *Dark Side of Xeen*, and 280K for *Clouds of Xeen*. If you're playing both games together in the *World of Xeen*, both games are saved at once, for a grand total of 660K per saved game!

So far, the game sounds pretty good. Is there anything wrong with it? Sadly, yes. *Xeen* is primitive, technically speaking. Your travel is shown in the old-fashioned bit-mapped jerky movement used in the early *Wizardry* games.

The mouse movement is quite sluggish, always trailing behind. *Xeen*'s keyboard interface is good and covers almost everything you need, but it's still no speed demon. As you travel across the wilderness, you are frequently halted while the game accesses your hard disk for an ungodly length of time. Then, you are often thrown into instant combat by the appearance of a previously unseen monster, unseen because you have just crossed some invisible barrier. Whenever you enter one of the major dungeons, you must watch a time-consuming animation. It's fun the first time, but you can't shortcut it.

Another egregious problem with *Xeen* is the automap feature. I applaud the fact that the game has one, but this has got to be one of the worst automaps in the history of computer gaming. It shows you only the terrain you have directly marched over and has few details (outdoors is the best for seeing details—inside dungeons is the worst). If you want to get an idea of

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what an area looks like from above, you must painstakingly wander over every square inch of it, so it can be mapped. The automap covers only a very small area, so you can't use it to locate things that are some distance away. I guess the designers thought you'd use the map enclosed in the game for that. Ah well.

To make up for the automap, your characters receive a list of all the quests they are currently on, which removes much of the need for the nice big pad of paper enclosed in the game box for you to make notes on. I hesitate to provide game tips for *Xeen*, because these games also have the fattest hint manuals I've hefted—over 250 pages for *Dark Side* alone! The games weren't so tough that I felt the manuals were absolutely essential (which is a plus), but if you want to know every detail of the quests so you don't miss anything, you might want to pick them up.

In summary, this is a fun game afflicted with stunted programming. I recommend *Xeen* with reservations. If you're the impatient sort who is unwilling to put up with lagging cursors, lengthy disk accesses, and relatively crude animation techniques, you may not want *Xeen*. Nonetheless, *Xeen* teems with clever and original ideas, and it is a nice big world chock full of cool stuff.

## FACEBALL: 2000

Super Nintendo

Bulletproof Software

\*\*

*Faceball: 2000* is a little 3-D game in which you wander through a simple maze, ambushing and slaying enemy Happy Faces. This might not seem like much at first. The fact is, it isn't.

You must kill 10 baddies on each level before progressing to the next stage, which you do by walking over a green spot on the floor. As you progress through the levels, the happy faces get tougher, shoot at you, bounce, etc. When you kill one happy face, a new one appears. Some faces flash on and off, signifying that they contain a power-up. This also indicates that they are a lot harder to kill, which poses a real problem if they are gremlins (a fast-moving creature that chases you and tries to slam into you).

The 3-D animation is quite slow-moving. You can get power-ups to increase your speed, but I see no excuse for starting you out in such a poor condition. The big round pellets you shoot are slow, and obscure your vision when fired. If you're in a hot spot and must shoot a lot, you're blinded for most of the action. It's rather frustrating.

The 3-D perspective is also somewhat

primitive. If you're next to a wall when a shot hits you, the wall flashes out of existence for a second. The visible world outside the maze is less than impressive, compared to what many other Super Nintendo games have had.

Even the play of this exceedingly simple game could use a boost. For instance, when you kill a monster, a new one pops in. That's okay, but sometimes they pop in right on top of you, giving you no chance to fight back. I prefer to lose a game because I'm incompetent, not because the game hosed me.

Ω

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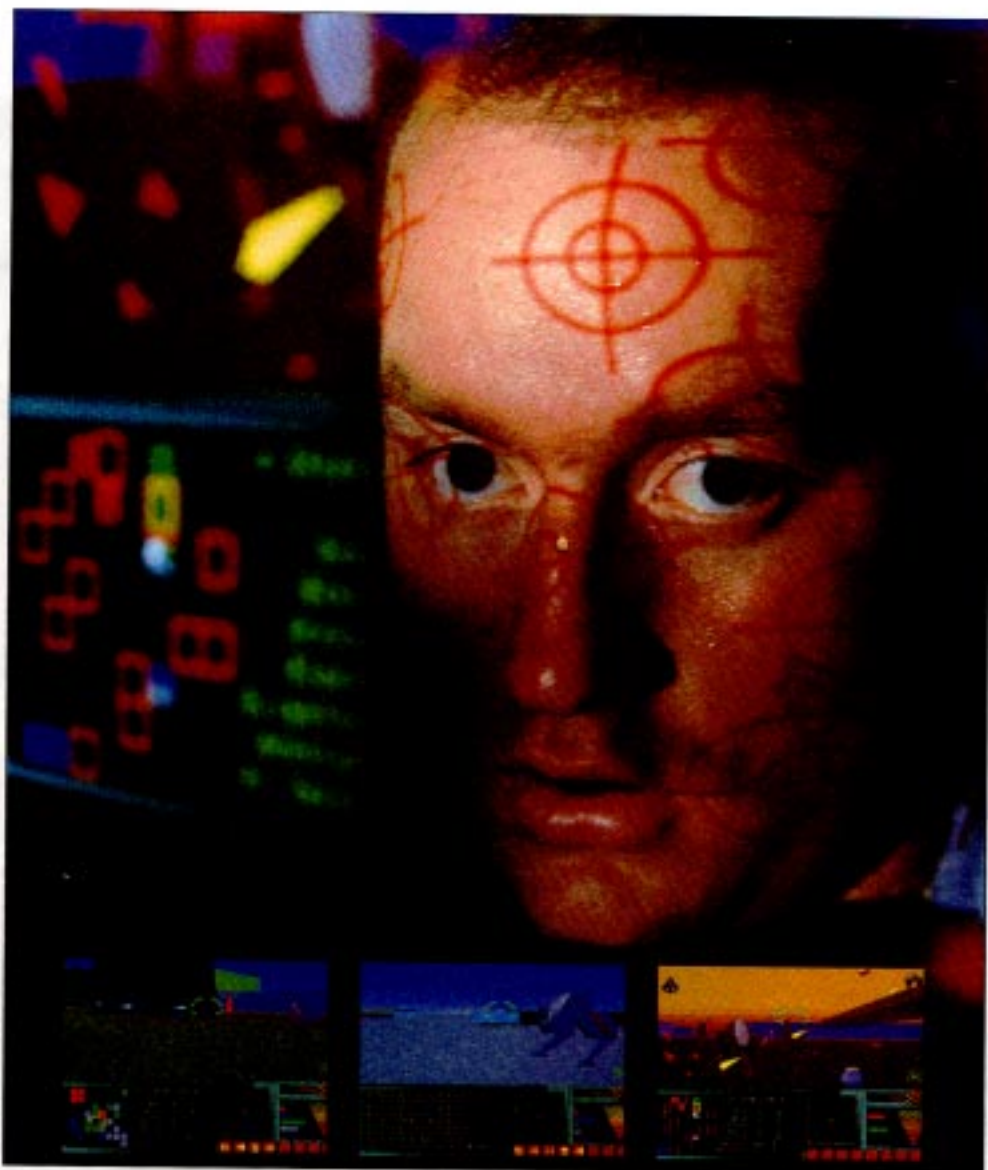
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# Role-playing Reviews

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## Trailblazers

I did not throw a rock in the Exhibition Hall of the 1993 GEN CON® Game Fair. I could not find a rock in downtown Milwaukee. Had I found one and sent it hurtling across that cavernous room, though, the rock likely would have bounced off a couple of gamers and hit a brand new role-playing game: Stewart Wieck's MAGE\* storytelling game (White Wolf, \$25); FASA's

EARTHDAWN\* RPG by Greg Gorden Christopher Kubasik, and Louis Prosperi (\$30); new games and supplements from West End, Avalon Hill, Chaosium, and TSR. The flood will keep gamers playing for months or years to come.

Several designs leave the comfortable ruts of the hobby and set off in new directions. One tries valiantly to revive the all-

but dormant super-hero genre. Another marks the auspicious debut of a new kind of game, not an RPG but fascinating anyway. As long as talented designers and adventurous publishers keep bringing out trailblazing products like these, I won't want to throw rocks.

Photography by Charles Kohl



## UNDERGROUND \* game

256-page full-color softcover rulebook  
MGI/Mayfair Games Inc. \$25  
Design: Ray Winninger  
Layout and graphics: Mari Paz Cabardo  
Cover: Geof Darrow (color artist: Florence Breton)  
Interior illustrations: Corey Barba, Peter Chung, Geof Darrow, Glenn Kim, Ed Lee, Rob McLees, Juan Ramirez  
Photography: Paul Kozal

In 1993 America has more nuclear bombs, more firearms, more prisoners, and *far* more lawyers, both in raw numbers and per capita, than any nation in history. Do you feel safe? Every year Fortune 500 corporations make more money, and the Gross Domestic Product rises. Do you feel prosperous? The media fill your home with more TV channels, books, magazines, and news than ever. Do you feel informed?

If you do, you won't in 30 years. "To the alert observer, the world of 2021 is clearly a cold and dreary rat trap dominated by violent men and women who shoot or foreclose first and ask questions later. The death of the [American] dream gave birth to a nightmare." So begins the UNDERGROUND game.

**Production values:** This game's graphics and print quality so obviously establish the industry benchmark that I feel silly saying it. At the GEN CON Game Fair, editors from other companies looked overwhelmed and disquieted, like high jumpers viewing a bar set dismayingly high. "We took advantage of our desktop-publishing software in ways that other companies maybe hadn't realized," said designer Ray Winninger. No kidding! A thick rulebook printed entirely on glossy stock (price: \$25), with beautiful full color on *every* page except the character sheet made every other game (and game-company executive) at the show look, literally, pale.

Winninger, well known as a freelancer with many credits for the DC HEROES\* and TORC\* games among others, now runs the role-playing arm of Mayfair Games, MGI. He and a talented team have brought a new vision to the Chicago company. It shows at many points in the UNDERGROUND game, from the trademark sensory-overload cover by Geof Darrow (of *Hard Boiled* fame) to the photo collages, to Mari Paz Cabardo's distinctive page layout, to Winninger's offbeat subject and approach.

**Background:** Borrowing heavily from popular graphic novels like *Watchmen*, *Miracleman* (originally published in the United Kingdom as *Marvelman*), and *Marshall Law*, the UNDERGROUND game uses a satiric backdrop to redefine the conventional super-hero image. In 2021 the government contracts out its dirty little Third-World wars to militant "conflict firms" like Allied Mayhem. These corporations use alien technology to create "boosted" super-powered

soldiers, but the process tends to drive subjects insane. The remedy: Slumberland, a virtual reality wherein soldiers adjust to their enhancements in a simplistic comic-book environment.

Emerging from Slumberland, the soldiers serve a six-year hitch straight out of *Apocalypse Now*. The corps then discard the exhausted vets on the streets of Los Angeles, in a nation of heavy weaponry, licensed terrorists, Tastee Ghoul cannibal fast food, commercials in Constitutional amendments, and actively malign government by the Plutocrats. (Darryl Gates, former Los Angeles police commissioner, served as president, 2012-20, with radio host Rush Limbaugh as his vice president.)

Unexpectedly, the Slumberland programming has caused some vets to "view life as a struggle between forces of 'good' and 'evil'." Because the American government of 2021 has more in common with the four-color master criminals than any other institution of the modern world, the vets decided the government was evil and lashed out" (page 234). They formed the Underground, the movement that in all likelihood your player character (PC) supports.

**Rules:** The UNDERGROUND game uses a bare-bones version of MGI's DC HEROES\* game system. The DC Attribute Points here become Units, measuring everything measurable but on a lower power scale than its predecessor. DC's Action and Results Tables give way to a simple, but somewhat awkward system of Challenges: 2d10 rolls that earn school-type letter or "Pass/Fail" grades to indicate success levels.

Basic and bloody combat rules fill 20 pages, a spartan showing by super-heroic standards. Fans of detailed combat, or of the high survivability typical of four-color comics, may want to retrofit the game background to their favorite system.

Character creation better displays the game's originality. Finicky super-hero gamers accustomed to total control of character design must shift mental gears here, for the UNDERGROUND game does not aim for optimum wish fulfillment. Instead, boosted characters can't know for sure what powers they get, and their fragile psyches constantly threaten to crack.

An involving system casts you as personnel planner for a conflict corporation. You engineer your boosted soldier with a \$20 million budget for recruitment, enhancement, and psychotherapy. Pay well for a good surgeon to install the chosen enhancements, for otherwise a bad die roll could reduce or change the soldier's abilities. Choose from a relatively short list of enhancements that includes only those with remote scientific plausibility: not Flight, for instance, but "Flight Control" that lets you pilot jet harnesses.

Most enhancements produce Stress, a commodity something like Sanity in Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU\* game or Humanity in White Wolf's VAMPIRE\* RPG.

You choose a psychosis during the design process. Then, when your character's accumulated Stress from combat or power use exceeds the listed Tolerance, you start making Will rolls each turn to avoid wiggling out. The UNDERGROUND game gives and it takes away, dramatically reducing its super-heroes to fallible mortal status.

Boosted veterans have a wide range of effectiveness, indicating potential game-balance problems, and most characters rate as weak siblings of super-heroes in other games. After 45 minutes and \$20 million, my intelligence operative, X. Raymond Spex, had lots of neat hyper-senses but would blow over in a stiff wind. Translation to the CHAMPIONS\* game produced a point base for Ray around 115 and a cost of 66 points—strikingly wimpy. That said, the UNDERGROUND system encourages characters with detailed personalities and behavior, a much more effective path to role-playing fun than any list of big-ticket powers.

If you seek a conventional super-heroic RPG, look elsewhere. The UNDERGROUND background plays against the popular perception of super heroes, and its rules support this subversion. Taken on its own terms, however, this stands as Winninger's best design yet. (I discuss his greatest innovation, the Parameters rules, below.) Too bad the text's tutorial approach, as opposed to a reference model, scatters important rules and tables everywhere. It makes the game a snap to learn but a nuisance to use. Plus, we don't get an index! Shame!

**Attitude:** The UNDERGROUND game strikes a posture of angry revolt from the first page. The credits invoke memories of the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals, the King assassination, and the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. One promotional ad for the game ran along the lines of "Not just a game, but a blueprint for revolution." I almost expected, or dreaded, a work genuinely engaged in the political process. The idea sounded intriguing, but political activism does not make for good entertainment.

In any event, my worries proved moot. Insofar as it names names at all, the UNDERGROUND game casts as the murderers of the American dream pretty much the same group as the most empty-headed Hollywood thriller: faceless megacorporations, corrupt politicians, and rich white guys. In other words, it shoots fish in a barrel. Whatever your political leanings, you need not fear this game offends them. The text even follows that most exacting recent fashion of Political Correctness, the replacement of "he" with "she" as the generic third-person pronoun. Winninger, who wrote the game's prefatory benediction, "Y'all go out and make some trouble," may not recognize the irony.

But don't think the game's lack of political grounding implies a lack of attitude. Unlike many RPGs that just give rules for creating characters and fighting, then cut

PCs loose with no idea what to *do*, the UNDERGROUND rulebook admirably emphasizes its characters' stories and campaign goals. Nominally catering to a wide variety of interests, it offers several campaign premises. It says you can fight crime as vigilantes or cops. It says you can join an organized crime syndicate or work as a corporate mercenary, insofar as these differ. But you don't have to read far between the lines to recognize that the book promotes one goal: overthrowing the American government.

Now, the text never says this in so many words. Good thing, too; courts have always held that First Amendment guarantees of free speech do not cover sedition. (Would a fictitious context keep writers out of trouble? Who wants to find out?) But the game makes the world of 2021 so bleak that any self-respecting characters should want to fix it. The way they do it highlights the game's best design feature.

**Parameters:** "To help the [game master] chart the vets' progress, we've created seven special categories known as Parameters that the GM can use to monitor the current state of 2021 society" (page 245). The Parameters rate Wealth, Safety, Government Purity, and so on from 1 (abysmal) to 20 (superb). In most respects the US in 2021 ranks really low, but by spending Reward Points earned in adventures, PCs can adjust the Parameters to quantify their effect on the campaign. Interesting rules set different costs for the scope of effect, interrelate the Parameters in fascinating ways, and tie the whole idea to adventures that the players can suggest to the GM.

This appealing take on campaign values never loses sight of its purpose: to create entertaining stories. The Parameters give a GM ready-made scenario ideas, bring the players in on that process, and let everyone easily track the state of the union—what a great idea!

7% overthrow the government, PCs have to spend tons of points and develop a careful plan. The Underground represents a whole range of approaches, and not all of them come from *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*. United but factionalized, Underground members range from political pundits with sophisticated agendas to vets who, as Winner says it, "subconsciously believe that if they go to Washington and beat up the president, they'll find the real president tied up in a closet."

The UNDERGROUND game "was created to allow you to tell stories that examine the nature of heroism and how it relates to culture. . . . Your stories should concentrate on allowing the players to explore what it is like to change their environment and how such changes affect society" (page 241). The game's background suits this theme, for both refute the American heroic ideal. Note, however, that heroism itself still finds a worthy place in the game. The thematic underpinning helps justify why this allegedly "seditious" game ap-

peals to me, whereas the recent Hero Games' CHAMPIONS\* supplement *Dark Champions* earned my scorn ("Role-Playing Reviews," #197). An attempt to reclaim democracy by rebuilding the Parameters of the American dream makes ethical sense.

Expanding on this theme, Winner claims important differences between the UNDERGROUND game and its closest model, the Epic comic series *Marshall Law*. Both star super-soldier street people in a darkly humorous future, but Winner says *Marshall Law* depicts "the absolute idiocy and futility of heroes. [It says] 'These guys are getting you nowhere. That anyone can really change anything is not the case.' " In contrast, the UNDERGROUND game argues that "heroes can change things. If you abandon the idea of a hero, you're abandoning the idea of morality altogether.

"The American concept of heroes is ridiculous, but the concept in general isn't. UNDERGROUND heroes are more like those of other cultures," such as King Arthur or Japanese heroes. Unlike mythologized American icons, they don't always make the right choice and do exactly the right thing. "Frequently they're their own worst enemies." Later supplements set in 2021 China and Germany (now called Neo-Deutschland and ruled by the Church of Scientology) will examine how the heroic ideal differs in other cultures.

**Evaluation:** Black-humored satire? Political activism? Compassionate examination of the plight of veterans? The UNDERGROUND game tries all three. Winner correctly calls its varied approach "the game's greatest strength and its greatest weakness." Despite its super-hero trappings, the game should appeal less to fans of four-color comics than to gamers seeking a darkly colored, absurdist background for near-future adventure. Get ready to redefine your definitions of heroism, and maybe redefine some rules along the way, and you'll find the UNDERGROUND game a unique, visionary, trailblazing experience.

**Support plans :** MGI's aggressive schedule emphasizes supplements that not only give background detail, but also describe the conventions of some sub-genre suited to the locale. For instance, the *Steel Deep* sourcebox for the Luna colony offers adventures of science-fictional discovery. Others include *Streets Tell Stories* (the Los Angeles campaign box), a Washington D.C. set, and a field manual for Allied Mayhem soldiers. *The Underground Notebook*, a three-ring binder of 180 loose-leaf pages by the ubiquitous Nigel Findley, covers many topics about the world of 2021; later products will include replacement pages to keep the binder current.

## MAGIC \* THE GATHERING game

300 coated full-color 2½ × 3½" cards  
Garfield Games/Wizards of the Coast

Deck of 60 cards \$7.95  
15-card "booster pack" \$2.45

Design: Richard Garfield

Paintings: Rob Alexander, Julie Baroh, Melissa Benson, Kev Brockschmidt, Cornelius Brudi, Sandra Everingham, Dan Frazier, Daniel Gelon, Quinton Hoover, Fay Jones, Anson Maddocks, Jeff A. Menges, Jesper Myrfors, Mark Poole, Christopher Rush, Andi Rusu, Douglas Schuler, Brian Snoddy, Ron Spencer, Mark Tedin, Richard Thomas, Drew Tucker, Tom Wanerstrand, Amy Weber, Dameon Willich

Throughout the GEN CON Game Fair people clustered three deep around the Wizards of the Coast (WotC) table, craning to see the ongoing demonstrations of this game. Everywhere I went I saw someone playing it. In discussing it, some players showed reserved admiration, others enthusiasm, but body language told more than words. Everyone hunched forward intently, the way you do in deep discussions of politics or religion. Onlookers and devoted fans alike felt compelled to grapple with the idea of this game. It achieved more than just a commercial hit; it redefined gamers' perspectives on their hobby. To put it in strict anthropological terms, it worked magic.

The MAGIC\*: THE GATHERING card game, the trailblazer in what may become an entire industry category, combines card game rules with trading card collectibility. Each deck gives you a unique random assortment of 60 cards from the 300 available, some common and others quite rare. Each card, individually named, represents a magical creature, item, or effect, beautifully painted by one of two dozen artists. In the game you and your opponent become wizards and, each using your own deck, cast these spells at each other in a duel. Play five kinds of terrain cards (mountain, swamp, plains, forest, and island) and "tap" them to gain five colors of magical energy, or mana. Spend mana to cast spells, energize items, and summon creatures. The first player to remove all the opponent's life points wins and—the killing stroke—earns a one-card ante from the loser's deck.

In your first few games you feel your way around the system. By trading with other players and buying new cards, you start to customize your deck to achieve particular effects. Good strategy calls for concentration on one or two colors of magic, and for a fast buildup in strength once play begins. You might specialize in summoning creatures and augmenting their strength (an idea one playtester achieved in a notorious "Deck of Sooner Than Instant Death"), or in a straightforward offense of Red magic, or in some subtle stack of esoteric effects. For in-

stance, WotC president Peter Adkison described a deck that forced the opponent to draw lots of cards, then used a rare spell to inflict damage based on the opponent's number of cards!

The issue naturally arises: Can you buy just one deck and realistically face a well-heeled player with a deck customized from half a dozen packs? Or even, heaven forbid, one of the narrowly specialized "degenerate" decks drawn from many, many packs? Designer Richard Garfield, a professor of combinatorial math, insists you can play from strength with a random deck straight from the box. He should know, inasmuch as he playtested for two years, but my experience contradicts this. Still, I believe you could assemble a strong deck by shrewd trading of spares from a single deck. In any case, the game requires two decks, so you have to buy two if you expect to play against undecked friends. Also, once an opponent assembles an unbeatable degenerate deck, everyone stops playing against it, and the player has to retire it. Natural selection triumphs. [Editor's Note: For more on this topic, see the postscript for this column.]

This game/trading card idea has floated around the field for years. Peter Olotka, co-designer of the COSMIC ENCOUNTER\* board game, described it to me in 1979. Yet making it work fell to Garfield and Wizards of the Coast, the small Seattle company best known for *The Primal Order* and the TALLSLANTA\* RPG lines. With simple rules and playing time under an hour, the MAGIC game emulates COSMIC and such other classics as Tom Jolly's WIZ-WAR\* game, freewheeling designs that loose a blizzard of effects and then sail elegantly through them, changing everything that anyone can do at every step. Unlike those games, unlike any game to date, the MAGIC game shows its virtues best in a league or informal group of deck owners. No wonder they call it "The Gathering"!

Assessment of a trailblazing product calls for a slight adjustment of reviewing standards. For example, I might carp at the conflicting priorities of games and trading card sets, as seen in the two different illustrations of each terrain type. In a game you want just one picture for each type, to avoid confusing players. Likewise, gratuitous background text on some cards improves collectibility but distracts during play. However, the breakthrough into a new game category makes these objections captious. The MAGIC game succeeds well in unexpected and pleasing ways. Forgive it a few rough edges, and applaud its sensational originality.

**Evaluation:** A review of the MAGIC game necessarily falls short in important ways. I haven't seen all the cards, maybe not even half of them, and therefore can't speak knowledgeably about play balance and the like. But this seems part of the game's virtue. It creates a real fog of information, a wariness between players that no doubt simulates the way two rival

wizards would approach a duel. "What does that guy have up his sleeve?" "Whoa, I had no idea you could do that!" With 300 different spells, play balance becomes circumstantial.

The MAGIC game requires a medium-to-large league of players to bring out its magic. Fortunately, its low entry price, simplicity, and quick play make this easier to achieve. It makes an ideal choice for conventions or lunch hours. Its drawbacks seem minor beside its groundbreaking achievement.

**Support plans:** WotC plans aggressive support, or exploitation, of the MAGIC idea and the DECKMASTER\* line it engendered. An expansion set, a factory set of all the cards, and a complete second game (*The Ice Age*) will appear by the time you read this or shortly thereafter. The company also plans licensed DECKMASTER games based on R. Talsorian's CYBERPUNK 2020\* game, White Wolf's VAMPIRE\* game, and others (maybe even the UNDERGROUND game, reviewed above). Look for a house magazine, *The Duelist*. Write for a catalog to Wizards of the Coast, P.O. Box 707, Renton WA 98057-0707.

Will WotC establish a lasting category or a quick fad? No one can say. But we who haven't yet blazed our own trails can feel vicarious excitement in watching where others lead.

## Postscript: The MAGIC Phenomenon

I wrote the above review of the MAGIC: THE GATHERING trading card game shortly after its release at the GEN CON Game Fair. I wanted to help promote this sharp little game so it didn't get neglected. Huh! Maybe next I'll publicize the Statue of Liberty, the Moon, gravity, and other neglected phenomena.

As I write this postscript, about six weeks after the game's release, the MAGIC game has attracted legions of instant fanatics. The decks have sold out everywhere. Retailers frantically await a follow-up shipment of millions of cards. I know lots of gamers who play the game long into the night, and weigh trade offers the way home buyers study mortgage contracts. I wonder what these junkies did before the game appeared; probably the junkies wonder too.

Yes, if you must know, I have become a junkie myself. The review above fails to highlight the game's addictive quality, which clicks in when you appreciate the diverse strategies you can pursue in tailoring your deck or decks; you may create decks for different situations, like a golfer choosing irons. These decks display fascinating contrasts keyed to the colors and creatures they use, and to the players who use them. The MAGIC game seems to bring out the designer in every player.

Still, I must retract the comment above that a fresh random deck can't stand against a customized opponent. I found my error when a casual new player wiped

out my usually invincible Plague Rat Deck. Luck plays a great part in any duel, especially in the need for both spell cards and (brilliant!) the lands to power them. If you draw too many of one type, you won't stand a chance against a lucky opponent with a balanced hand. However, over the long run a good tailored deck beats a random one, so start trading. (By the way, if you have any Plague Rats to trade, get in touch with me.)

**The social context:** You know what really interests me about this game? The local group has plenty of cards and, among them, many uncommon and rare ones. Owning a large number of different cards seems to confer an odd, unspoken status. So does ownership of a particular rare card that no one else owns. Because every deck contains rare cards, this means a neophyte can buy one MAGIC deck and acquire instant stature among these long-time players. "Wow, he's got a Lord of the Pit!" This seems to me something new in the gaming subculture, another sign of the game's pioneering nature.

**The Wizards respond:** The mega-hit caught Garfield Games and Wizards of the Coast (WotC) off-guard. They now plan a second edition, with gray borders to replace the first edition's black, as well as the supplements mentioned above. The expansion set, *Arabian Nights*, with 70 new cards should be available by the time you read this. February, 1994, sees the publication of *Antiquities*, with 70 more new cards including many artifacts. In April, a 300-card expansion set, *Legends*, introduces new rules for heroic characters. Summer brings the licensed VAMPIRE: THE JIHAD\* game, based upon White Wolf's role-playing system. Fall will feature another licensed game, the MIDDLE-EARTH\* role-playing DECKMASTER\* game. WotC staffer Lisa Stevens also has plans to make *The Duelist* magazine a slick full-color bimonthly.

WotC shows greater savvy of the on-line information services than any other game company, except perhaps Steve Jackson Games. It has its own node (wizards.com) on the Internet computer network, which features a fast-growing newsgroup devoted to the MAGIC game that currently draws over 100 messages a day. The newsgroup also offers a "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) file and an unofficial list of all the cards. Official representatives of WotC also monitor CompuServe and Illuminati On-line.

## Short & sweet

RM2 *The Created*, by Bruce Nesmith (TSR, \$6.95). I quite like this AD&D® RAVENLOFT® one-shot for its chilling premise, elegant craft, and atmospheric staging. In summary it sounds spartan: Characters of levels 2-4 attend a festival in a village right out of *Pinocchio*. It drifts into the demiplane of Ravenloft, killer marionettes cause trouble, and the characters must use their wits to escape a creepy

situation. When they do, they win. Not much there for seven dollars, true, but the execution (as it were) makes the difference. Nesmith, one of TSR's most talented staffers, shines in this introductory adventure. It should have come in the RAVENLOFT boxed set!

**Pagan Publishing:** "Plotting the downfall of humanity since 1990." Speaking of horror, Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU game (CoC) has spawned the best one-game support magazine I've ever seen: *The Unspeakable Oath*. This 80-page wonder crawls forth quarterly from Pagan Publishing, a small Columbia, Missouri company—more accurately, one talented and energetic guy named John Tynes. Fascinating features, columns, letters, and huge amounts of period source material (which is sorely lacking in Chaosium's own support for CoC), unsettlingly illustrated by Blair Reynolds and others, make this magazine an Elder Godsend for both Keepers and players. Learn the price for a ticket on the Orient Express that got left out of the 200-plus-page *Horror on the Orient Express*, and discover why *Cthulhu Now* investigators prize their cellular phones above all other possessions. All issues give great value, but especially check out issues #6 and #7 with "CoC 5½," supplementary rules and background for CoC's recent fifth edition. (Subscriptions

\$16/4 issues in the U.S., \$24/4 issues elsewhere, to Pagan Publishing, 403A N. 8th St., Columbia MO 65201. Back issues \$4 each + \$5 shipping from Chaosium, 950-A 56th St., Oakland CA 94608.)

Pagan has begun ambitious support for CoC, including the lighthearted CREATURES & CULTISTS\* card game (which I've not seen) and, more recently, *Grace Under Pressure* (32 pages plus cardstock inserts, \$5.95). Handsomely reissued after its debut in the out-of-print *Oath #2*, this cool *Cthulhu Now* adventure calls for two Keepers, eight players, eight penlights, three cassette tapes, and two walkie-talkies. The pre-generated PCs head 1500 feet down under the Pacific Ocean in an experimental minibus. There they find—well, you can fit the whole plot in a few words, but the module's attention to staging, pace, and handouts (including a "Flee-O-Meter") make this intense, high-pressure fun.

Of course you've spent years looking for handmade Great Cthulhu plush dolls. Your quest ends at Pagan Publishing, which sells them in your choice of color for \$20 postpaid (\$26 outside the US) from the Columbia address above.

VIPER, by Scott Bennie and Cliff Christiansen (Hero Games, \$20). This arrived too late for my survey of recent CHAMPIONS game products (see DRAGON® issue #197), else it would have offered further

evidence for the line's rejuvenation. That longtime joke of the Champions Universe, the VIPER villain agency, here gets help from two talented authors in the form of improved organization, bases around the world, an arsenal of high-tech equipment, over 50 super-villains and agents, a "Random Villainy Generator," and an unusual and incredibly powerful Supreme Serpent. Scenarios include the venerable "VIPER's Nest," finally revised for the CHAMPIONS game's fourth edition. The usual editing and proofreading errors show up in force, but otherwise this supplement rejuvenates VIPER well enough to keep a four-color campaign busy for a year.

MORE COSMIC ENCOUNTER (Mayfair Games, \$35). I had a very minor part in playtesting this expansion set for the Mayfair edition of the brilliant COSMIC ENCOUNTER game, so I cannot review it. Let this serve as an objective notice that Mayfair has now brought back all the old Eon expansion material, including the rest of the original 75 Alien Powers and revised rules for Moons and Lucre, plus new special cards and 26 new powers, ranging from the excellent Wraith and Sting to the egregious Serpent, Spiff, and Berserker. (Oops! So much for objectivity. Forget I said anything.)

By the way, do you know how many COSMIC ENCOUNTER players it takes to screw in a light bulb?

Answer: "I'll do it, I've got the Electrician power!"

"Cosmic Zap! I'm playing the Utility Company Edict, so I'll change the bulb."

"Hah, I've got the Wild Filch Flare! I'm taking your Edict and using it myself."

"Edict Zap! I occupy the Light-Bulb Moon, so I'll do it!"

"Oh yeah? Well, watch this . . ."

Free-lancer Allen Varney recently collaborated with fantasist Don Webb on a book of legends for FASA's EARTHDAWN game, due this May. His reviews and articles appear regularly in DRAGON® Magazine.

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## Forum

Continued from page 55

This is the first program I have found that allowed anyone to create great maps the first time you start the program. AW allows the user to create almost any game world with the basic terrain types: trees, mountains, hills, towers, towns, castles, stairs, doors, treasure, space stations, asteroids, stars, planets (that can double as tables), earth, air, water, fire, direction arrows, pits, arches, swamps, and even debris. Digital Alchemy has other add-on terrain packs that will increase anyone's map-creating abilities, with Natural Caverns, Arms & Equipment, and Modern Military terrain packs.

You can print a "master" map that is a 50 X 50 hex or rectangular grid, or you can opt to print the same map on four pages where the grid is 25 X 25 per sheet (for the players). You also can print the map at 25 pages with a 10 X 10 grid (great for miniatures)! At the larger scale, the user can create his own markers by gluing that portion of the map to foam board and cutting it out.

The maps can be printed in gray-scale or in color, if the user has a color printer. This option is great for the larger-scale maps.

I know of a few people who like to number their hexes or have numbered squares; this also can be done. Adding text to a hex or square is also possible.

AW is perfect for those DMs who either don't have the time to fuss with making maps by hand or think they do not have what it takes to create good maps. Instead of making one map for the players and then having to copy it again for the DM (so he can write his notes), you can create both maps very easily.

I have plans to create the rest of my game world with AW. I'll never have to worry about whether the scale is right or if I forgot anything.

John "B.J." Tomkins  
Kenosha WI

I am responding to David Casey's letter in issue #189, where he lamented the "endless hours" he spends drawing maps with graph paper, all in the shadow of an expensive, idle computer system. Two years ago, some friends showed me the fantasy worlds they've built over the years, particularly the maps and dungeon layouts. As a software engineer, I saw the opportunity to make computer-based tools to support these highly creative people. To make a long story short, we formed SILICON DRAGON\* to develop and market professional-quality software for gamers.

The result of our work is CARTOGRAFIX\*, a Windows-based design program that will support all aspects of role-playing mapmaking. We recognize that each gamer has a vision of her world, a sense of what should be there, how it looks, how it acts, how it all fits. Our primary design principle is to give users the ability to control all they create, without necessarily having to create the detail. CARTOGRAFIX allows the user to create planets, continents, provinces, cities, buildings, levels, rooms—to any desired degree of detail. In addition to standard drafting and painting tools, the program supports a large array of functions for automatically generating coastlines, river networks, mountain ranges, terrain patterns, road networks, and so on. Maps may have any number of layers that can be independently displayed or hidden, and when a grid is necessary to support motion and combat, the user may select a pattern (hex, triangular, square) to lay over the map. CARTOGRAFIX also provides a

facility for creating libraries of entities that can be reused. In fact, we plan to supply a wide range of libraries to users, since library items can serve as raw material upon which to customize. CARTOGRAFIX allows users to print maps in a wide range of sizes. We will offer printing services for users who want full-color or large-format maps but don't have access to the appropriate hardware.

I could continue, but I hope this gives you and your readers a flavor for what CARTOGRAFIX can do. The capabilities mentioned above represent only a fraction of the features designed into the basic architecture; additional features will be added in subsequent releases. We realize that running under Windows may initially be unpopular with some users, but it does allow us to support a very graphics-intense product over a huge number of machines and peripherals. Finally, I want to mention that we will fully support people who would like to develop entity libraries for sale, as well as other software developers who would like to use the package as the foundation for their own role-playing support software.

Anybody who would like more information can write us: SILICON DRAGON Inc., 1756 Plymouth Road, Suite 2001, Ann Arbor MI 48105-2141; send us Email on CompuServe at 71564,754, or on the Internet at dragon@sdracon.com; or FAX us at (313) 973-0922.

Christopher M. Cameron-Carey  
President and Engineering Director  
Silicon Dragon, Inc.

Several contributors in DRAGON issue #196's "Forum" touched on the subject of house rules. These are often interesting and sometimes bizarre (see the editorial in the same issue). Perhaps DRAGON Magazine could provide a column for people to describe their house rules for various systems.

Like Paul Bleiweis, I often hesitate to tell others that I participate in RPGs. However, many other pastimes could be construed as childish. How about the various team games where men, and sometimes women, chase a ball around? Some sports have built up a large industry and are extremely popular. Many of the detractors of those sports call participants and spectators childish.

We cannot expect everybody to enjoy role-playing, or even to understand it. In the U.K., the sport with the greatest number of participants is angling, yet I am uninterested in it. That's probably my loss.

Roger Smith  
Lincoln, England

Because DRAGON Magazine is a popular publication among role-players and the companies that produce role-playing games, I chose this magazine as the forum in which to express my steadily increasing disgust at the manner in which women are represented in illustrations accompanying most role-playing materials.

As a person, I am interested in role-playing; however, as a woman, I am reluctant to support an industry that persists in exploiting and, in many cases, falsely representing the female body.

Unless I've missed something rather important in the rules, I'm under the impression that female characters are entitled to an equal amount of clothing and armor as are male characters, but the illustrations rarely show this to be the case.

There also appears to be some confusion concerning breast size. It's been my experience that reed-thin or muscular women seldom have

breasts larger than their heads—unless, of course, they are in one of these illustrations.

I can find no reason for these things other than the needless exploitation of the female body. If, however, I am mistaken, I would invite anyone to reply to my letter within this publication. Unless this can be done, I ask that game producers reconsider the way they handle illustrating women.

Amy Jones  
Oklahoma City OK

I wholeheartedly agree with Amarylly Roy (DRAGON issue #189) and the anonymous TSR employee who objected to many of the depictions of women in TSR products. In far too many products (*one* is far too many), women are objectified and denigrated in the artwork. It is an affront and an injury to women, and an embarrassment to the hobby and gamers.

What makes this situation even more tragic is the fact that, as fantasy games, AD&D and D&D products can offer a world beyond our own—and beyond its sexism. The DRAGONLANCE® novels are a step in the right direction. If dragons can breathe fire, female characters don't need to bow to our stereotypes. As the TSR employee points out, some of TSR's best-selling products don't have "exploited" women on their covers. Mature gamers are looking for quality products, not skin. TSR can help sexist and immature players become non-sexist and mature by including representations of women who wear real armor and do real things (like rescue princes from dragons).

Based on my experience (and simple common sense), there would be many more female gamers if role-playing products didn't have fawning, weak, naked, or some combination thereof, women on their covers. One wouldn't expect too many African-American D&D players if characters with dark skin were consistently depicted in postures of servitude.

I plan on putting my money where my mouth is. If there are other readers out there who would like to share comments, not only on covers but on the content of gaming products as well, I'd really like to hear from you. I'd especially be interested in any bad experiences you or someone you know (like a woman you tried to introduce to gaming, for instance) have had. If we put our stories, letters, and dollars together, TSR, which has been smart enough to create and nurture a fantastic family of role-playing games, will be smart enough to address this problem.

Bryan Kirschner  
Bristol CT

Congratulations, "Forum," for showing in DRAGON issues #189 and #196 two of the divergent views of women gamers. Ms. Haynes, writing in issue #189, was concerned that an APA (amateur magazine) dedicated to women and RPGs might encourage men to view women gamers as less serious and promote divisiveness in the hobby.

How often have you, Forum readers, ever wanted a chance to sit around and discuss games with a group composed mostly of women? How often have you had a chance to discuss women and games, from historical models for characters to whether men and women play RPGs in fundamentally different ways to why there are so few women gamers? That's what the PODIUM APA, published by White Rose Publishing, is for. Over the past year, we've discussed everything from historical models for women in the AD&D character classes to stereotypes of men and women to debates about art

and philosophy. PODIUM is not meant to replace general forums like DRAGON Magazine, in which gender is usually irrelevant. It is not meant to be an exclusive bunker with a "No Boyz" sign in the yard. It is a place to discuss a particular topic, similar to magazines and APAs that discuss certain games or certain genres.

The question of "bimbo" art, in my mind, is a balancing test. What is the positive gain in depicting erotic images of women and what is the loss? The gain, it is alleged, is higher sales. Everyone accepts that "sex sells," but can anyone produce a published study to support it?

The loss comes in several forms. The survey I have been taking of women gamers asks specifically about views of "bimbo art." Responses have varied from indifference to personal dislike to a refusal to purchase anything from that company. It certainly is doing nothing positive for TSR's sales among women.

Another loss is to the company's reputation and the self respect of its gamers, writers, and artists. Skip the problems of plausible armor. Look at what "bimbo" art says about players. Are we really mostly drooling fan-boys with no social life? Is that how we want to be seen? How many of us would willingly show our parents the covers of our favorite games, never mind their interior art? How many adult gamers would show their games to non-gamer friends? For those of us in the industry, are you proud to show off your latest publication to your friends and relatives? If we are ashamed of our hobby, something is very wrong.

A third loss is to society at large. Every year there are stories about teenage girls with eating disorders trying to look like models. Every year there are stories about date rape, teen pregnancy, and teen AIDs cases. No, gaming art doesn't cause these things, but it doesn't help either. It does reflect one image of female beauty. It does push sex at young men. It does often show women as victims or at least as in passive, helpless roles. I can't fix American teens, but I, as a publisher, can decide not to make the problem worse. If you aren't part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

Don't get me wrong. White Rose Publishing is not a feminist publishing house. We publish plausible, playable games about the historical Middle Ages. We do that in a way that reflects historical reality: the roles of men and women, the contributions of Christians, Moslems, Jews, Mongols, and Vikings. Real medieval women fighters (and there were more than just St. Joan) didn't wear chain-mail bikinis. Any gain by "bimbo" art would cost us our reputation for accuracy and our willingness to brag about our work to family, friends, and potential customers.

Clairssa Fowler  
Amherst MA  
White Rose Publishing

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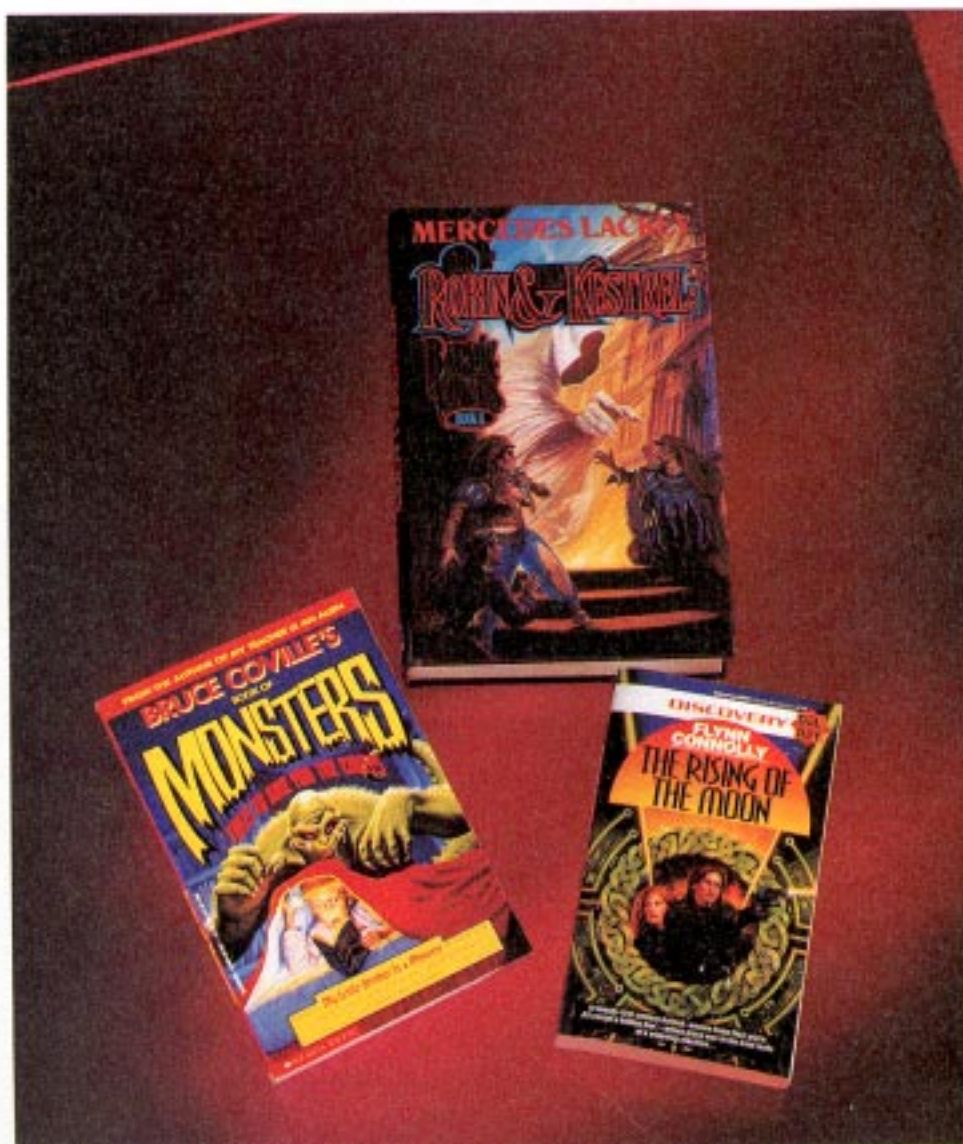
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# The **ROLE** of **Books**



Photography by Charles Kohl

# Daring swashbucklers, black gryphons, and scary monsters

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## **THE WELL-FAVORED MAN** **Elizabeth Willey**

**Tor 0-312-85590-7 \$22.95**

I haven't yet seen the new film version of *The Three Musketeers* as I write this, but I still feel safe in promising that this first novel from Elizabeth Willey can out-swashbuckle and out-intrigue any version of the Alexandre Dumas classic novel Hollywood can possibly film. It is, in fact, hard to imagine a more definitive—or more inventive—work of elegant high-Renaissance fantasy than *The Well-Favored Man*.

Willey appears to have cross-pollinated Dumas with Shakespeare and Stephen Hawking to produce a world that combines the courtliness of pre-Revolutionary France with a misty network of realities interconnected by something that may be magic or may simply be Clarke's-Law technology. Magic, however, is very much a part of life in Argylle, where the ruling family guards a sorcerous legacy and supernatural creatures turn up every so often out of the mists. Gwydion, presently acting regent in the absence of his grandfather (retired), father (missing), and mother (fate uncertain), is busy slaying a mantichora as the story begins, and shortly afterward learns of the arrival of a dragon big enough to be seen from thirty miles away. Then there's the diplomatic envoy from the next kingdom over, the appearance of a heretofore unsuspected sibling, the exotic aliens from whom someone has stolen certain genetic data, and the growing evidence that Gwydion's mother is not deceased as her family believes.

All this unfolds in a relaxed yet polished style against a backdrop of casual wealth that's not at all self-indulgent. Gwydion and his relatives are the sort of people who take their responsibilities seriously, so that one goes out to confront an ancient dragon not for any reward or treasure, but because it's liable to decimate the local livestock if something isn't done. The fact

that the odds are in the dragon's favor is irrelevant to the equation.

It is therefore a good thing for Gwydion that he's well-versed in magic, and Willey handles the sorcerous aspects of her universe with uncommon insight. Indeed, certain aspects of the spellcraft read remarkably like the AD&D® game's system, though Willey disavows any background in fantasy gaming. Others concepts, however, are wholly her own, such as the inhumanly powerful Spring that is the magical heart of Argylle itself.

More intriguing yet, though *The Well-Favored Man* is clearly a swashbuckler and a descendant of swashbucklers, there actually isn't all that much swordplay in its pages. One doesn't notice the fact while reading the novel, though; you're too quickly drawn in by Gwydion's wry narration and eccentric yet likeable family to be worried about the number of duels. Elizabeth Willey's world is interesting regardless of what's going on in it—and it should be especially so to those gamers who enjoy the art and craft of role-playing as much or more as the roll of a twenty-sided die.

## **THE BLACK GRYPHON** **Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon** **DAW 0-88677-577-9 \$22.00**

## **THE ROBIN & THE KESTREL** **Mercedes Lackey** **Baen 0-671-72183-6 \$20.00**

*The Black Gryphon* and *The Robin & The Kestrel* are a study in contrast, which is a surprise considering that they come from the same writing team—Mercedes Lackey has previously credited husband Larry Dixon with creative input into most of her work. But the variation isn't so much in mood or tone as it is in craftsmanship. While the first "Gryphon-era" novel in the Valdemar universe is tightly and seamlessly woven, the second "Bardic Voices" book suffers from uneven, badly flawed construction that's very unlike

Lackey's usual solid work.

We begin *The Black Gryphon* in the middle of the Mage Wars, in which the chief opponents are Urtho, called the Mage of Silence, and Ma'ar, the original and equally twisted incarnation of "Mage Winds" adversary Mornelithe Falconsbane. But neither of these is more than a supporting player; the tale's protagonists are Skandranon, and Amberdrake, who is rather more than an ordinary healer. Amberdrake is actually a kestra'chern, a kind of composite masseur-psychiatrist whose practice combines healing arts, the ear of a skilled listener, and sometimes the ministrations of physical love.

Both Skandranon and Amberdrake are attached to Urtho's military forces, which are gradually losing ground in the face of superior numbers and their enemy's willingness to adopt any tactic that works, however inhumane and bloody it may be. Urtho's army, however, is itself not without unease. There are tensions between humans and the various nonhuman races of Urtho's creation—especially the gryphons, who are seen by some of the generals as expendable weapons, not valued special-forces troops. The gryphons in turn look to Urtho with mixed minds, for while he has been a benign and loving parent, he alone holds the secret that guarantees their survival as an independent species. These interspecies conflicts are beginning to cause rifts even among the human soldiery.

Lackey and Dixon expertly convey the high-strung atmosphere of a military encampment on permanent alert, and Skandranon and Amberdrake are ideally positioned to have their respective claws and fingers on the pulse of the action. The assorted subplots are smoothly interwoven, characters interact and mature in plausible fits and starts, and the complex aerial-combat dances between gryphon and makkaar are choreographed in thorough and convincing detail. (Readers

should hope someone licenses the flight-simulator rights.)

All this makes *The Robin & The Kestrel* extraordinarily puzzling. While the prose itself is reasonably deft and readable, the novel's content and structure are riddled with distractions and difficulties.

Among these is a severe overabundance of background detail. Readers learn a fair amount about Alandan history in this book, most notably concerning something called "the Cataclysm," which appears to have left a number of alien and even spacefaring races stranded in what is now a more or less medieval landscape. The trouble is that virtually none of this "back story" has anything to do with the events of the present volume, which focus on a corrupt Church leader's bid for personal power. The science-fictional trimmings are pure window-dressing and hint-dropping which serve only to pull readers out of the story at odd moments.

That story is nominally told from the viewpoints of Free Bards Gwyna and Jonny—the Robin and Kestrel of the title, respectively—and that's another problem, because most of the book's character development derives from the pair's interaction with each other. The trouble is that the narrative style tends to assert its emotional depth, so that "he felt" this and "she realized" that, rather than creating maturity and growth through action and experience. Too much of the character work relies on internal monologues, and there are no explicit payoffs for some of the ethical issues raised as the tale unfolds.

Such action as there is, fortunately, is as lively as one might wish, and the reappearances of the Skull Hill Ghost from *The Lark and the Wren* are especially well-rendered. But by and large, this second "Bardic Voices" novel is substantially weaker than the first, and an unfortunate choice for the first hardcover entry in this series.

The difference in quality between the two books is a puzzle. It's tempting to speculate either that Lackey is writing too quickly, or that the superior aspects of *The Black Gyphon* are somehow related to Larry Dixon's more visible hand in that tale. The former answer is the more plausible; add *Winds of Fury* to this duo and Lackey has had three original hardcover novels released in the past six months, which may well be a record. Neither explanation is entirely convincing, though, and the most that readers should conclude is that even the best literary craftsman occasionally has a bad day.

#### BRUCE COVILLE'S BOOK OF MONSTERS

Bruce Coville, ed.

Scholastic 0-590-46159-1 \$2.95

You'll have to go all the way past the "young adult" shelf and look in the children's book section to find this first of four planned anthologies compiled by

veteran kids' writer Bruce Coville. But it's well worth the trip on two counts. First of all, the thirteen stories in this collection are the kind that transcend age boundaries; grown-ups will find most of them perfectly readable and capable of evoking chills or chuckles in all the right places. At a modest \$2.95, the book also is easily one of the best anthology bargains you're likely to find anywhere in the bookstore.

Editor Coville has gathered an impressive list of contributors for this salute to monsters of every stripe. Joe R. Lansdale contributes a clever bit of reverse psychology concerning Dr. Frankenstein's creature. John Barnes, noted for his adult SF novels, weighs in with a yarn about elves and trolls that is both "just plain sick," as Coville describes it, and wickedly entertaining. Further cheerful monster-fighting comes from Monty Python alumnus Terry Jones ("The Beast With A Thousand Teeth") and Jane Yolen ("Momster in the Closet"—no, that's not a typographical error).

"Uncle Joshua and the Grooglemen" finds Debra Doyle and James Macdonald telling a darker tale of bleak lands and mysterious figures in the night. Newcomer Patrick Bone's "Bloody Mary" is another chiller that uses a familiar folktale to excellent effect, and well-known storyteller Laura Simms offers a haunting Modoc Indian legend.

There really isn't a weak link in the entire chain of stories, though Coville is right to note that his own brief "Friendly Persuasion" is more silly than anything else. It's intentional silliness, though, and Coville is a versatile writer whose two other contributions to the book demonstrate his skills. "Duffy's Jacket" is a clever double-twist on the traditional campfire story, and "My Little Brother Is a Monster" is a modern fairy tale with a monster-driven spin to it.

There is, in short, something for just about every taste in Bruce Coville's *Book of Monsters*. But if the cover art is to be trusted, one might be well-advised to avoid reading the collection while hiding under the covers with a flashlight.

#### DARK MOON LEGACY (Books #1-#3)

Cynthia Blair

Harper 0-06-106158-1 \$3.99

Harper 0-06-106151-4 \$3.99

Harper 0-06-106160-3 \$3.99

Creators of fiction, including novelists and game masters alike, are always inventing details. Most of the time, this is a practice to be encouraged, as in the oft-repeated principle that "You see a robust seven-foot wolflike creature with glowing eyes and saliva dripping from its two-inch fangs" is more evocative than "You see a werewolf." The chief trouble with the *Dark Moon Legacy* trilogy is that native New Yorker Cynthia Blair has set her story a continent away on the Oregon coast, and the details she invents about her setting are not merely unconvincing, but out-and-out wrong.

It's permissible, for example, to invent a fictional small town rather than using a real one; Blair's community of Overlook is an acceptable if generic stretch of the imagination. Moving mountains around, however, demonstrates only that Blair failed to consult a map of the state before setting fingers to keyboard. Contrary to the books' assertion, the Cascade mountain range is not directly adjacent to the beaches of northern Oregon; they're better than a hundred miles apart, separated by the Coast Range and the Willamette Valley.

By itself, the errant geography might be chalked up to ordinary carelessness and even forgiven, since readers can easily locate more accurate data. More seriously, though, Blair's plot relies on a body of Indian folklore that's equally imaginary—and it's likely that many readers won't realize the fact or easily be able to track down better information. Given that the *Dark Moon Legacy* books are aimed at a school-aged audience, this is not just unfortunate, it's irresponsible.

Part of the trouble is more geographic slippage. There are no authentic totem poles in Oregon, where Blair places hers; that tradition belongs to the Northwest Coast tribes along the coasts of northern Washington and western Canada. Other problems simply represent bad history. Blair's *narnauks*, a host of intangible good and evil Indian spirit beings, are an example. While myths of the region do refer to spirit powers, often called "tahnahnawis," they're not categorized as Blair suggests, and the word "narnauk" itself is found in no easily located source. Then there's the trilogy's male lead, Garth Gautier. According to Blair, his ancestors first came to Oregon as French fur trappers; according to real-world history, there was no French presence in the region during the period Blair describes.

The glitches aren't only in the trilogy's historical data. Equally unconvincing is student actress Miranda Campbell's discovery by a professional theater company; the type of talent scout Blair invents for the purpose simply doesn't exist (at least not in Oregon). Even characters' names aren't immune—"Feather Woman" in the first volume changes to "Featherwoman" in the second and third books.

Nor does it help that the plot, which centers on Garth's and Miranda's efforts to lift a werewolf-curse that has plagued Garth's family for generations, moves like a sloth with a bad sense of direction. Blair's story moves slowly and is thick with cloying pseudo-romantic dialogue and ill-defined magic. (We never do learn who the three mysterious horsemen are, or what makes their evil powers compatible with those of the *narnauks*.)

What makes all this worth reporting is that *Dark Moon Legacy* is the first real clunker in what has otherwise been a very strong line of teen-age supernatural and psychological thrillers from the Harper

paperback imprint. These novels have been carefully packaged to attract fans of L. J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries* and *Secret Circle* series, but the resemblance ends as soon as the books are opened. Blair's trilogy falls well short not only of Smith's level, but of a professional standard for research even in works of fiction. It's reasonable for fantasy writers to exercise their imaginations, but not for them to make up facts when real ones are available, and readers should vote against the practice by bypassing this series.

## THE RISING OF THE MOON

Flynn Connolly

**Del Rey 0-345-38289-7 \$4.99**

Flynn Connolly's first novel is an alert, sensitive story of politics, prejudice, idealism, and rebellion. But despite its nominally futuristic Irish setting and a sprinkling of tomorrow's technology, it is not a work of science fiction—and indeed, the SF elements of the book do more to undercut Connolly's story than they do to support it.

We are told, for example, that the Ireland of Connolly's next century is cut off from most worldwide media and related networks, even though friendly alien contact has led to improvements in the relevant communications technologies. Yet people still have telephones and computers and TV sets, and it's difficult to believe that the degree of isolation Connolly postulates is truly achievable. This is made all the more curious by the fact that it seemingly is possible to interrupt government-sponsored TV transmissions and beam unauthorized images into every household in Ireland. This is comic-book science, and it grates against the realistic mood Connolly otherwise tries to set.

The degree of realism she actually achieves is likely to depend on one's individual take on Irish politics. By the time Connolly's tale opens, the country has reunified under a government strongly influenced by the Catholic church, and women's civil rights have been drastically restricted—again to an extent that stretches credibility just short of the breaking point.

Into this insular and unhappy country comes university professor Nuala Dennehy, whose return for a simple visit after a long absence is soon transformed into the beginnings of a rebellion against the government's ongoing repression. There's no doubt who's right and who's wrong in this version of future history; principle and logic are firmly in Nuala's camp. But law and force of arms are with the government, and the novel's drama arises from the rebels' constant need to cover their own tracks while causing the authorities as much trouble as possible.

Connolly has a good sense of pace and a keen touch with character development, though it's strongly skewed in favor of her female characters to a degree that male readers may find annoying. Though the

narrative makes it clear that Nuala and her allies are possessed of strong political views, Connolly keeps the novel's social agenda firmly in the hands of her characters. There's no authorial voice delivering lectures in the background, as can often happen in this kind of story.

The *Rising of the Moon* works reasonably well as a tale of revolution from within. Gamers looking purely for lessons in guerrilla strategy won't be disappointed, though the book's political message remains its most prominent feature. But it is disappointing that, having introduced an intriguing future in which aliens walk the earth and humanity walks among the stars, Flynn Connolly then casts that world aside in favor of other things. One can hope at best that she'll return to the science-fictional side of her universe in future tales.

## THE WIZARD'S APPRENTICE

S. P. Somtow

**Atheneum 0-689-31576-7 \$14.95**

*In the city of Los Angeles on the northern slopes of the Santa Monica Mountains, there lies a magic kingdom called Encino. It is a land of glittering shopping malls, Japanese bank buildings, sushi bars, and German cars; of video arcades, fast-food havens, and casually dressed people with wallets full of credit cards; of neon, palm trees, and smog.*

So begins the story of teen-aged Aaron Maguire, whose father is a special-effects wizard for low-budget movies and whose newly self-appointed private tutor is a genuine wizard with two thousand years of experience and a solar-powered pocket computer.

S. P. Somtow knows both Southern California and teenagers, and that knowledge comes through in the funny, perceptive chronicle of Aaron's introduction to magic, Penelope Karpovsky, and monster-fighting—not necessarily in that order. The magic is of all kinds: skateboarding tricks that defy the laws of gravity, mirrors that reflect more than light, Porsches conjured from who knows where, and dragons wreaking havoc on the local fast-food strip.

What's really distinctive about the story, though, isn't merely the sardonic comedy or the plot. The former, though well-executed, is scarcely unique, and the latter is reasonably straightforward, though Somtow does manage a clever twist in the finale. The book's true virtue is an air of bright-eyed optimism that filters through its Californian cynicism, permeating the narrative without sacrificing its humor or overselling the obligatory moral. It's a difficult balance to strike, but Somtow pulls it off perfectly—no mean feat for a writer better-known for exotic horror tales.

*The Wizard's Apprentice*, in short, is rather like certain kinds of breakfast cereal: it tastes good going down, and fortifies you with the approved daily requirement for moral fiber. And what else

is there to say about a story that includes lines like "time is an elastic waistband on the jockey shorts of reality?"

## Recurring roles

Cynthia Blair isn't the only teen-horror writer focusing on werewolves lately. The good news is that *Bad Blood* (Berkley, \$3.99) is from Debra Doyle and James Macdonald, who pack more action and angst into one slim book than Blair manages in three. This is a teenage werewolf story done right, complete with the consequences of garlic pizza and a final showdown in which no punches are pulled on any side. Grab this one and keep an eye out for the sequel.

Another title to snare from the young adult section is *The Night of the Solstice* (Harper, \$3.99). L. J. Smith's first novel is finally in paperback after much too long, and is a must-have for serious fans of classic fantasy. Smith combines a traditional "stop the evil sorcerer" plot with a decidedly modern cast of young heroes and heroines, and the result is a novel that compares well to the likes of Edward Eager and Andre Norton.

Last but not least in the young-adult ranks is Esther Friesner's *Wishing Season* (Atheneum, \$14.95), which leaves the modern world behind for a lively, barbed tale of genies and cats, wishes and true love. Friesner is at the top of her form here, wielding twin rapiers of logic and wit in the service of as enjoyable an Arabian Night as one is likely to find outside of Baghdad itself.

Elsewhere in the bookstore, *Blood Pact* (DAW, \$4.99) and *Red Death* (Ace, \$4.99) signal a minor boom in vampire fiction. The former looks to bring down the curtain on Tanya Huff's series about Canadian private eye Vicki Nelson and her vampire associate, Henry Fitzroy. This time the homage is to Dr. Frankenstein's experiments, and while the ending isn't exactly unhappy, it has the taste of finality about it. Not so *Red Death*, in which P. N. Elrod turns her attention to Jonathan Barrett of colonial-era America. A minor character in Elrod's previous series, Barrett now takes center stage in a tale of uncertainties—some political, as America braces for war with England, and some personal, as Jonathan finds himself unexpectedly among the ranks of the undead. Vampire fans should enjoy both books.

The other welcome arrival is Holly Lisle's *Minerva Wakes* (Baen \$4.99), that departs from the fantasy realm of her two previous solo novels to tell a tale of this world and those beyond it. "Never give up on your dreams. Always stand up for what's right. And never mess with the mommy." So says the cover copy (on my prepublication galley, at least), which aptly captures both the theme and tone of what's definitely Lisle's best work to date.

Ω

# The 10 Commandments of Tournament Writing

An adventure-writer's bible

by Jonathan Evans

Artwork by James Holloway

WATSFIC, the science-fiction & fantasy club at the University of Waterloo, has been running AD&D® game tournaments

for over ten years. I've worked on several myself, and in my experience, however much players enjoy gaming in a campaign,

gaming is at least twice as much fun at tournaments. Tournaments tend to be better written than "normal" adventures,



simply because of the amount of work that goes into them. They're usually full of new ideas and fun characters, and tournaments are run by GMs who are at least competent and sometimes fantastic. Also, most role-playing games are essentially cooperative, and it's fun competing against other teams.

I'll explain the format of the tournaments with which I'm familiar. WATSFIC tournaments are two-round tournaments for teams of six. A limited number of teams make it into second round (depending on the number of GMs available). Teams are given pregenerated characters to play. Each round consists of four hours of play-time plus an hour to read characters, take breaks, and so forth. Generally, the first rounds scoring is weighted toward role-playing and the second round toward achieving objectives. Role-playing awards are given out for first round, and team awards for the top three teams in second round.

Based on my experiences, I give you my 10 commandments of writing tournaments, though they'll be helpful to those of you who write your own adventures too. The examples are specific to the AD&D game, but the guidelines here are applicable to most games.

### **I. Thou shalt bend the rules until thou hast broken them.**

So you want to write a tournament? Okay, this is how you start. Move to an apartment on the 17th floor. Open your window. Knock out the screen. You with me so far? Good.

Now throw out all your rulebooks. Change the rules you didn't like. Better yet, make up new ones. Now change all the ones you did like so they're better. Now you can start writing.

That's a little extreme—but not much. One of the chief reasons for playing role-playing games (RPGs) is the sense of wonder they inspire. It's hard to get inspired by another *wand of magic missiles*. One of the reasons people come to tournaments is for something new. It gets boring fighting monsters from the *Monstrous Manual*, especially if you've memorized them. "Okay, it's a rakshasa, pass the crossbow." It gets boring casting the same spells. It gets boring looking for the same magical items. This isn't to say the AD&D game is boring—plots and characters are always interesting. But it's fun (and challenging) to see something that's actually *new*, or at least old in interesting ways.

Of course, you can't and shouldn't change everything, or people would never be able to play the tournament. Keep the old spells for characters to cast, keep some standard magical items, keep some of the usual classes and races. Above all, keep the game mechanics the way they are. Avoid house rules as they require extra time to explain to strangers.

But you can give the characters new spells, new magical items, or even a new magic system. Don't ever let them run into a standard monster (until they expect all the monsters to be different). You can make them look different, or give them a new society, or even just a new name. But when you tell them, "You run into four-

teen crazed stobor," you'll get much more attention than if you say "hobgoblins." Most of all, change the character-creation rules. Let them play monsters, ghosts, or new races of your own devising. Create entirely new classes or kits for them to play. Put the adventure in a new setting—ancient Egypt, an airless moon, or in the game-world's prehistory—the possibilities are endless. Keep hitting them with novelty. It'll challenge and interest them.

### **II. Thou shalt create the characters first.**

The characters are the most important part of the tournament. If you have boring characters, then you're going to have bored players. It doesn't matter how spectacular and original your encounters are—if your characters are just stacks of statistics with one-dimensional personalities, the players won't enjoy the tournament. There are, fortunately, many ways to make characters interesting.

The first technique is to give a character an interesting personality. A ruthless, evil wizard is wooden at best—but what if he's fallen in love with a lawful-good party member? Paladins can be boring. How about a fallen paladin, tricked out of her paladinhood and finding that, on her quest to regain it, some part of her enjoys her new freedom to act?

Complexity and conflict add interest to a personality. Adding complexity is just a matter of adding more facets to a character's personality that make sense: A narrow-minded inquisitor, for example, is unlikely to be an abstract painter.

Conflict, in this case, is conflict with oneself; it usually means that the character's personality is in a state of transition. This gives the players more freedom, letting them decide which direction to take the role.

You can create more interest in the characters through their history. Maybe a character is a renegade thief, on the run after having stolen the thieves' guild blind. Throughout the adventure, the player will be on his toes looking for his pursuers. Even that is relatively tame. How about a thousand-year-old soul that has "borrowed" the current character's body? Or, in a similar vein, a character who is the reincarnation of a great historical figure, but doesn't know it yet?

Character history is more effective if it is connected to the tournament's plot. In a way, every tournament is a story; character histories are the way to arrange the story's background. Frequently, all the characters' histories are interwoven into one or more plots. The players feel like their characters are a part of what's happening, instead of being spectators. As an extreme example, in one of my tournaments all characters in first round were related to each other (and to the main enemy) without knowing it. Keep in mind that there should always be at least a rationale for character connections; it is unlikely (to say the least) that six people would meet at a bar, go adventuring, and discover that they're all long-lost relations.

Another way to make life interesting is to create characters who are not what they seem. This is a fairly common trick, and a hard one to get wrong. Regardless of what role they play—a *polymorphed* dragon, a runaway princess, a minotaur disguised as a gnome, an evil wizard masquerading as a paladin—players enjoy having secrets. The secrets should be fairly important ones, and revealing the secret should increase the party tension to new levels. Curses are great secrets ("What do you mean, we'd better be done with this before the next full moon?"), and most tournaments I've seen include a cursed character.

Draw from outside sources in your tournament; from published game material to mythology to pop culture. If the party's after an artifact, fine—but if they are after the *sword of Kas*, well, that's the stuff of legend. Similarly, the party may be trying to seek advice from a wizardess on an island; but if they find out in mid-adventure that the wizardess is none other than Circe from Greek mythology, things will suddenly become much more interesting. There are two important cautions to remember. First, too much "borrowing" can reduce your tournament to sheer silliness. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but if Sherlock Holmes and Conan team up to fight a Dalek in the

middle of an otherwise serious adventure, the mood is ruined. Second, plagiarism is boring. Use elements of other stories, but always work them into your own design, and twist them so that people who have read the original won't have an advantage (and may, in fact, be disadvantaged). Mention the Trumps of Doom in character histories, and then make them a horn section or a race of real-estate speculators. If the party's quest is to recover the eye and *hand of Vecna*, let them discover to their misfortune that they're still attached to Vecna.

Some players like high-level characters more than low-level characters, and, as a rule, it is easier to make interesting high-level characters; there are more possibilities. An 11th-level cleric could be a high priest or a burned-out, drunken vagabond, but a 1st-level cleric is not likely to be running the church (although that could happen). Also, some players may not appreciate the subtle wit and role-playing opportunities of an artistic 3rd-level schizophrenic half-drow illusionist, but they might like the sheer firepower of a 14th-level ranger with a power-point magic system and a *sword of invisibility*. Keep in mind you're writing your adventure for all types of people; role-players, power gamers, storytellers, puzzle solvers, etc. Try to make it fun and interesting for everyone.

Aside from making characters interesting, it is important to ensure that they cooperate. Backstabbing tournaments can be a lot of fun—in one of the most enjoyable I've played, the writer declared, "If the party makes it to the final encounter with all members still alive, they have done something horribly wrong,"—but keep two points in mind. First, people don't pay money to play tournaments just so that their character can be killed in the first hour through no fault of their own. Second, a backstabbing party needs a very good reason to stay together, especially if the members have wildly varying alignments. If the party breaks up, two things are certain. The party was stupid, because they wasted far too much time; and unless they were complete idiots, it was partly the writer's fault.

Finally, try to avoid cliches. As always, this rule can sometimes be broken. A satirical tournament where *all* the characters and encounters are cliches could be howlingly funny. If you're adding a mean twist to an apparently cliched character, go ahead. Keep in mind your thieves don't have to be greasy halflings, your wizards are not necessarily old bearded men with staves, your clerics really shouldn't be beautiful, blonde, white-robed priestesses of the god of healing, and fighters don't have to be traveling weapon shops with toad-like IQs.

### III. Thy setting shall be unusual and interesting.

The tournament's setting has an effect, direct or indirect, on every other aspect of the tournament. Make sure the setting is convincing; dungeons with thousands of monsters and no food supply just don't make sense. Neither does an enormous city in the middle of a desert, or an alternate dimension with wildly different character races but Earthlike flora and fauna.

The amount of work needed for your setting depends on your plot. If the entire tournament takes place indoors in an enormous, Gormenghastlike castle complex, there's no point in figuring out what the weather will be like each game day. On the other hand, if you give the players a big map and show them Point A (where they are) and Point B (where they should go), you better have all the places in between fairly detailed.

The geographical setting is not half as important as the adventure's social setting. Are the characters pursued by a religious inquisition? The society's religion had best be well explained. Are the characters refugees from fairy tales? Do your research and have the plot follow suit. Is it an alternate-timeline American Indian tournament? Unless the Europeans have already shown up, they'd better not be riding horses.

Don't forget that the people in the setting didn't just appear when the characters arrive. Where did they come from? Why? What happened ten years ago in your setting—or a hundred, or a thousand years ago? Answering these questions can lead to great plot ideas.

History provides dozens of great ideas for settings. The hundreds of feuding Scottish clans, the War of the Roses, the Viking raids, the rebellion against the Romans, the mutiny on the Bounty, the Spanish Armada, the legend of Cuchulain, the Hundred Years' War—these are a few from the British Isles alone. There are countless others. How about Ancient Egypt? Norse myths? Tibet? Feudal Japan? Aztec and Mayan societies? Criminals marooned in Australia? Players enjoy the tournament all the more if they recognize the setting.

### IV. Thy plot shall be neither too simple nor too complex.

Ideally, the tournament's plot should be a mystery to the characters. As they piece together details from their character backgrounds and the encounters in the tournament, the players should be able to make sense of what is happening. A tournament should not be full of twisted, Byzantine intrigue; on the other hand, if everyone knows exactly what's happening, the plot gets old very fast. Tournaments generally tell the end of a story, because that's where all the action is.

"Plot" does not necessarily mean the characters achieving objectives such as reaching certain locations, gaining treasure, and so forth. Purely role-playing plots are fine and can offer much more intrigue. As a rule, role-playing plots are the first round and objective plots for the second; regardless, there should be strong elements of both in every round.

Charles Dickens loved coincidences. I don't, and far more importantly, players don't. Your plots should make sense. Not every encounter has to contribute to the plot; chance encounters are useful as distractions. The plot must be comprehensible. Even if things make sense to the referee, if everything the players find seems completely random, they won't be too impressed. There is a fine line between a mystery and confusion.

Don't make the plots too linear. "Assembly-line" tournaments, where characters proceed from encounter A to encounter B all the way to final encounter Z, are monotonous at best. Give characters options, and let their actions affect the plot. At the very least, give them the illusion of making choices. Your plotline should be sketched out early in the writing process, and encounters that advance the plot should be made difficult for the characters to avoid.

The most difficult part of plotting is undoubtedly the balancing. By "balancing," I mean ensuring that the plot is challenging without being lethal, and that it fits roughly within the tournament's allotted time. As a rule, between one-third and two-thirds of the competing teams should finish the first round. "Finishing" may mean reaching the final encounter or resolving the key role-playing conflict.

Don't kill too many of the characters. While GMs love killing characters, and players don't mind losing characters in certain circumstances, remember that the players paid good money to play in your tournament. Even if they're not paying, it's rude just to destroy their characters without a reason. If the plotline requires them to die, pull no punches, but try to work all the mandatory deaths into the last encounters of the final round. On the other hand, if the PCs waltz through every encounter without breaking a sweat, either you've made it far too easy or they're not backstabbing each other enough. There should be enough danger to keep the players on their toes while only a few PCs actually die. That's a hard requirement to fulfill, but it is very important to the adventure.

#### V. Thine enemies shall be worthy.

Great enemies are fun for all concerned. Players like facing them, GMs like playing them, and writers like creating them. Unfortunately, not all enemies are great. Too often, they're just mindlessly evil foes that show up only to be hacked apart in the final encounter.



Tournaments should have one chief enemy or group of enemies for each round of the tournament. Since the plotlines are usually connected, the two enemies are usually connected as well; one may be the other's lieutenant, they may be rivals, or even twins. To have the proper effect on the party, you should build up the legend of their enemies. Have the yokels mention their names in terror, have wanted posters with a long list of crimes posted, have wastes and desolations named after them—the technique doesn't matter, as long as it fits the villain and his setting (a thieves' guildmaster wouldn't have deserts named after him).

An extremely effective technique is to connect the enemy with the party's history. Players take enemies much more seriously if their characters have run afoul of them in their past. For example, in the finest tournament I have played, the enemy and the party's wizard had been rivals since youth—first in friendship, then as enemies—and another member of the party had been hired by the enemy to kill the PC wizard (but reneged on the deal).

This brings us to another kind of enemy—the "party slimer." A party slimer is a player character who is out to kill one or more of the other characters or sabotage their quest. Party slimers are fun to play, but should be used sparingly, especially if the rest of the party is good. Ensure that they can't waste the rest of the party, or it'll wind up being a short tournament.

As a rule, party slimers are not the chief enemy of the round; instead, they are one of the enemy's pawns. Usually the enemy has a few lieutenants. These lieutenants also are

frequently connected to the past of one or more characters. Generally the lieutenants are in the field, hatching their master's dastardly plan, while the master has to be bearded in his lair.

The next question, of course, is what that villains dastardly plan is. The possibilities range from a political aide who's trying to convince the king to hang all wizards, to marshalling a huge orc army of the villains own. A common plan is the villain is bringing back or freeing a great and powerful evil entity. This is a cliché, but that's not necessarily bad—your players are all but guaranteed to have read or played similar plots.

Remember to make your enemies worthy of the name. They should be more powerful than any single party member, but the party should have a reasonable chance of defeating them (unless this runs contrary to the plotline). Do a fair amount of work detailing the enemy's personality, history, motivation, and so forth—it gives the chief villains depth denied to the too-common faceless thugs.

#### VI. Thou shalt have witty, reasonable, and balanced encounters.

In the end, most of the tournament's playtime will come down to a series of encounters provided by the writer, with the balance of the time being role-playing. Some encounters will advance the plot, some will entertain, some will challenge the party, and some will merely kill time for disorganized groups. Regardless of their function, most encounters can be divided into three general types; role-playing, combat, and puzzles.

Combat encounters are the easiest to deal with. Combat encounters may not involve

actual fighting, but it's always a distinct possibility, and the characters must succeed in their task through direct physical action. Escaping from a horde of army ants, sneaking through the enemy lines, or ambushing a pack of werewolves are all examples of combat encounters.

Very few combat encounters, if any, should be pure dice marathons of the "You see a monster, it's charging at you, roll initiative" type. Most combat encounters should be avoidable, whether through spells, bribes, or simply running away. Even those that aren't avoidable shouldn't just be die-rolling, but should have something to add interest—mood, zaniness, an effect on the plot, whatever is required to set it apart from just fighting orcs. Simple hack-and-slash encounters get old quickly, and tournament players demand more.

Again, balance is crucial here. Traditionally, the encounters are relatively easy at the start of the adventure and get more difficult as the party nears its goal. On the other hand, a monster easily handled at the start could kill the entire battered, weary, and magic-drained party near the end of the tournament. Stay away from lethal monsters (those that can kill party members with a single hit) and pushover monsters unless you have a good reason. Also, remember the time factor. Battles against dozens of foes can take large amounts of time, especially if spells such as confusion start going off. Unless the encounter is meant as a time-waster, keep the enemy's numbers limited.

All encounters are role-playing encounters inasmuch as the party role-plays in all of them. In this context, a "role-playing encounter" is one where the party interacts with one or more NPCs without fighting (at least, not without talking first).

Role-playing encounters can be generally divided into three types: "plot encounters," "character encounters," and "dungeon dressing!" This last grouping is the most fun; it just means sticking in fun NPCs (often stolen outright from other authors) and usually enjoying a few outrageous puns at the expense of the players. A lizard king spouting Doors' lyrics, a punk pixie named Moli who loves to fight, twin brothers named Doom and Gloom with the personality of Marvin (from the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) are just a few examples from my fairy-tale tournament. The idea is to make the players laugh, wince, or both.

The idea behind the character encounters is to give specific PCs chances to role-play. The NPCs in these encounters are tailored to interact with a specific character, and often a specific facet of their personality. Examples are countless; a sexist character meets an Amazon, a bookish wizard meets a fellow bibliophile, a secretive ex-assassin meets an old ally from the past. The lion's share of these encounters should go to the "quiet" characters, who are harder to role-play than the boisterous, extroverted ones.

Plot encounters are role-playing encounters that advance the plot, such as the party meeting their enemies in a neutral zone. They are divided into two groups: encounters with characters important to the plot, or encounters where the characters just pick up information important to the plot.

Most role-playing encounters combine elements of two or even all three of the encounter types above. Role-playing is the real meat and drink of a tournament; make sure that your role-playing encounters are fun for all concerned.

The third type of encounter is the puzzle. Players are of two minds about puzzle encounters. A minority think that puzzles and mind-twisters in a tournament are contrived and stupid. The rest of them love puzzles, and want as many as possible. Unfortunately, it's fairly difficult (for me, at least) to come up with good ones.

Most puzzles are variations of five basic kinds: riddles, word puzzles, "Rubiks," barriers, and traps. There are puzzles—usually good ones—that fall into none of these categories.

Riddles are self-explanatory. Word puzzles involve writing that has to be manipulated to reveal the answer—decoded, read backward, translated to the Elvish, held up to a full moon, whatever. "Rubiks" are the same thing, but with objects that must be manipulated, not words. For example, two pieces of a key may have to be fitted together, then turned to gold in the Pool of Midas, before the treasury door can be opened.

Barriers are just that. Something prevents the party from getting to where they're going, and they'll have to think their way around it. This is probably the most basic puzzle. Barriers can include walls, cliffs, pits, armies, a *prismatic sphere*, whatever. Generally, the party can use their talents, equipment, and inspiration to get past.

Traps can't be dealt with exhaustively in a single paragraph. If you're no good at designing them yourself, look at published modules or DUNGEON® Adventures for inspiration.

A final word to the wise: Make sure there is more than one way past any puzzle. Remember, if only one party member knows the language the password is written in, that member could die before reaching that point in the plot. Also, allow players to use original ideas; making a technique unusable because you didn't think of it is just petty.

Finally, try to make all encounters witty. Use puns, wordplay, trickery, and pithy dialogue.

## VII. Thy scoring shall be fair and balanced.

Scoring for a tournament is usually a pain. It is quite important—after all, it determines who wins the awards, or at least who gets nominated for them—but it tends to be overly subjective and is often done almost as an afterthought by the writer.

Objective scoring is relatively simple. Make the number of points the party could win in an encounter proportional to the importance of the encounter. (It's a good idea to list and weigh all the encounters before applying points.) Make sure you list all the ways players can get points. For example, in a single encounter characters could get 10 points for defeating the nasties, 15 points for avoiding them without fighting, and an additional 5 points for deciphering a minor puzzle. A party could get a potential 20 points in that encounter.

It's then the GM's decision how many points to give the party out of the maximum possible in an encounter. In the example above, the party might attack the monsters first, then realize that there was a simpler way, disengage, and use it. The GM probably would give them 12 or 13 points (not including the puzzle); they did better than the 10 points for hacking their way through, but didn't perform ideally.

Repeat the process for all encounters, and you've got objective scoring. Some special scores should be added. For example, when the party gets somewhere special in the tournament—such as the tower where the final battle takes place—they should receive points just for getting that far. Objective points should be for reaching destinations as well as fighting monsters and figuring out traps and plots. Award a big bonus for finishing the round successfully. Parties should suffer penalties for each dead character and for attacking friendly NPCs.

Role-playing is a little trickier, because GMs tend to be quite subjective on how they score it. A GM who is herself an excellent role-player would tend to give lower scores than one who is mediocre—her standards are higher. To counteract this, role-playing scoring is often divided specifically into personality, interactivity, and "memorable moments" as well as the GM's overall impression. The more specific the scoring, the less subjectivity matters—but it also means that great role-playing that doesn't fit into the scoring won't be rewarded.

Personality traits are just that; two or three points for each of the character's major traits, depending on how well they were played. Interactivity means points for role-playing with the other PCs; another two or three points for each other character in the party. Memorable Moments are things that the characters did that are worthy of being written down and related to others. The overall impression includes how the GM thought the player did as a whole and how consistent the player was.

Many tournament writers want more feedback and distribute "tournament evaluations" to the players so that they can get constructive criticism (and in some cases, downright abuse). In addition, GM evaluations are handed out to determine the winner of the "Best GM" prize. GMs are generally graded on their familiarity with

the material, their use of available time, their description of events and encounters and their role-playing of NPCs.

### VIII. Thy second round shall be worthy of its players.

The second round should follow logically from the first. I've played tournaments where second round picked up right where the first round ended, and I've seen tournaments where there was a several-thousand year gap. In both cases, the plot continued from first round. The purpose of second round is to clear up loose ends, so make sure you leave at least a few dangling.

There should be a definite division between first and second round. For example, in one of my tournaments, the two rounds took place in different dimensions. In another, all characters were alive in first round and were undead in second round.

There are two schools of thought on players keeping the same characters. One says that half the fun is solving the mystery of other characters, so give the players new PCs in the second round to prevent savvy players from figuring out all the secrets of the other PCs. The other argues that first round is for role-playing and second round for reaching objectives, so it makes sense to let the players keep the same characters. As always, the players' opinion is the most important; in my experience, they prefer to keep their characters.

Finally, make the second round hard. Not lethal, but keep in mind that only the best players advance, and you have to challenge them. Just don't overdo this. Writing a lethal tournament is a hazardous business. Keep in mind all the above advice when preparing a second round.

### IX. Thou shalt make it fun for the game masters.

GMs don't sleep, at least not during tournaments. It's simply not allowed. They have to get up early, run three five-hour sessions, devour inhuman quantities of pizza and junk food, and then stay up to all hours arguing role-playing awards. The next day they have to run the second round.

GMs do have one great advantage. Many of them will get to both play the tournament and run it. They will play it, of course, at the playtest, where they will a) learn the adventure, b) find weak points in the adventure, and c) have fun. Your tournament *will* have a playtest—for both rounds. GMs are generally canny, experienced players with wildly original ideas, so if anyone's going to poke a major hole in your tournament, it'll be them.

Still, make the tournament as enjoyable as you can for the game masters. Stick jokes into the encounter titles, the NPC names, the plot, and so forth. Give them NPCs that are great fun to role-play. Give them some mean monsters to hit the players with (that does not mean "let them kill the party on a whim"—but GMs love catastrophes and



horrible monsters). Establish a "kill pool" for the GM with the highest kill percentage (but make sure GMs don't take it too seriously); it intimidates the players nicely. Basically, make sure that the GMs will remember the tournament fondly even if they get stuck with dud teams.

### X. Thou shalt beg, borrow, or kidnap a good editor.

My editor hates me. If I'm going to so much as mention the word "tournament" to him, I make certain he has no weapons nearby.

The reason for this is that he has a back-breaking and thankless task. I do the fun part, the creating; he does all the slogging work. He draws the maps, fills in monster statistics, proofreads, indexes character abilities, fixes inconsistencies, summarizes magical items—fun stuff like that. If you like putting the pieces together neatly and can do it well, more power to you. If not, obey this commandment if you're going to write a tournament.

Why? Well, first, you probably won't ever finish it if you don't. Second, if you do finish it, and it isn't edited, GMs will break down your door during the tournament because the players did something you didn't cover. This may happen anyway, no matter how many playtests you have, but a good editor can cut the number down to a manageable level. An editor's job is to ensure that the manuscript is clear enough so that anyone

can run the tournament well. Sure, you can run it—you've spent hours and hours writing the darn thing. You know it inside out. But there have been occasions when GMs didn't receive copies of my tournaments until the night beforehand, and only brilliant editing let them run it successfully.

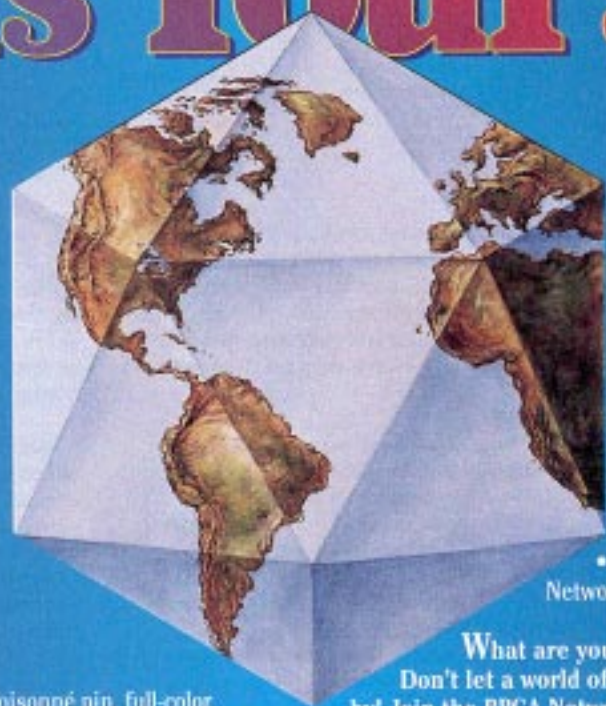
Well, that's it. Broken rules, fun characters, interesting settings, original plots, worthy enemies, witty encounters, fair scoring, a tough second round, happy GMs, and a good editor. Now can you apply all this and write a tournament?

Of course you can't—not on this article alone. I couldn't address the most crucial parts of the tournament—it isn't even possible. Those crucial parts are the ideas, the light bulbs' going off in the writer's head. Creation is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration. This article was meant to help you with the perspiration; the last 10% is your problem.

There's an easy way to develop ideas though; just keep writing. I came up with a good half-dozen adventure ideas just writing this article. The more ideas you have, the more you'll come up with, and the better you'll be at creating adventures.

Ω

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# Convention Calendar

## Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

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

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. **No** call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

**WARNING:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention,
- \* indicates a Canadian convention.
- ❁ indicates a European convention.

\* Indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc. Most product names are trademarks owned by the companies publishing those products. The use of the name of any product without mention of its trademark status should not be construed as a challenge to such status.

**Important:** DRAGON® Magazine no longer publishes telephone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is an annoyance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Also, be certain that any address given is correct and complete.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You might also send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

## GALICON '94, Jan. 7

OH

This convention will be held at Galion Train and Hobby in Galion, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniatures-painting and costume contests. Registration: \$2, plus a small event fee. Write to: Galion Gamers' Guild, 123 Harding Way E., Galion OH 44833.

## WINTER FANTASY™ Convention '94 Jan. 7-9

WI

This convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Milwaukee, Wis. Guests include Bruce Nesmith, Bill Slavicsek, and James Lowder. Events include role-playing, board, miniatures, and war games, seminars, a Sunday breakfast buffet, and more. Registration: \$15 before Nov. 30, \$20 at the door. Write to: WINTER FANTASY, RPGA® Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

## RUNEQUEST \* CON '94, Jan. 14-16

MD

This convention will be held at the Columbia Inn in Baltimore, Md. Guests include Greg Stafford, Sandy Petersen, Ken Rolston, Michael O'Brien, and David Hall. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and an auction. Registration: \$30/weekend. Write to: David Cheng, 313 E. 85th St., Apt. 2C, New York NY 10028.

## CRUSADES '94, Jan. 15-16

CT

This miniatures convention will be held at the Comfort Inn in Darien, Conn. Events include historical, SF&F, and cross-genre miniatures games. Registration: \$20; Club discounts available. Write to: CGC, P.O. Box 403 Fairfield CT 06430-0403.

## MARMALADE DOG GAMEFEST '94 Jan. 15-16

MI

This convention will be held at the Bernhard Center on the campus of Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich. Guests include Troy Denning. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include painted-miniature and costume contests, an SF&F film festival, and dealers. Registration: \$10/weekend or \$6/day preregistered; or \$12/weekend or \$7/day at the door. Write to: MARMALADE DOG, c/o W. Mich. Gamers' Guild, Western Michigan Univ., Faunce 2420, Box 47, Kalamazoo MI 49008.

## WINTERCON '94, Jan. 15

MI

This convention will be held at the Lincoln Park Kennedy Recreation Center in Detroit, Mich. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include games for youngsters, a used-game auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$10 at the door. Write to: WINTERCON, P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte MI 48192.

## PANDEMONIUM XI, Jan. 22-23

\*

This convention will be held at the Hub cafeteria on the campus of Ryerson Polytechnic Univ., in Toronto, Ontario. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$25. Write to: Peter Fund, 118 Roncesvalles Av. #34, Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M6R 2K8.

## GAMICON DELTA, Jan. 28-30

IA

This convention will be held at the Wesley Center in Iowa City, Iowa. Guests include Johnathan Tweet and "Zeb" Cook. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and a game auction. Registration: \$12 preregistered; group discounts available. Write to: GAMICON DELTA, 22 W. Chestnut, North Liberty IA 52317.

## WARCON\* '94, Feb. 4-6

TX

This convention will be held on the campus of Texas A&M Univ., in College Station, Texas. Guests include Tim Beach, Tim Olsen, and Monte Cook. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include Japanimation and a dealers' room. Registration: \$12 preregistered; \$15 at the door. Write to: WARCON '94, MSC NOVA, Box J-I, College Station TX 77884.

**DUNDRACON XVIII, Feb. 18-21 CA**

This convention will be held at the Marriott hotel in San Ramon, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a painting contest, computer games, a flea market, and dealers. Registration varies. Write to: DUNDRACON XVIII, 385 Palm Ave., Oakland CA 94610.

**GENGHIS CON XV, Feb 18-20 CO**

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

**JAXCON '94, Feb. 18-20 FL**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn at Baymeadows in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include door prizes, a painted-miniatures contest, a flea market, and dealers. Registration: \$22/weekend. Single-day rates vary. Write to: JAXCON, P.O. Box 4423, Dep't. M, Jacksonville FL 32201.

**WINTER WAR XXI, Feb. 18-20 IL**

This convention will be held at the Chancellor hotel in Champaign, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include auctions, dealers, and open gaming. Registration: \$6/weekend or \$3/day. Send an SASE to: Donald McKinney, 986 Pomona Dr., Champaign IL 61821.

**EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN '94, Feb. 25-27 IL**

This convention will be held in the Renaissance and Roman rooms of Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniatures and art contests, an auction, and guest speakers. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Send an SASE to: Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor Student Center, S.I.U., Carbondale IL 62901-4425.

**HURRICON '94, Feb. 25-27 FL**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Resort in Ft. Walton, Fla. Guests include Piers Anthony, Timothy Zahn, and Michael Stackpole. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include readings, demos, a costume contest, and a charity auction. Registration: \$26 before Jan 31; \$30 thereafter. Write to: HURRICON, P.O. Box 4728, Ft. Walton FL 32549.

**RADCON 1B, Feb. 25-27 WA**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Tower Inn in Richland, Wash. Guests include V. E. Mitchell, "Kev" Brockschmidt, Don Segna, and Glen Allison. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include Japanimation and SF movies, an art show, dealers, and gaming. Registration: \$15. Write to: RADCON 1B, 2527 W. Kennewick Ave., #162, Kennewick WA 99336.

**TOTAL CONFUSION VIII, Feb. 25-27 MA**

This convention will be held at the Best Western Royal Plaza in Marlborough, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures contest. Registration: \$23/weekend or \$9/day preregistered; \$10/day at the door. Write to: TOTAL CONFUSION, P.O. Box 1463 Worcester MA 01607.

**PAINTING CONTEST/GAME DAY****Feb. 26 IN**

This convention will be held at Metalcraft Miniatures and More in Elwood, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a painting demo, a raffle, and war games. Registration: Free. Send a long SASE to: Leslie A. King, Metalcraft Miniatures, P.O. Box 6, 926 N. 9th St., Elwood IN 46036.

**PLATTECON ETA, March 4-6 WI**

This convention will be held at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Student Center. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include raffles, contests, and demos. Registration: \$6/weekend or \$5/day preregistered; \$9/weekend or \$6/day at the door. \$1 Spectator passes are available at the door. Write to: Platteville Gaming Assoc., Student Center, 1 University Plaza, Platteville WI 53818.

**STELLARCON XVIII, March 4-6 NC**

This convention will be held at the Radisson hotel in High Point, N.C. Guest of honor is Mark Lenard. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' room, panels, demos, movies, and an art display. Registration: \$25 at the door; some group rates are available. Write to: STELLARCON, P.O. Box 396, Thomasville NC 27361-0396.

**CONCENTRIC '94, March 11 - 13 IL**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill. Guest of honor is Robin Wood. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, a game auction, and a dealers' room with demos. Registration: \$12 before Feb. 1; \$15 at the door. Write to: CONCENTRIC, 114 Euclid, P.O. Box 287, Park Ridge IL 60068.

**NORTHEAST WARS II, March 11-13 VT**

This convention will be held at the Radisson hotel in Burlington, VT. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$18 preregistered; \$25 at the door. Write to: N.E. WARS II, 152 Church St., Burlington VT 05401.

**OWLCON XV, March 11-13 TX**

This convention will be held on the campus of Rice University in Houston, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include Japanimation and open gaming. Registration: \$12/weekend before March 1; \$15/weekend at the door; single-day rates vary. Make checks payable to WARP. Write to: WARP, OWLCON XV, P.O. Box 1892, Houston TX 77251-1892.

**RUCON IV, March 18-19 PA**

This convention will be held at the Parsons Union Bldg., on the campus of Lock Haven University in Lock Haven, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include magical-item and monster design contests and battle chess. Registration: \$15/weekend; single-day rates vary. Send an SASE: RUCON IV, c/o Role-playing Underground, Parsons Union Bldg., Lock Haven Univ., Lock Haven PA 17745.

**DAY OF CON-FLICT, March 19 WI**

This convention will be held at the Bucyrus Erie Club in South Milwaukee. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' area and a silent auction. Registration: \$3 at the door. Write to: DAY OF CON-FLICT, 1250 N. 68th St. #206, Wauwatosa WI 53213-2896.

**MAGNUM OPUS CON IX, March 24-27 SC**

This convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Greenville, S.C. Guests include Timothy Zahn, Bruce Campbell, and Raymond Moody, Jr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, workshops, Japanimation, a costume contest, and open gaming. Send an SASE with \$.52 postage to: MOC-9, P.O. Box 6585, Athens GA 30604. Please include your age.

**SIMCON XVI, March 24-27 NY**

This convention will be held at the University of Rochester's River campus in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dealers' room. Registration: \$8 for students; \$10 for the public. Write to: SIMCON XVI, c/o URSGA, CPU Box 27726, River Station, Rochester NY 14627.

**ATOMICON '94, March 25-27 ID**

This convention will be held at the Idaho Falls Recreation Center in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$12 before March 12; \$17 at the door. Single-day rates will be available. Write to: Randy Pacetti, 2635 Laguna Dr., Idaho Falls ID 83404.

**COASTCON XVII, March 25-27 MS**

This convention will be held at the Miss. Gulf Coast Coliseum/Convention Center in Biloxi, Miss. Guests include Spider & Jeanne Robinson, George Alec Effinger, and Larry Elmore. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies, videos, an art show and auction, a costume contest, and a charity auction. Registration: \$25. Write to: COASTCON, P.O. Box 1423, Biloxi MS 39533.

**MID-SOUTH CON 13, March 25-27 TN**

This SF convention will be held at the Best Western Airport hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Guests include Barbara Hambly, Larry Elmore, and Robin Curtis. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: MID-SOUTH CON, P.O. Box 22749, Memphis TN 38122.

**LITTLE WARS\* '94, March 3 1-April 2 IL**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$12/weekend or \$8/day plus event fees. Write to: Jeffery Hammerlund, 107 W. Chicago St., Algonquin IL 60102.

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**GEN CON® Game Fair 1994**

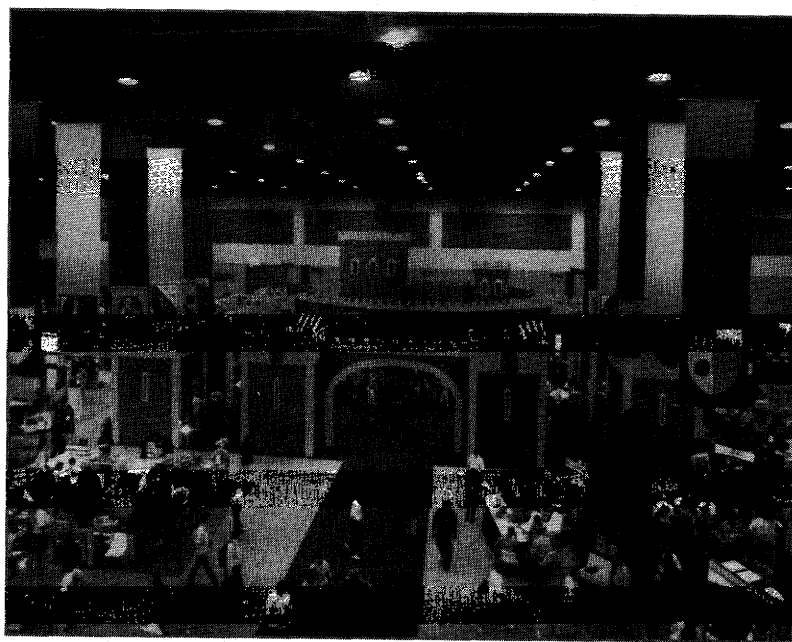
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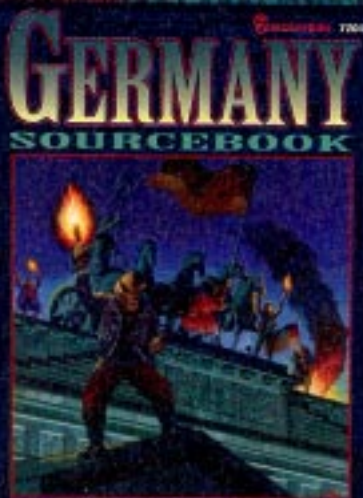
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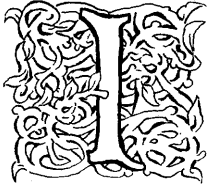


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# I

## The Mother



It happened one time, a family lived outside Fairborough, on the banks of the Fairflow. The parents were a hard pair, and the oldest child did most of the work, chopping wood, keeping

house, setting out fishnets in the morning and taking them in at night. When her parents fought, she took her little brothers and sister up to the loft window, where they could crawl out, climb down, and play hide and seek in the forest.

One day the father up and left, which wouldn't have been any great loss, except that he took the money with him.

The night of the day he vanished, the mother sat up counting what was left. "It's not enough," she said. "With four kids, nothing would be."

Suddenly she had an idea—such a simple idea, she wondered why she hadn't thought of it before. She went up to bed but was too busy working out the details to sleep much.

Next morning she got up when she heard her oldest moving in the loft. She stood at the foot of the ladder, waiting.

"Oh, good morning," said the oldest girl. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I've been thinking," said the mother. "We're going to have to help each other, if we're to get anywhere in this life. Come on. I'll help you with the nets."

The daughter couldn't ever remember her mother acting this way before, and she was so happy she skipped all the way to the river bank.

They were almost finished with the nets when the mother dropped a corner into the Fairflow. "Quick," she said. "I'll hold onto you. Catch it."

It was spring, and the water ran high and fast, but the daughter held tight to her mother's hand and leaned out. "No good," she said, "but we can—awk!"

The mother stepped back and watched her daughter swirling down the river, flailing her arms and screaming. One, two, three times she went under. One, two, three times she fought her way up again. The fourth time, she didn't come up. The mother looked around to make sure no one was by. She took a deep breath and squared her shoulders. "That was easy," she said. "I can do that three more times."

Back she went to the house and found her five-year-old up and about in his nightshirt. "Where's my big sis?" he asked.

"She's playing hide-and-seek," said the mother, "but not in the woods this time. She's gone to hide in the river. You'd better go find her there."

"But it's cold in the river."

So the mother dressed him up warm and took him to the river. He pulled back. "Big Sis always told us not to go near the bank when the river was high."

"It's all right this once," said the mother. "Go on. She's in there."

He closed his eyes and jumped in. He didn't struggle at all but yelled for his sister, and after the first time under

# The River Children

by Peni R. Griffin

*Illustrations by Bob Lessl*

started crying. After the second time, he didn't come up again.

"It's easy," said the mother. "I should've done it before, and to their father, too."

Back she went to the house and woke up the eight-year-old. "Come on," she said. "Bub and Big Sis are at the river already."

"What're they doing there?" asked the younger daughter.

"It's a surprise. Hurry."

So she got dressed and the mother wrapped the Baby up against the cold morning. The Baby was about one and a half, and they'd found out about eight months ago that he was deaf. All together they trooped down to the river, the mother holding the Baby on her arm and leading the younger daughter by the hand.

"I don't see them," said the younger daughter when they reached the bank.

The mother put the Baby down on her shawl. "They'll be along. Why don't we play stick boats while we're waiting?"

"Big Sis never lets us play with stick boats when the water's high."

"It'll be all right this once," said the mother, giving her a stick.

At first the daughter stayed shy of the edge, but soon she forgot to be careful, and the mother reached out her hand and shoved her in. The eight-year-old screamed louder than the other two put together, but she went under just the same. "Three down, one to go," said the mother, "and that the easiest of all."

When the mother picked the Baby up, he wrapped his arms around her neck. His quietness bothered her. She had gotten used to screaming. But she took a deep breath, unwrapped his arms, and dropped him in.

Once more she went back to the house, bundled up all the kids' clothes, and took them to the bank to throw them in after their owners. She took in the fishnets and packed. Not a thing was left in the house when she was done, for it was all in the cart behind the old mule her husband had left her. She tied the cow on behind, put the chickens in back, and set off.

The mother settled down in Hadam Port, working as a barmaid. She met a gambling man she got along with and set up partners with him in a little casino on the west side near the docks. He wanted to be north, on the river, but she wouldn't have that. The money came in comfortably, and in a year or two they married. There weren't any children, but they lived well and happily. Their parties were famous in that part of Hadam.

In time, the gambling man died. His nephew and niece-in-law took over the business, but the mother sat behind the bar, keeping an eye on the cash, serving drinks, and consoling the losers so they'd try their luck again.

One night she woke to find Death at the foot of her bed. He looked at her out of his lidless gray eyes. "Woman," he said, "where are your children?"

"I sent them to you."

"They never arrived," said Death. "Now's your time, but I refuse to take you, till you bring your children to me."

"Don't, then," said the mother. "I'm in no hurry to die."

"I never said you wouldn't die. The Deadlands won't open for you, and the living will turn from you, and your body will lie in the ground, but you'll get no rest till you knock on my gates leading your children by the hand."

"But I sent them fifty years ago!" complained the mother. "Who could possibly find them now?"

"You'd best hope it's you," said Death. "Now go."

He jerked her up out of her body and vanished. Her spirit was cold without any flesh on it, but for all her efforts, she couldn't lie down in her body again. Nor, when the nephew and niece-in-law found it, and laid it out, and took it to be buried, could she make them see or hear her. For a week, stubbornly, she held out, but the winds off the river are cold on a naked soul, and she was alone.

At last she made her way through the streets to the Fairflow, calling her children by name. When she came to the river she walked out onto the water, calling, calling, calling, until morning came and she in her weariness curled up in the mud beneath a bridge to rest. Next evening she started up river, calling, calling, but they did not come—not that night, nor the next, nor the next, nor any night till now, when you can still hear her calling the children she drowned, above the water of the Fairflow, between Fairborough and the sea.

## II

### Mousefinch

Mousefinch's mother told her that story on nights when she was drunk, or ill, and did not work. She knew lots of other stories as well, but Mousefinch always asked for "The Wicked Mother." Afterward they would huddle together, listening, and maybe they would hear her, wailing and calling along the crowded banks of the Fairflow as it passed through Hadam Port.

"This happened terrible long ago, didn't it?"

"Ages and ages."

Mousefinch would listen to the calling, so mournful and hopeless and thin. "She must be sorry by now."

"She's sorry 'cause she's cold and lonely and never has good times no more." Her mother would take another pull at her bottle, or sniff on her handkerchief, as the case might be. "She's a wicked old bitch that's sorry she ever had kids, but not that she ever killed them." Her mother would tickle Mousefinch till she squealed, and say: "Don't know why you want to hear that old creepy story, anyway. I know a nice story." Then she would tell something to make Mousefinch laugh.

Aunt Nilla, whom her mother paid for use of the cracked and crowded room at the top of the house, said that Death liked little children. She said it a lot the summer the fever came, every time she saw a small casket carried up the street. "There he goes, taking another kid out of this misery, and leaving me to my corns and bunions and bursitis and my eyes going bad and my heart fluttering and—"

Mousefinch's mother laughed at Aunt Nilla, though it didn't sound like her ordinary laugh. "If you want out of life so bad, why not slip out through the window?" She pointed to the brown water lapping the flagged edge of the street.

"Don't want to get my feet wet," Aunt Nilla sniffed.

"Besides, Death don't like to be rushed. They say he'll shut you out if you come to the gate before he wants you. I wish he'd taken me when I was a little child, I surely do! Ain't nothing but pain and misery in this world!"

"Hush. Little pitchers have big ears."

Mousefinch knew her mother didn't want her getting gloomy ideas from poor old Aunt Nilla. No danger of that! Mousefinch found lots of things in the world besides pain and misery: puppet shows and minstrels, cold melon stolen from the vendors, skipping rope, swimming, feeding the animals and birds that came begging round the house, and the fish—sturgeon, carp, catfish—that floated hopefully beneath Aunt Nilla's kitchen window.

Mousefinch hated Death. He was the one who left frozen finches on her windowsill in winter and carried her friends away in coffins. Everyone said the fever had never been so bad before. Illness hovered over the city like the flies and mosquitoes hanging over the wells and dung-heaps. Two or three funerals went past each day. The whole family on the second floor died off, one by one.

Mousefinch's mother paid a whole week's earnings to the Well Woman round the corner, for advice and a charm. The charm she put around Mousefinch's neck—a scarlet bag of asafetida, chicken bones, a chip from a king's gravestone. The advice was a bother, and Mousefinch didn't see the sense of it. They had to boil all their water and cover it with a white cloth half an hour before drinking it, and Mousefinch was not allowed to play with anyone who had been in contact with the fever.

At first she attempted to obey, feeling important. Only after she had offended all of her friends did she realize that the number of people not included in it was shrinking every day. It did little good to roam farther and meet new children, for the city was emptying. Not only were the rich folk making their annual exodus, but poor people—real people—were following, trekking down the roads and the rivers, fleeing the fever.

"More fools they," said Mousefinch's mother, caressing the charm round her neck. "What's to live on in the country? Do they think that farmers give their crops away? And they'll find no work to go around." Her own work came and went on the ships at the sea docks and the barges on the river, and she did a good trade. Her competition was vanishing to the Deadlands and to the country. The hoard of silver coins behind the stove grew apace, but it seemed sometimes that Mousefinch was the only well child in all the world.

Mousefinch watched the ships loading and unloading, nimbly filched wares from every vendor in the city, invaded the deserted precincts of the wealthy to play upon their lawns. When she heard the wicked mother calling to her children over the water, she thought *I know how she feels. I'm all alone, too.*

One day she found a tavern perched on the bank as if it contemplated slipping in and ending its misery forever. Among the damp remnants of past merriment Mousefinch played barkeep, barmaid, and patrons; went upstairs as the chambermaid, pocketing what she liked of the imaginary objects she tidied up; and tried to go into the cellar, but the river had eaten one wall away.

Mousefinch lay on her stomach above the hole where

the stovepipe had gone into the floor, and found she could just reach the water. The wood here was rotten and crumbly, and she enlarged the hole easily. She took up fishing, rescuing a broken oar, a boot, a rusty kettle, and finally, the Baby.

She thought he was a doll, he was so quiet and bobbed so lightly upward from the brown depths. A sluice of water fell from him when she hauled him up through the hole. He moved his head and blinked at her with eyes the color of riverweed.

"But where did you come from?" asked Mousefinch, looking down into the murky water. A face rose toward her now, and two reaching hands. Mousefinch laid the baby aside and reached down, grasping two bony wrists, pulling with all her might. The girl rose, all buoyance except for the weight of the water streaming from her hair. She was older than Mousefinch, with the beginnings of breasts showing under the gray wetness of her bodice. She got her arms over the edge of the hole and pulled herself up the last bit, coughing out a huge volume of water. Tadpoles and fish eggs glinted and wiggled on the floor after the water had splattered and run off.

"Thanks," said the girl. "Where's the Baby? Oh, I see." She picked up the child, turned him over, and slapped his back. He opened his mouth as if to wail, and another flood of water came out. "The others are coming."

"Others?" Mousefinch looked down the hole, and sure enough, another pair of hands waved and clutched above the surface. She reached down again, to pull out a girl about her own age, and while she was burping up her load of water, a younger boy. He was better dressed than the others, with leggings and a jacket.

Mousefinch sat back on her heels. "Who are you?"

The Baby was sitting up with his arms around the big girl's neck. "I'm Big Sis," she said, "and this is Baby, and Bub, and Little Sis."

"Those aren't names," snorted Mousefinch.

"It's who we are, all the same. Who are you?"

"Mousefinch."

"That's not a name," said Little Sis, "so we're even."

"But why were you in the river? Why didn't you drown?"

Big Sis shook out her hair, which was drying already. "It's not so bad once you get used to it, but we were a little tired with it. So we saw you and sent Baby up, because he's lightest. What's to do in Hadam Port?"

"All manner of things," Mousefinch said. "Let me show you."

The River Children were real country bumpkins. They held their noses at the smells in the gutters, goggled at the store windows, laughed with admiration at her skill in pilferage, and gazed in wonder at the monuments and at the rich folks' houses. Empty as the streets seemed to Mousefinch, they still held more people than these children had ever seen at one time. They showed also a lightness of step that made them quick studies at climbing walls and fences, and slipping away from angry vendors, passing the Baby back and forth so easily that even he did not hold them up. Nor did he cry, only looked about him with wide-eyed interest and attempted to put things into his mouth.

"He's deaf," Big Sis explained as they crouched in the shade of the Dower Street Bridge over the Side Ditch. "He's never made a noise in his life."

"How old is he?" asked Mousefinch, dividing the brown sugar candy she had swiped.

"One and a half," said Big Sis.

"One thousand and a half," giggled Little Sis.

"You hush," snapped Big Sis. "T'ain't been near that long."

"Has too," said Bub.

"Since when?" asked Mousefinch.

"Since we went in the river," mumbled Little Sis, around a mouthful of candy.

"It's the age we were when we went in that matters," said Big Sis, giving Baby some candy to suck. "The rest don't count."

Mousefinch said, "I know a story. Want to hear it?"

"Sure," said Bub.

She told them about the wicked mother. Big Sis wouldn't look at her, but Bub and Little Sis winked and nudged and almost spoke, so that by the time she got to the end, Mousefinch was confident. "And nobody ever knew where they'd got to," she finished, "till one day I was fishing through the floor and pulled them right up."

Bub and Little Sis screeched delightedly. "How'd you know?"

"Just naturally smart, I guess," said Mousefinch.

Big Sis bounced the struggling baby on her knee. He was plenty big enough to crawl, but they hadn't set him down yet. "Is she still hanging around here?"

"She comes and goes. I heard her last night."

"She won't get us," bragged Little Sis. "We're onto her."

"We'll hide," nodded Bub, eagerly. "We're good hidiers."

"I don't know as you need to hide," said Mousefinch. "She's sorry by now."

Big Sis sniffed.

"Is not," said Little Sis.

Bub shivered and hugged himself, though he should've been too warm, with those clothes on. "She's mean," he said, "and a liar. Don't listen to her."

"She'll put you in the river, too," said Little Sis, "and hit you, and—"

"Even if she were sorry," interrupted Big Sis, "she deserves to be sorry. And what happens if she finds us? We all go to the Deadlands, that's what! Who wants to go there? Not me!"

"Not me!" chorused the other children, Mousefinch included, for she saw the force of the argument. The last thing she wanted was for her new friends to follow so many old ones down that road. "What's it like in the river?" she asked.

"Nice," said Bub.

"We can be fish, if we want," said Little Sis.

"Or ducks," said Bub.

"Or water."

"Oh, show me how!" said Mousefinch.

They tried, but she had no knack. It was so frustrating Mousefinch almost cried; but Big Sis invented games in which that disability did not matter, and asked for lessons in pilferage, so she felt better. When it came time for

Mousefinch to wake her mother, they walked home with her and left her in the narrow court outside. "Where will you sleep?" asked Mousefinch.

"Wherever we want!" laughed Little Sis.

They faded into the shadows of the lower courts, and Mousefinch went upstairs to wake her mother. She did not tell her about the River Children. The night was still, the river smell was strong, and the wicked mother was far away, sounding on the edge of tears. It was too hot to sleep in the room, so she climbed onto the sloping roof of the room below, spread a towel to protect her from the hot slate, and slept there.

As summer dwindled, Mousefinch and the River Children went everywhere together. At dusk, though, the River Children always ran off. Mousefinch often invited them up, but Big Sis said: "We don't want to meet anyone's mother."

"But my mother's wonderful," said Mousefinch.

"All the same."

"But what do you do all night?"

"Hide from mother," giggled Little Sis, touching Mousefinch's shoulder. "Tag! You're it!" She scampered off between two brewery wagons.

The wicked mother's voice came closer each night, as if she were making a systematic search of the streets nearest the river. On the night of the day the last child in the house besides Mousefinch died, the mother came wailing along Tar Street, upon the river side. Mousefinch lay belly down on her roof, sweating. The mother felt her way from window to window, peering in at each one, and calling. "Bub? Sis? You're here somewhere. Oh, please be here somewhere!" Mousefinch's heart ached.

The wicked mother reached the bereaved windows below after the ragged quarter moon had struggled above the level of the chimneys opposite. Mousefinch could see her hair straggling down her back, and the shadow of her limbs inside her nightgown. "My children!" she called. "Oh, please, my children!"

"Your children!" screamed the woman downstairs. "You threw yours away, you wretch! What about my children?"

The wicked mother flew backward and up as the chamberpot emptied into her face. "At least you know where yours are!" screamed the wicked mother, and dove into the river,

She stayed down so long Mousefinch thought she would never come up. Her eyes watered with tiredness. Before she fell asleep, the mother burst out of the river, her hair and gown streaming, looking so much like Big Sis that Mousefinch gasped.

The mother heard her. Her head whipped around, scattering glittering drops across the moonlight, and she soared to the level of the roof. Black and white in the colorless night, she stared into Mousefinch's face. "You're not one of them!" she moaned, and began to sink. "No," said Mousefinch, "but I'm a friend of theirs."

The mother stopped sinking, hovered, then drifted closer. She gripped the drainpipe with fingers thin and frail as strips of kindling. "A friend . . . of theirs?" she whispered hoarsely.

"Maybe not, if they find out I told you."

"They're angry at me?"

"Do you blame them?"

The woman's face went through a series of changes, too rapid to identify by moonlight. "No," she said. "But I must see them, must find them, must—" She released the roof's edge and held out her bony hands. "Please help me, little girl."

"Are you really sorry?" asked Mousefinch.

The mother tilted her head back and wailed. "Sorry! After all this time? Oh, little one, little one. Let me only find my children, and I will show the world how sorry I am!"

"They don't want to go to the Deadlands, you know."

"Of course not. Do you suppose I do? They only need teach me to hide, as they have done, so well, so long—" A shudder ran down her body. "Only bring me to my children and let me speak to them—make it up with them—and we will be family again. Happily ever after."

"All right," said Mousefinch. "We'll meet you tomorrow. At—" She frowned. "You know the Dock Street Bridge?"

"There's no bridge or dock or patch of reeds from Fairborough to the sea that I don't know," said the mother, her mouth twisting.

So the next day at dusk, Mousefinch began her suasion. "It's not fair. Everybody stays out all night but me."

"Can't you come out after your mother leaves?" asked Little Sis.

"I could, but I never know where to find you."

"You wouldn't need to," said Big Sis. "We'd find you."

"Maybe you would," said Mousefinch, "but I'd rather

have a place to meet."

"Down in your court," said Bub.

Mousefinch shook her head. "What if Aunt Nilla saw you? I know—let's meet under the Dock Street Bridge, where the boats are moored. Maybe we can borrow one."

This notion found immediate acceptance, for the River Children admired boats. They parted amid eager anticipation of the night's adventures, and Mousefinch went home to find her mother awake in the stifling room, the water boiled, and the bread and cheese laid out for supper.

"It'll be a long night," Mousefinch's mother said, gazing at the silhouettes of roofs and chimneys against a heavy sea-cloud.

"I wish it wasn't so hot," said Mousefinch, making dull conversation to hide the excitement in her belly.

"It won't be long," said her mother, nodding at the cloud. "A good autumn storm is what we need, to wash the illness away."

"Would it do that?" asked Mousefinch.

"Something must," sighed her mother wearily, "or there won't be a person left alive in the city."

Mousefinch chewed up her cheese. "Except you and me," she said. "We could go live in one of those fine houses."

Her mother hugged her. "It would take us, too," she said, as Mousefinch (her arm pressed uncomfortably across her chest) wriggled to get free. "No one can hide from Death." She let Mousefinch go and dressed in her working clothes, with the ruffle round her bosom and the awkward heels.



Mousefinch climbed onto the roof to watch her go, and when she disappeared round the corner onto Dock Street, shinnied down the drainpipe and ran.

It was cooler under Dock Street Bridge, where the boats bumped each other, pointing down the tide. Mousefinch climbed into one. People and horses passed overhead. It seemed to her she waited a long time, while the dark came down and the moon came up and the stars crept from behind the cloudy sky.

At last she heard splashing. Bub's face broke the river's surface. She helped him into the boat, then Little Sis. Then Big Sis passed the Baby up and climbed in herself. "It took you long enough," said Mousefinch.

"There was too much traffic," said Big Sis. "We didn't want anyone to notice us, so we had to come by river."

"No one would notice," said Mousefinch. "Dock Street's always busy. What are you so nervous about?"

Big Sis looked over her shoulder; Bub made a sign against evil; and Little Sis said: "We haven't heard our mother tonight. We can't tell where she is."

"I think it's mean, the way you run away from her. She must be sorry by now. And what could she do to you?"

"Finish what she started," said Big Sis darkly.

"But then she'd have to go to the Deadlands, too," Mousefinch pointed out, seeing a shadow move in the unmoving shade of the bridge. "You could teach her how you avoid Death—"

"No!" said Bub, rocking the boat.

"No!" roared the wicked mother, diving into the boat.

The boat rocked wildly and Little Sis and Bub screamed as the mother retreated to the high part of the bridge's arc, holding the Baby.

Mousefinch gaped up at her. "But . . . you—"

"Bring him back, Mother," said Big Sis coldly.

"Oh, no!" Her hair and gown did not quite hang straight in the still air. Baby twisted in her arms, trying to break free, and she kept shifting, trying to keep her grip. "You little horrors heard me all the time, didn't you? You made me suffer, broke all the rules. Why should you, of all the world, escape the Deadlands and ghosthood and all other penalties?"

"Give him back, Mother," said Big Sis.

The mother dipped in the air as the Baby nearly wiggled free, and caught him more securely, one hand round a kicking ankle and one arm round his waist, Baby wiggled and rolled, stretching his arms to his sister. "Oh, no! It's your time to meet Death, now. I'd better call him quickly." The arm round Baby's waist slipped down till she grasped him, swinging, by the ankles. "When a skull this young meets stone—" smiled the mother, drifting to the arch.

Mousefinch and Big Sis both jumped. Neither made it. As the boat turned turtle, Baby twisted loose. Mousefinch glimpsed him diving, his arms and legs smoothing into fins, before the splash and silent rush of water engulfed her. The smooth bulk of some large fish brushed past her, but in the underwater darkness she saw nothing till her head broke surface, and then only a dazzle of moonlight.

Mousefinch could hear, though, the cursing and wailing of that familiar lying voice. She coughed and sputtered, trying to strike out for shore, but the wail swept down and

drove her under. She struggled against the bony hands, but her lungs burned, and the insides of her eyes turned red. Cheated of her first murders, the wicked mother was taking no chances this time.

*And I deserve it*, thought Mousefinch. She had betrayed the River Children, brought this trouble on them after they had avoided it so long! Well, as long as their mother was drowning Mousefinch, she couldn't chase the children. She should just open her mouth and let the brown water in. She opened her eyes so she would see Death when he came.

Suddenly, the water boiled with long darting shapes, battering and nipping the mother's grappling arms. Mousefinch slipped from her grasp, sinking through the silent water. Four sturgeon-shapes, dark against the lighter surface, spread along the mother's length, striking and striking and striking, never in the same place long enough for her to strike back.

As Mousefinch drifted downward, a lean figure drifted upward, lidless eyes turning briefly from the turmoil above as they passed her. "What are you doing here still?" asked Death. "Do you think I have time for you? You must wait your turn."

Mousefinch wanted to shout at him. This was all his fault, not hers! In a burst of anger, she let out all her breath and shot past him, swatting at the biggest fish, pointing frantically. The fish scattered and the mother, released, bobbed upward like a cork as Mousefinch's head broke water again and she gasped for breath, dizzy with the sweetness of intruding air.

From total silence, she came to roaring bedlam. Someone grabbed her. Mousefinch screamed and fought, but her own mother snapped, "Be still!" and she went limp. Blinking the water from her eyes as she floated in her mother's wake, she saw the wicked mother whirling away like a screaming leaf.

People lined the bank, shivering, their clothes blown inland by the icy wind sweeping down the river. A sailor helped them ashore. Mousefinch coughed up water till she was sure her stomach would come up, too. "How did . . . where did . . ."

"Half Dock Street heard the screaming," her mother said.

"She'd've drowned you, sure," said the sailor, "but those fish came. I thought they'd eat her! She got away into the air, and then the wind blew her upstream."

"Death's wind," said someone.

Mousefinch could only shiver and cry, straining her eyes for the sight of four fish in a bunch, of Death's lean face—but all she saw was the black surface chopped into waves by the wind. Heavy drops of rain fell on her head. Her mother took her home.

These days, since the fever broke, Mousefinch spends most of her time by the river, throwing scraps to the sturgeon and counting the members of each school. The River Children do not come to play, but they must be free, for their mother still searches. However, her wandering note has changed; and Mousefinch, hearing her, runs to shut the window.

Ω

CHAPTER II  
INTO THE  
MAZEWORKS  
(THE FIRST DATES  
ALWAYS THE TOUGHEST)

# Ilioram

STORY  
JEFF GRUBB

ART  
BOB LESSL  
COLOR  
CATHY LESSL

I'D MET JEN JUST  
MOMENTS BEFORE SHE WAS THROWN  
THROUGH A DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY  
BY A MAGISTER  
NAMED TARANT

HE'S NINE AND A HALF FEET OF UNDEADLY  
UNPLEASANTNESS  
WITH MY NAME ON IT.

YOU HAVE BEEN  
FOUND GUILTY OF CRIMES  
AGAINST LAW, AND ARE  
HEREBY SENTENCED...

TO  
DEATH!

SHOKK

AT TIMES LIKE  
THESE THERE'S ONLY  
ONE WAY TO FACE  
THESE PROBLEMS:

AND THAT'S  
HEAD ON!

MY  
KEY!

TARANT'S CONCERN  
WAS JUSTIFIED!

BECAUSE WITHOUT A  
KEY HE CAN'T RE-OPEN  
A GATE ONCE I CLOSE IT.

NOT THAT THERE  
WAS ANY CHANCE  
THAT HE WOULD  
GET THROUGH THE  
GATE BEFORE I  
CLOSED IT.

STTT00000P!!

I COMMAND  
YOU TO...

PANT

PANT

SNAP

RIGHT. PIECE  
OF CAKE.

I WISH I COULD SAY THAT WAS THE  
LAST OF HIM WE'D BE SEEING

HEEEELP!

OF COURSE, I KNEW I HAD  
FORGOTTEN SOMETHING!

MYTES!

A PENNY  
SAVED IS  
A PENNY  
EARNED

WASTE NOT  
WANT NOT

HAVE A  
NICE DAY

THEY FOLLOW BIGWIGS  
LIKE TARANT, TAKING  
ANYTHING THAT  
ISN'T NAILED DOWN!

A STITCH IN  
TIME SAVES  
NINE

JEOPERS  
CREEPERS

MAY I  
TAKE  
YOUR  
HAT  
AND  
GOAT

JUST  
DO  
IT

LAW IS  
ORDER AN  
GOOD LAW  
IS GOOD  
ORDER

FOOLS  
RUSH IN  
WHERE  
ANGELS  
FEAR TO  
TREAD

YOUR  
FACE'LL  
FREEZE  
LIKE  
THAT

WHERE  
YOU  
GET  
THOSE  
SHOES

GET

OFF

OF

ME!

DOES  
SHE  
DOESN'T  
OR SHE?

YOU  
FOUGHT  
THE  
LAW  
AND THE  
LAW  
WON

HELP!

GET THEM  
OFF!

AND IF THEY  
CAN PRY IT  
UP, THEN IT  
ISN'T  
NAILED DOWN

IF I  
WADED IN THEY  
WOULD TRY  
TO LOOT MY  
BODY AS  
WELL

THERE ARE TIMES  
FOR ACTION AND  
TIMES FOR GUILF

THIS IS  
A TIME  
FOR  
GUILF

TO BE CONTINUED

**"YOU MUST BE CAREFUL EACH TIME YOU STEP OUT OF YOUR DOOR, BECAUSE YOUR FRONT WALK IS REALLY A ROAD, AND THE ROAD LEADS EVER ONWARD."**

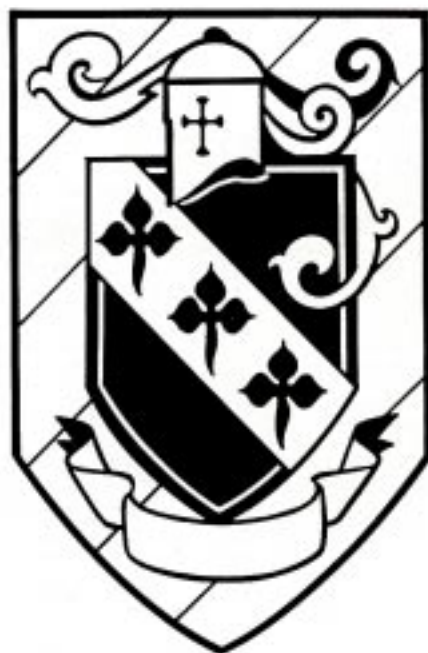
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# Undiscovered Treasure Troves

Using nongaming sources as inspiration

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Artwork by David Day

All game masters (GMs) can enrich their campaigns by being open to new ideas and concepts taken from a wide variety of published games and nongaming sources. Prospecting in local libraries can pay huge dividends to any campaign. Searching history books for NPCs, travel-industry publications for unusual settings, and newspapers for world events can lead to

innumerable adventures. Other sources where you can enrich your campaign are your library's government-publications section containing books, maps, posters, and periodicals that are grouped together by agency. GMs who run science-fiction campaigns will find much useful information in the Defense Department and NASA sections. Moreover, local historical soci-

eties, along with retirees (such as your own relatives), have much information on how human beings interact with each other. These nongaming sources are undiscovered treasure troves of inexpensive ideas that can add texture and depth to any ongoing campaign.



## Nonplayer characters

In too many published modules and home-grown campaigns, nonplayer characters (NPCs) are lifeless, interchangeable automatons. However, libraries and museums contain many biographies that detail the lives of very colorful explorers, pioneers, and colonists. These people are far more interesting and complex than any NPCs created by random charts. By simply transferring their personal backgrounds to NPCs, GMs can create more interesting NPCs. (Players can create more interesting characters also.)

Let's take a look at Minnesota pioneer John Carey's background, and then invent an interesting NPC based on him. The real John Carey was born in Bangor, Maine, on March 3rd, 1830. At the age of twenty-three, he was one of 85 New England citizens who immigrated into southern Minnesota. However, the undeveloped country lacked good roads to get their farm products to larger markets. That, combined with greedy land speculators, soon forced many of the colonists to return to Maine or move to other parts of Minnesota. Mr. Carey traveled north to St. Paul, where he was hired by Luke Marvin's Wholesale and Retail Boot and Shoe House. In 1855, he moved to the village of Superior, Wisconsin. In Superior, Mr. Carey used the knowledge he gained in St. Paul to open his own boot and shoe store.

*With Mr. Carey's background to guide us, we can create a his tory for Christina Plantation, a female NPC for a fantasy campaign. In her youth, Christina's family moved to Newburg, a fast-growing frontier farming settlement. (The town of Newburg is just a small part of a much larger republic.) On the town's main street, the Plantation family set up a shoe-making shop. Over the next few years, Christina made shoes and boots for the local population, traveling merchants, and the occasional band of adventurers. Sometimes she would personally deliver a finished pair of boots to an out-of-the-way farm house. This traveling gave her skills to ride horses in all types of weather.*

The depression of 1857 forced Mr. Carey to close his store and move across the St. Louis Bay to Oneota, Minnesota. Mr. Carey spent the next few years farming, cutting timber, and delivering the mail to the small farms and villages north and west of Duluth. In 1859, Mr. Carey was elected to the post of probate judge.

In 1865, the Civil War had drawn most of the population away from the area. During this time, the village of Duluth had just two houses that were occupied.

*However an upwind volcano became active and erupted, sending millions of tons of pulverized rock down on Newburg and the lands around it. Half the population died. Rivers and streams became clogged with ash, causing extensive flood-*

*ing. This flooding washed away the town's riverside piers, warehouses, and bridges. Regional roads became impassable. With the area's soil covered with a thick layer of ash, farm families moved away to better lands elsewhere. Also, the loss of road and river traffic, the town's merchants had no one to sell their goods to and also departed the area. Soon, there were only two families still living in Newburg. The republic's Senate abolished the town's charter making Newburg an unincorporated village.*

*The Plantation family was hard hit; sales of shoes and boots fell to almost nothing. As a result, Christina had to supplement her income by delivering mail to the more remote settlements and the wizard's tower. Perceived by the remaining farmers as an impartial outsider, they asked her to settle their disputes. Soon, Christina discovered that she needed to put all her negotiated settlements in writing. With instruction from the wizard's apprentice, she learned how to read and write. The remaining adult population became so impressed with her fairness and impartiality that they elected her village judge.*

Judge Carey moved from Oneota to Duluth, where he chose to live in the largest and best maintained of the village's empty homes.

Just hours after moving his family and their belongings inside the house, a group of miners heading for the Vermillion Gold Fields trekked into the almost deserted village of Duluth. As Carey had the largest home in Duluth, the would-be miners asked him if they could spend the night there and shelter their horses in his barn. The next day, another group of miners arrived, looking for shelter. Despite his initial reluctance to open his home to strangers, Carey soon became an innkeeper for many groups of miners going to and returning from the gold fields. But, even with the income from being a judge, an innkeeper, and a mail carrier, he still had difficulty supporting his family.

*Christina's family then moved in to the former mayor's now-abandoned fortified mansion. The Plantation family settled into ten rooms, leaving the rest of the mansion empty. The very next year, the area's farmland began to show signs of recovery. Many of the farmers returned. In the republic's Senate, a 300-person road-repair crew was authorized and funded to clear Newburg's main highway for traffic.*

*The Plantation family renovated the rest of their mansion as the only first-class hotel in Newburg. The Judge's Inn was opened first for the road crews, then for merchants, prospectors, trappers, and other travelers who passed through Newburg. Consequently, The Judge's Inn became the center for starting and finishing adventures in the area.*

*Christina's skill list includes: Cobbling, riding horses, reading & writing, rural etiquette, and frontier law.*

Christina could interact with the player characters in at least three ways. First, if the player characters meet Christina at The Judge's Inn, they may perceive her as only a simple innkeeper. If the PCs stay one or more nights at the inn, Christina or the inn employees could discreetly keep an eye on the party (For example, she could make sure the PCs pay a 10% finders tax on any newly unearthed wealth.) Second, the PCs could encounter Christina in court. As Christina is honest and just, any type of bribe will find the offending characters jailed, fined, or both. Third, she could guide the party to any interesting locations within her jurisdiction.

## Settings

Any GM running a modern-era campaign will need information about cities or areas not found in published sourcebooks. Each year, the travel industry publishes many free brochures and magazines that can make it easier for GMs and players to visualize unfamiliar settings. You can get this information from local travel agencies, or federal, state, county, and city tourism offices. To get toll-free numbers for out-of-state tourism offices, call: (800) 555-1212.

Let's take a look at an unusual real-world landscape and transform it into a fantasy campaign setting. Virginia's Natural Tunnel is a limestone cave formed by Stock Creek. The cave is 850' long, averages 100' high, and is between 100'-170' wide. Outside the cave, the creek has also cut cliff walls around itself that are between 350'-700' high. Stock Creek does not fill the entire cave floor. A railroad was built in the tunnel in 1890 and is still in use. In 1971, the cave and the area around it became a state park.

The PCs are rafting a river in an area that's recently been invaded by evil forces when a sudden storm strikes. Just as the party decides to land and wait out the storm, they round a bend in the river and see the water flowing into a large tunnel-like cavern. There also seems to be a rocky path or road leading into the cavern. Will the PCs explore the cave? Will merchants, bandits, or dragons also try to avoid the storm by taking shelter in the cave? Could this area be sacred to the local human or humanoid population? Could there be a sawmill, dwarf village, tomb complex, or winery within the cavern? What is at the other end of the cavern?

For over 400 years, the slow-moving river was the cheapest, fastest way to move goods and people between two human nations in the area. Along the river, canals were built to go around rapids. These canals also help boats and barges overcome the river's slow current. Mules and horses are used to pull boats and barges in the canals and through their locks, (Ambushing the PCs at a canal lock would make a quick mini-adventure.) At the area's border, a village was built inside a huge river-cut tunnel.

However, the tunnel was not well fortified. Thus, within the last few months, a large army of humanoids have chased away the villagers and claimed the tunnel and the village for themselves. To secure their hold on the tunnel, they built a large wood-and-earth fortress, along with several smaller redoubts, at each end of the tunnel. Any river traffic attempting to get from one nation to the other must pay excessively high tolls to the humanoid army to pass through the tunnel. Accordingly, trade between the two human nations has been cut in half, causing massive unemployment in many trades.

One or both nations now ask the PCs to help them get rid of the parasitic humanoids and liberate this trade route. The GM could design an adventure that has the PCs sneak into the tunnel and kill the humanoid's leaders. Then, the army would be simultaneously attacked by the PCs in the tunnel and by a human army attacking from the outside. It would make an epic adventure!

## World events

World expositions, along with thousands of other periodically staged events such as the Olympic Games and *Mardi Gras*, are treasure troves for adventures. World expos are always grand spectacles where nations showcase their cultural heritages. International corporations have their own pavilions to advertise recent advances in architecture, computers, transportation, communication networks, and space exploration. The PCs could encounter a wide range of technology, languages, and cultural diversity. To make the PCs' lives more interesting, one or more pavilions could be the focus of violent demonstrations, terrorist attacks, or industrial spies. A nation or corporation could hire the party to discover who is behind the illegal activities. On the other hand, the PCs could be hired to steal a new machine or priceless artifact. They could also find helpful or dangerous contacts with foreign citizens, corporations, or governments at an expo. Outside the public areas are offices, loading docks, utility tunnels for water and gas pipes, and telecommunications cables where PCs can find danger and mystery.

Other world events also can inspire adventures. The next time you read the newspaper or watch the TV news, put your mind to translating some of the themes, settings, and events mentioned into forms usable in your campaign.

## Adventures

Finally, magazines are an endless source of campaign ideas that GMs can adapt to their campaigns. There are magazines devoted to almost every subject imaginable. Not only are these magazines fun to read, but they contain articles that include photographs, maps, and detailed histories of specific locations around the world. These articles can provide GMs with a fresh approach to creating memorable

NPCs, encounters, settings, and campaign goals. For example, a Roman legion entering hostile territory would march from sunrise to noon, then build a massive earth-and-wood fortification around the camp. Plans for these fortifications can be found in a number of historical and modeling hobby books and magazines, but not in published game sourcebooks. [Editor's Note: *HR5 The Glory of Rome Sourcebook*, a historical reference for the AD&D® game, is now available.] Magazine articles have inspired more than half my published gaming manuscripts.

Let's suppose that the PCs attempt to prospect for precious metals in an area of forested hills. They make a legal mining claim and start digging. If the GM rules that no precious metals exist in the area, the PCs may find less-valuable mineral deposits, like a large salt dome. GMs should remember that most mining done in the real world is to get at common resources such as iron, copper, or salt, not gold, platinum, or diamonds.

The GM needs to decide what, if anything, the PCs discover, then read several magazine articles on that mineral.

The GM must decide how many obstructions, such as layers of very hard rock, villains, or monsters will attempt to slow down or stop the player characters from operating the mine. For example, a vampire could use the PCs' mine shafts to

escape the light of day, then decide to take over the mine and the area around it for himself. Moreover, the mining site could already be honeycombed with the tunnels of humanoid creatures who mine the salt or make the salt dome their homes. Finally, articles about medieval to turn-of-the-century mining techniques provide game masters with some idea of the costs, hazards, and rewards of building and operating any mining operation.

## Conclusion

Discovering ideas in these nongaming sources will take time, but the investment is worth the benefits. GMs who take the time to do a little research for fresh, innovative ideas will create more enjoyable, more memorable, and—most of all—longer campaigns.

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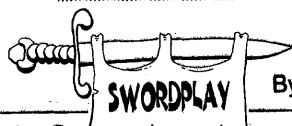
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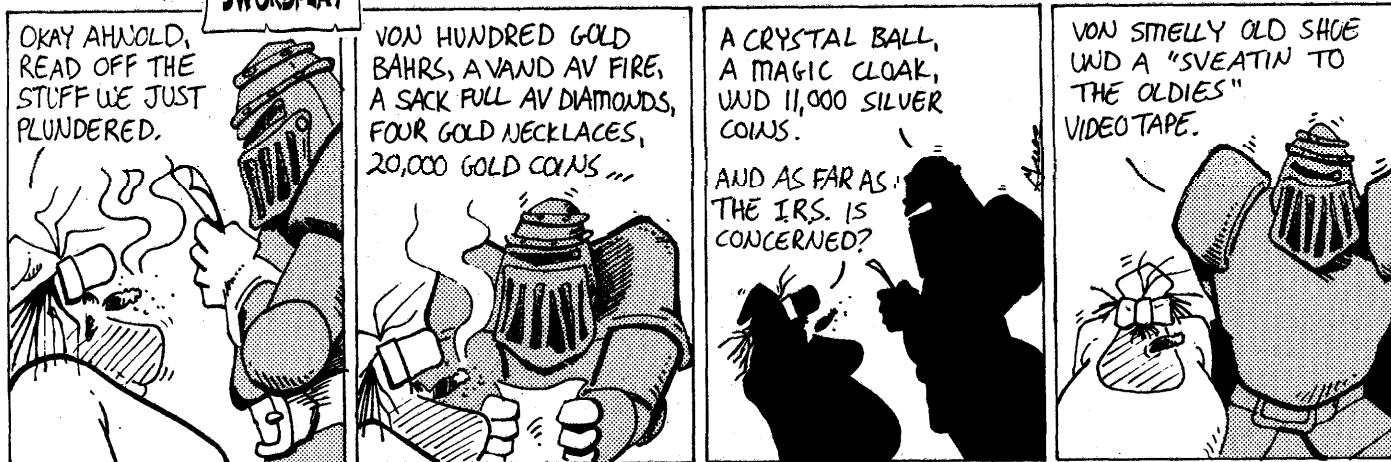
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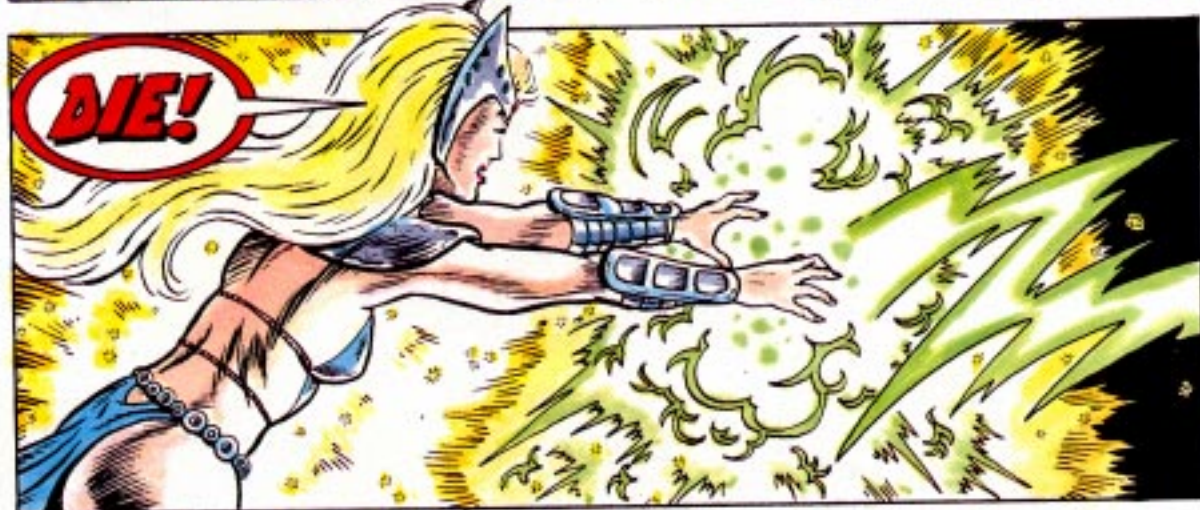
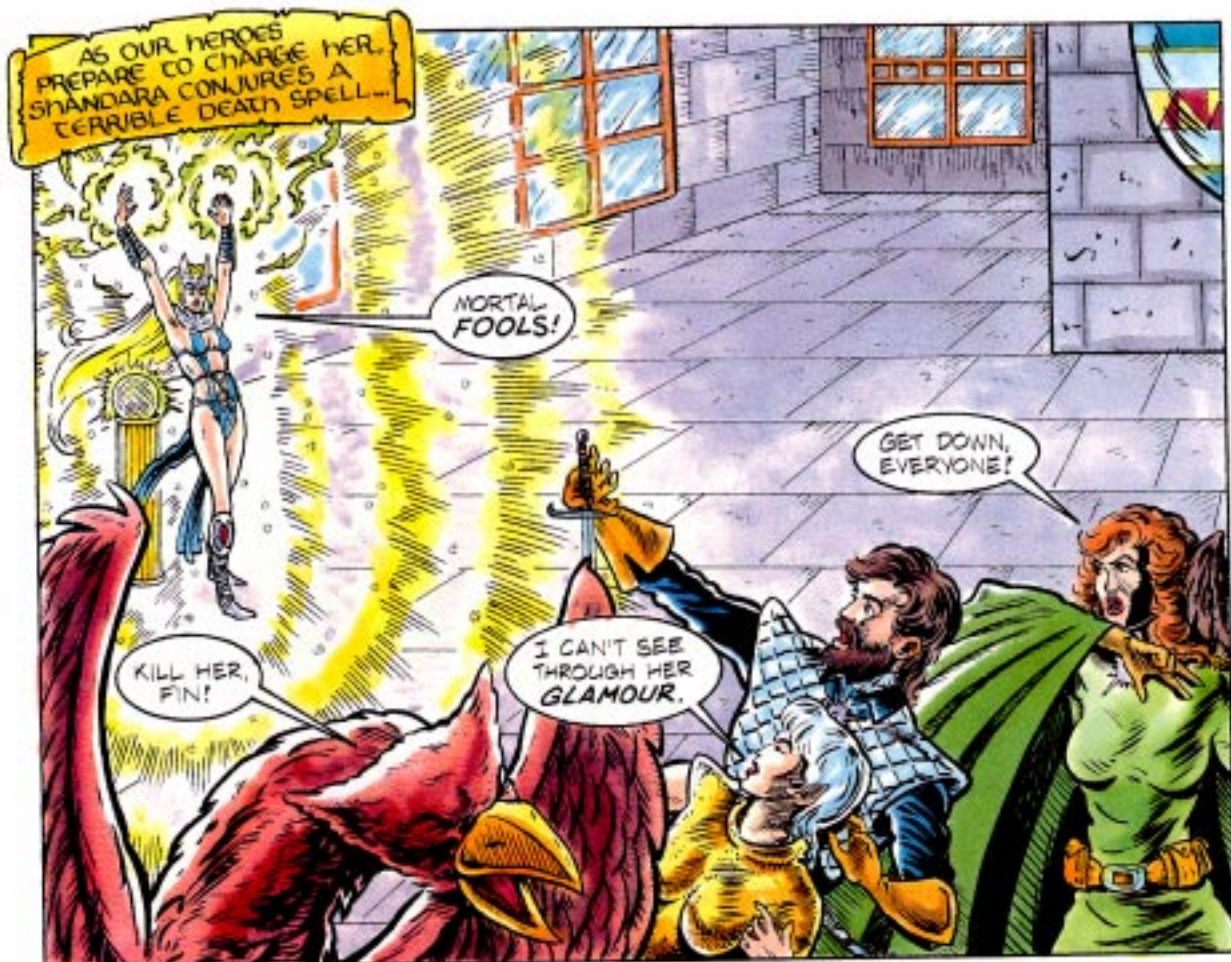
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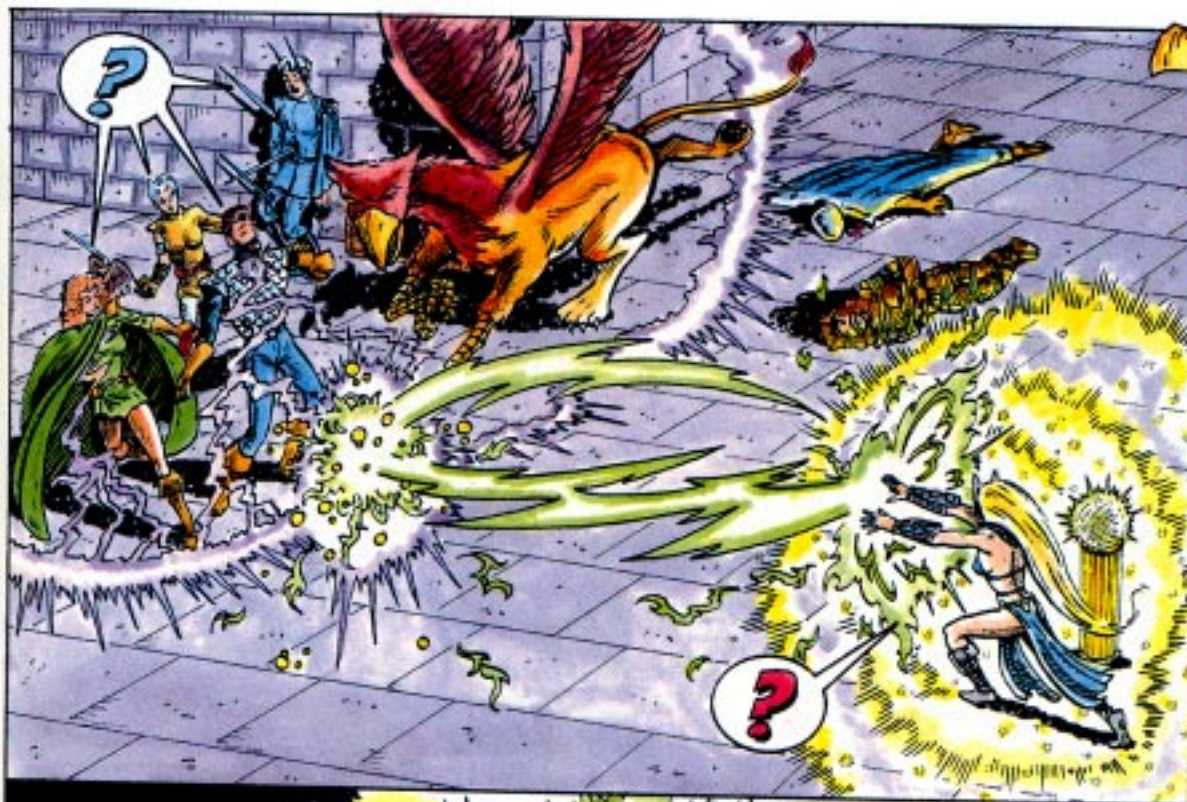
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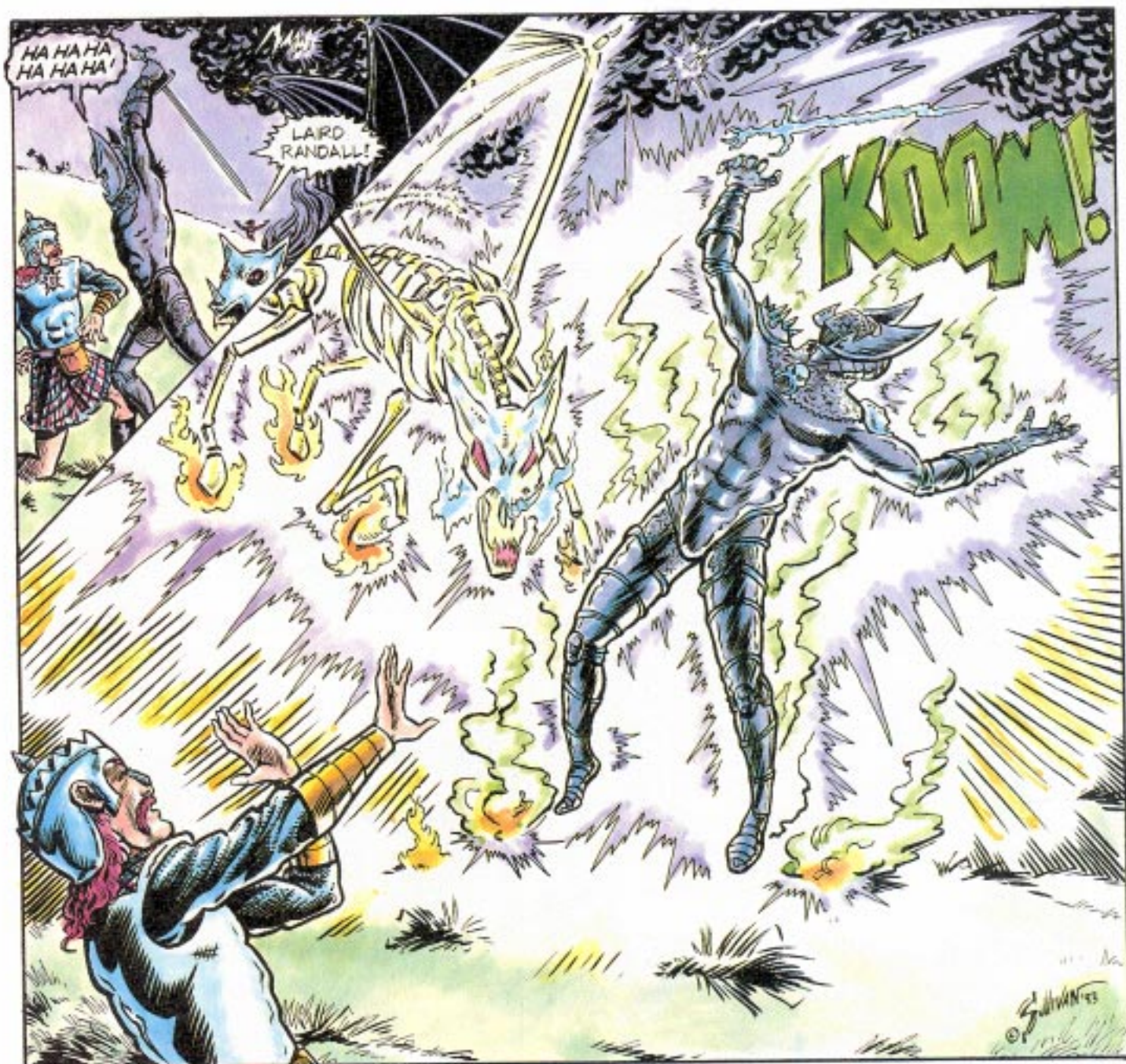
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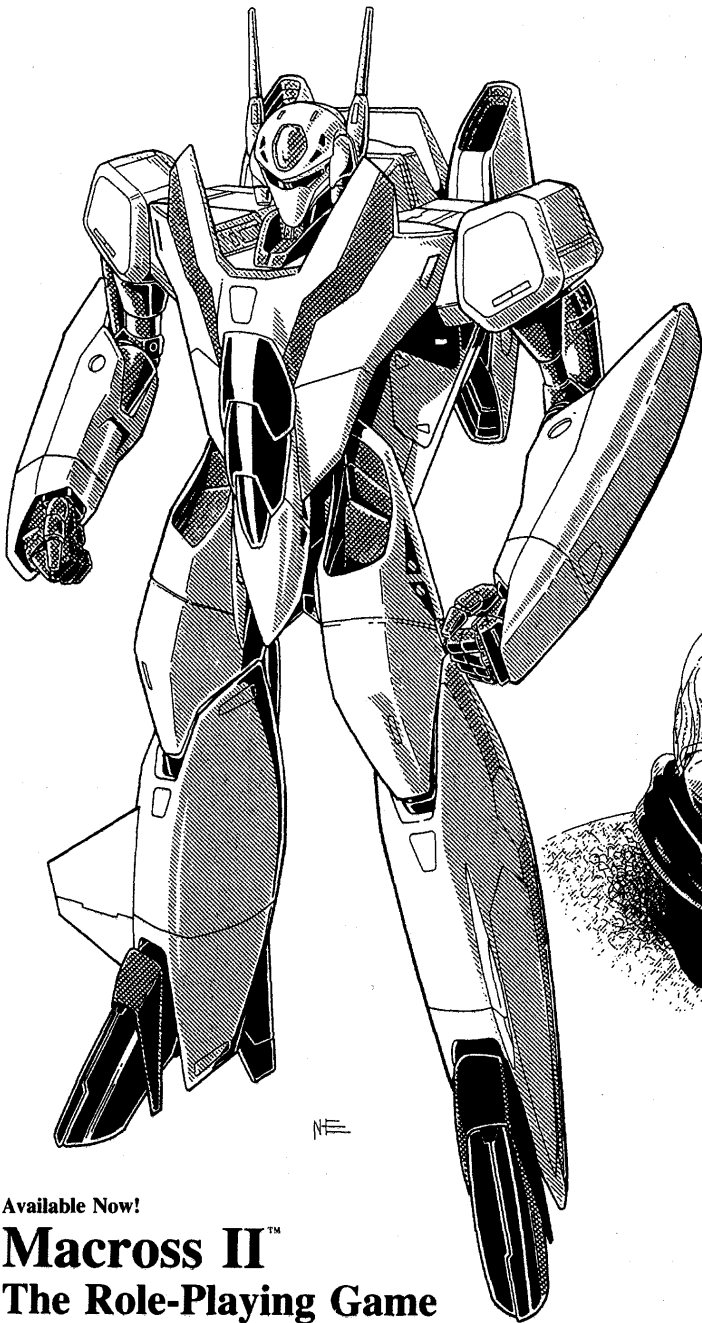
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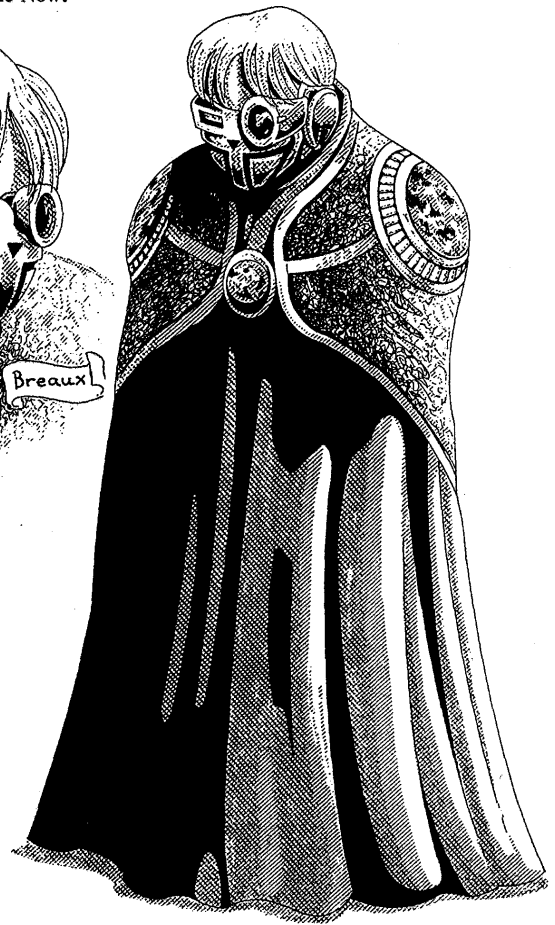
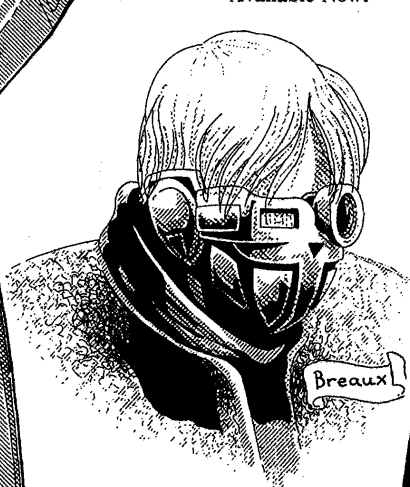
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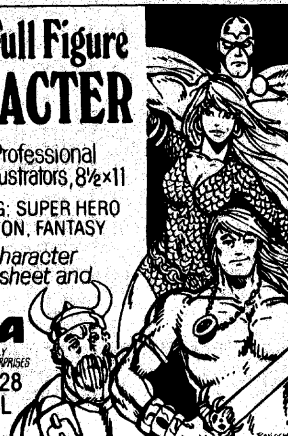
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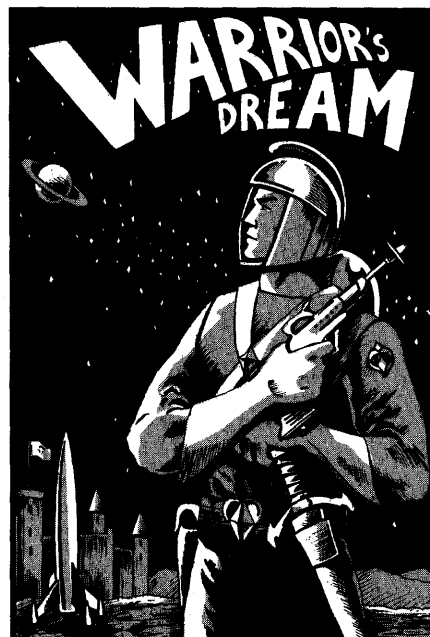
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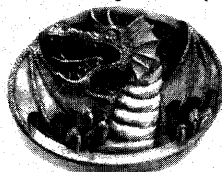
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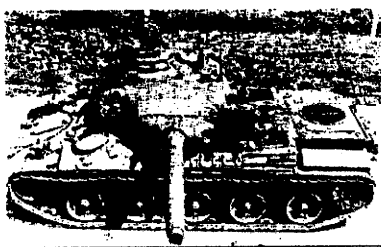
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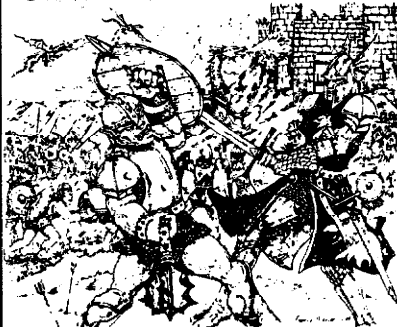
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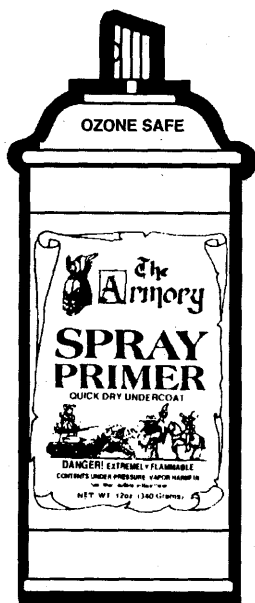


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# Through the LOOKING Glass

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Photographs by Mike Bethke



High-Rise &  
Ruined High-Rise  
Buildings (Gallia)

## Buildings, bards, and beholders

Last year at this time, my column was devoted to the attack on the miniatures field by forces outside the hobby. The news continues to be bleak. New York State remains unreasonable about lead limits and the miniatures industry continues to fight, both through the legal system and the arena of public relations. Even if the industry wins, the damage already has been done. Many people have asked me why some figures are no longer available. The answer is that many distributors will not carry lead figures and the most popular figures have been changed to lead-free alloys first. Good figures that are slow sellers are a low priority on a company's changeover lists. Many figures with low sales probably will be discontinued

as not feasible for conversion to lead-free substances. Some distributors have reported a marked decrease in miniatures sales. The price of collecting, gaming and modifying figures continues to rise. I think we all owe the State of New York Health Department a polite letter asking them to be reasonable.

On the plus side, we owe the U.S. Senate

### Miniatures' product ratings

|       |               |
|-------|---------------|
| *     | Poor          |
| **    | Below average |
| ***   | Average       |
| ****  | Above average |
| ***** | Excellent     |

thanks. The lead bill is coming to vote soon and our bill exempting miniatures as collectibles is still attached. Please write or call your congressman and senators and ask them to support the amendment. We must remain alert to protect our hobby. We have a lot of items to cover this month, so I'll get off my soapbox.

## Reviews

### Gallia USA

c/o Armadillo Games  
RR #6, Box 105  
Schenectady NY 12306

#### 5504 High-Rise Building

\*\*\*\* 1/2

#### 5506E Ruined High-Rise Building

\*\*\*\*

These two buildings are scaled to fit either 1/300- or 1/285-scale historical or SF armor and figures, or FASA's slightly larger BATTLETECH\* scale. The building is made of a cast resin and is 97 mm tall X 39.5 mm wide X 31 mm deep. There are 11 floors represented, complete with ledges, small front and side windows, large ground-level doors and stairs. The buildings have no fire escapes or other exterior detailing. This lack of detail allows the building to mold easily. The roof is slightly slatted and outlined in brick and could be used as a very small helicopter pad. The outside surface is slightly rough and resembles a stony surface. There are no exterior bubble holes or marks.

The ruined building is a damaged twin of the other. Most of the front and sides of the top two floors are piles of rubble with pieces of roofing and edging clearly visible. The fifth floor is almost totally devastated. The bottom of the building is surrounded by a resin pool molded with debris visible. Devastation of the building is not total, but serious. This building has some bubbles and resin strings but they blend into the damage.

Both buildings are nice, although the 5th-floor damage probably should have totally collapsed the damaged building. The main stumbling block on these is their

cost of \$6.00 each. This could make it prohibitive to make a really nice city.

## Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

656 E. McMillan  
Cincinnati OH 45206-1971

### 1032 Mummy's Favorite

\*\*\*\*\*

This kit depicts a pair of adventurers who have been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. The kit consists of eight pieces and is made of a lead-free compound. The pieces are scaled to 25 mm and consist of a base section, a wall, two skeleton guardians, a sarcophagus, a clear orb, a male fighter and a male adventurer. The base section is 70 mm × 48 mm × 4 mm thick. The base sides have extensive flash and mold lines that are easily removed with standard tools. The sides are tapered to resemble a plaque while the top has engraved blocks with some cracks. A hammer and two pry bars are on the floor beside the sarcophagus stand. The back wall is 44-mm tall with a pillar-framed arch in the center. The walls are cut block and a torch holder is in each of the upper corners. The pillars end in almost handlike forms and the center of the arch supports a shield with an eye framed by dragon wings. The eye is very well done, with a visible tear duct and a well-formed lid. The last details are two identical dais on either side of the base that support the guardians.

The guardians are identical skeletal figures measuring over 30-mm tall and are extremely thin. The figures are stepping down from the stands and have their scimitar-type swords held as if to strike. The arms, hands, and back of the legs are bones as is the skull with deep-set eyes and individual teeth. The rest of the figure is dressed in ornate armor. The boots are overlapping plate extending to the shins. Scale mail covers the upper torso and is partially covered by a ram-horned skeletal face. A belt surrounds the waist. The arms and shoulders are protected with overlapping plates, while a pointed helmet with horns and a faded medallion protect and frame the head. Small links of chain fall from the helmet to shoulder. The figures had very light flash, and my only gripe is that they would have looked better if each figure had been molded in a different pose.

The male fighter is dressed in folded-top, hip-boots and leather pants. A light field plate covers the upper body and is in turn partially covered by a chain-mail coat. Both arms are covered by jointed plate armor and both hands wear metal gauntlets. The chest has a small shield with skull insignia and plates protect the shoulders. A wide leather belt with a buckle and skull support a scabbard on the left and a knife on the right. The right hand holds a raised sword while the left grasps the top of the now empty scabbard. The face, with a surprised expression and well-done features, is framed by chain and an ornate helmet with flames and trim.



Mummy's Favorite (Thunderbolt Mountain)



Basic Pack #3 (Soldiers & Swords)

The male thief is wearing studded leather armor with overlapping strips at the waist and shoulders. The legs are in tights, and shin-high boots of supple leather cover the feet. A thin belt supports a studded scabbard on the left which is also held by the left hand. A hood and cape cover a long-sleeved shirt. The facial features are vaguely elven and definitely annoyed as the guardians move to protect their charge. Wrinkle detail is excellent and even some light flash did not ruin the figure.

The object of everyone's attention is an ornately done sarcophagus measuring 33 mm × 15 mm × 9 mm. The top has a bas relief of the figure inside and is of the Aztec-type dress. The side panels have a number of scenes and hieroglyphics that

probably warn against intrusion. The glass sphere sits in a depression on the hands.

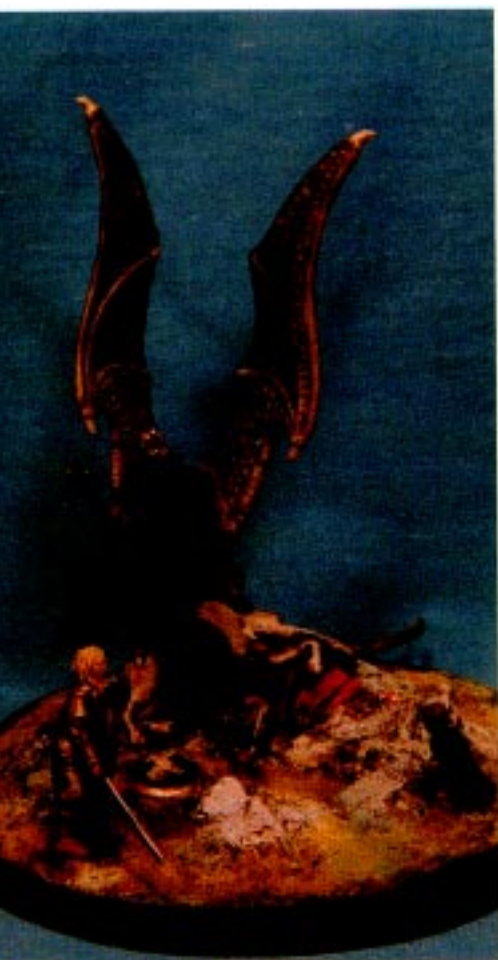
This is an excellent diorama kit. The pieces fit together well and the figures could be used as separate pieces for gaming, then replaced on the base. The kit is a good gift, or personal project and is reasonably priced at \$12.00 per kit.

### Soldiers and Swords

25 Fayette St.  
Binghamton NY 13901

### DP003 Basic Pack 3: Villain, Henchman and Henchwoman \*\* 1/2

This set was designed for R. Talsorian's DREAM PARK\* game, but would be usable in a number of different games. The three-piece set is scaled to 25 mm and made of a



Lord of Nazgul (Mithril)

lead-free alloy. Each piece is mounted on a thin, oval, undetailed base that requires trimming and cleaning to stand flat.

The villain is dressed in a long, tight robe that flares at the feet and is belted at the waist with a rope belt knotted in front. His head is covered by a hat reminiscent of those worn by the French Foreign Legion. Facial detail is slightly exaggerated. A large ball is held in front of him by a twisted wire frame and he is waving his hands over it as if casting a spell. The figure has a thin layer of flash between the stand and the base of the body and the globe, and the body and right hand. Care must be taken when removing this to avoid destroying any details.

The henchman is dressed in knee-high boots with folded tops, pants, and a unbuttoned tunic secured by a wide belt. His right hand is holding a sword with the point toward the ground. A cape flows out behind him at a weird angle and is secured to the tunic by clasps. The facial detail is fair, with a sneer as the facial expression. His hair is tied in a topknot. The figure has flash between the ponytail and shoulder, neck and hair, between the legs from groin to knee level, on the sword, and between the arms and torso. Again, care must be taken when cleaning this figure.

The henchwoman is armed with claws strapped to her left hand and I think the

figure wears tights. Her boots are high on the calf and she is dressed in open-topped, button-down leathers with no sleeves. Her face is detailed but not terribly pretty. Hair strands are evident with the hair being wavy. This figure has a number of possibilities, but also a number of problems. There is flash between the legs, between the body and arms, and between the body and sword and around the collar edge. Metal flow is heavy at the collar, the left foot (which is not fully formed), and the sword. Very careful work is required to get the piece to look right. Her right leg also has the appearance of being squared and formed by slab-like layers rather than having a smooth and rounded appearance.

These are some of the worst pieces that I have seen from Soldiers and Swords, but with a lot of work they could be effective villains. Other packages that I have gotten to sell do not have nearly as many problems. This pack is not worth the \$4.75 price tag, but others that required less work might be.

### Mithril Ltd.

Macroon  
Co. Cork  
Ireland

### Prince August U.S.

The Byrne Building  
Lincoln and Morgan Sts.  
Phoenixville PA 19460

### MB 279 Lord of Nazgul

\*\*\*\* ½

The Lord of Nazgul was killed by Eowyn the shield maiden while attempting to kill King Theodin after the lifting of the siege of Minas Tirith. The vignette presented represents the battle just before the fatal blow. The set is scaled to 25 mm and is a mixture of resin base and lead-free metal figures. The base is round and 110 mm across. The sides of the base are machined to resemble a professional plaque mounting. The top of the base has an excellently sculpted ground cover consisting of realistic rock formations, grassy regions, and dirt. King Theodin lies crushed beneath a horse on a small hillock. The horse is very well done and is wearing a full harness and tack without barding. The tail and mane feature individual hairs and the facial expression reflects the creature's death with open mouth and closed eyes. King Theodin lies stretched upon the ground, with his body visible from knees up. The king is dressed in a chain-mail coat with half sleeves, extending from his shoulders to his feet. A wide belt with a simple pouch supports a case and scabbard. His left hand is folded over his chest and the right is outstretched towards his sword. There is little facial detail other than his beard and gaunt cheeks as his eyes are closed. He has a full helm with nose guard and a tassel at the peak. A wide cape is spread underneath him on the ground.

The Lord of Nazgul's mount is a lizard-

like beast capable of flight. The creature comes in five parts and is easy to glue together. The legs glue into feet that are molded on the horse as if sinking talons into flesh. Then two wings glue into the 110-mm body by insertion into slots. The tail must be bent slightly as it does not quite fit the rear hole, but this is easy. The lizard has a bumpy texture to his skin and a scaly texture to his wings that are well done and makes me wish that this figure was available independently. Straps and saddle provide a riding platform for the Lord of Nazgul.

The Nazgul Lord is dressed in billowy black trousers, a black tunic, and a long, flowing cape secured at the neck by a simple clasp. A belt is visible, but not detailed. The face is covered by a mask and his hands are covered by gloves. Over his cowl is a simple four-pointed crown, while his right hand holds a scepter or mace. The left hand is pointed at Eowyn. This figure does not have much detail, but does portray the implicit threat well.

Merry the hobbit sits crouched on the sidelines looking for an opening. He is dressed in a simple, long-sleeved shirt and vest, long pants that go to mid-ankle, bare feet, and a cape with cowl. The cowl is secured to his vest and falls to the ground in wrinkled swirls. Facial detail is poor, but is easy to paint. The hair is curly and secured by a headband. His left arm is bare while his right hand clenches a small sword.

Eowyn is dressed in heavy leather boots and a chain-mail dress that falls to mid-thigh. The dress is secured by a wide leather belt that supports a pouch. Another belt supports an empty sword sheath. Her head is bare and individual hair detail is good, even to being mussed from the battle. Chain detail is good, but the facial detail will need to be painted on. Much of the detail on the front chain mail is hidden after you add the horse-embossed shield, so you may want to consider leaving the shield off. A sleeve-covered right arm and bare hand hold a long sword.

This is an excellent set and should be considered a must for any *Lord of the Rings* fans. This kit will take some extra work to bring out the fine detail, but is worth it. I highly recommend this kit, available at \$25.95 each.

### Leading Edge Games

P.O. Box 70669  
Pasadena CA 91117

### 64110 Men-at-Arms Pack

\*\*\*\* ½

This pack contains four 25-mm scale lead miniatures whose actual size would be under six feet tall. The figures all have undetailed, thick circular bases. The standard uniform is a chain-mail shirt that drops to mid-thigh and a Jupon Surcoat belted by a wide leather belt and simple buckle. Two characters have knee-high boots and two have low boots and all wear

trousers. All the figures are armed with simple swords, but three have gloves while one is bare-handed. All the figures have metal coifs; one has a French-style helmet and one has a Basicinet-style helmet. Three have the sword held in their right hand in the advancing position and one is slicing downward with a two-handed grip. All have slightly different postures.

The faces differ slightly in expression from resolution to anger. Facial features are well defined, and three are clean shaven. There is one bearded member complete with mustache.

These are well-done generic army figures that would fit well into either historical or fantasy collections. These figures could personalize units that otherwise would be identical. I plan on picking up several packs to supplement my human figures from Ral Partha, and the quality is very comparable. I highly recommend this pack at the \$5.99 price.

### RAFM Company, Inc.

20 Parkhill Road E  
Cambridge Ontario  
CANADA N1R 1P2

#### 3694 Bards

\*\*\*\*

Bards are welcome in almost any noble's court, and this collection of bards should be doubly so. The set contains three different figures scaled to 25 mm but varying in height. All are made of a lead-free compound and have oval bases set onto rectangular slabs for stability. Each bard is equipped for a different environment.

Bard #1 is a court musician. She is dressed in a low-cut dress and a set of low shoes, and is playing a harp. A set of support belts for the harp hang loosely while she grasps the harp in her left arm and plucks on the strings with her right. The figure is extremely tall, being just over six feet in scale height. Her hair drops to mid-back and is wavy at the ends. It is tied back with a braided headband. Facial detail is simple. Her mouth is set as if she is trying to whisper out of the side of her mouth rather than sing to an audience. A pendant hangs from a necklace. She is not armed and appears to be at ease. The major flaws of this figure are the extremely long legs and the extra thick arms.

Bard #2 is dressed in low boots, pants, and a belted jacket. The jacket has a thick hem and cross-laced sleeves end with large studs. A narrow belt cinches the jacket and supports a pouch and sheathed sword on the left and a knife on the right. A short cape with hood is secured at the neck. Her hair has good detail. It is in a long ponytail secured by a band. Both hands are occupied in playing the flute and finger detail is appropriate. Facial detail is fair, but the ears are definitely elfen. The legs are a problem with this figure also, the knees are too high on the leg and are much too creased.

Bard #3 is carrying a mandolin in her



Men-at-Arms Pack (Leading Edge)



Bards (RAFM)

hand. She is dressed in tights, a pair of low boots with folded-over tops, and a double-breasted jacket that looks quite modern. A sash supports a pouch on the right side and an ornate sheath on the left side. A short cape hangs from her neck and is secured by a clasp covering several items on her back. Hair detail is good and she has her hair secured by an ornate headband. Facial detail is slightly better than the rest of the figures. This figure is cursed by a sharp mold line on the outer leg and some flash on the inner leg and the puffed sleeves.

This is a versatile set with some problems. If you're willing to do some work, you can have either figure props or one really good adventurer. A package of three is \$5.75.

### Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

5938 Carthage Ct.  
Cincinnati OH 45212

#### Minifigs

1/5 Graham Road, Southampton  
ENGLAND SO2 OAX

#### 20-534 Spirit of Man

\*\*\*\* 1/2

The Spirit of Man set contains four pieces that form two figures. The pieces are scaled for slightly larger than 25 mm and are made of Ralidium. The first piece is a casting with a long oval base. Two hay bales complete with baling wire provide support for one figure. The humanlike figure is wearing a wide-brimmed hunter's cap and overalls with pockets. He rests his left arm on the hay and his right is at the brim of his cap. His face is more squared than normal, emphasized by a square-cut beard. Even the small details, such as a rat on the pitchfork, enhance the scene. The only detractor is the very thin pitchfork handle. Mold lines do not interfere with the quality of this figure, nor is flash present.

The second figure is a three-piece cast-



Spirit of Man (Ral Partha)



Glasswalkers-Crinos form (Ral Partha)

ing. Two pieces are lids that glue on to the back of the dumpster, but may be set at any angle you wish. These will be exasperating to move, as there are no clear supports or notches to hold the lids in place. The tops are well done with clear grooves and peaks. The dumpster measures 25 mm x 17 mm x 13 mm. The open top reveals a collection of modern junk. Books, shoe soles, bags, broken picture frames, and food are all clearly visible. Rising from this refuse is an elemental form reminiscent of a shambling mound, made totally of trash. Its hands grip the edges of the dumpster and its mouth is open. Small, sunken eyes complete the face. There are mold lines evident on the dumpster sides that need cleaning and there is flash in the elbow crook of the elemental.

This set is recommended for anyone running a modern RPG. The price on this item is \$6.95 per pack and the contents are worth it.

#### 69-001 Glasswalkers-Crinos form

\*\*\*\*\*

The Glasswalker figure is a huge miniature, even for the 28-mm scale, standing over 43 mm tall, and is made of Ralidium. Hair detail is excellent over the majority of the body while muscles are evident on the chest, stomach, and bare arms. The character is snarling. The werewolf is armed with a sawed-off shotgun and a wand. The figure's only other clothes are ankle bracers. The curled hands have claws and paws for feet.

The werewolf is an excellently sculp-

tured figure that is closer to display size. The figure is recommended at \$3.00 each.

#### 69-204 Sabbat Vampires

\*\*\*\* 1/2

These characters are not upper-class vampires! The set contains two male and one female Ralidium figures scaled to 28 mm. The characters are mounted on unde-tailed oval bases with mold lines on top. All three figures are unarmed.

Figure #1 is of a male dressed in jeans tucked into midcalf-high boots. His upper torso has a leather jacket open in front, showing a bare chest and stomach covered with fine hair. The face shows a state of anger, with a down-turned face and gaunt cheeks, all with a slightly Oriental cast. His hair is pulled back and falls to midback in a ponytail. There are serious mold lines on both legs and across the head, along with some flash at the armpits.

Figure #2 is also a male, with shoulder-length hair, a beard, and a mustache. His arms, with fists clenched, are up as if threatening someone. He wears a wrinkled T-shirt covered by a knee-length coat. High boots cover the lower part of his pants, which are supported by a wide belt and buckle. Mold lines are evident on this figure also.

Figure #3 is a female dressed in high boots, shorts, a halter top, and a short, open jacket. Shoulder-length hair falls in a wave, and the face shows some anger. The hands are out at her sides, with the left in a fist and the right open. Mold lines appear on the outside of the legs and arms, and flash lies between the legs.

These figures would make good gang figures in modern-era games. You must work, but the \$4.25 price tag is low enough to justify the effort.

#### -476 Beholder- Kin

\*\*\* 1/2

This 25-mm Ralidium kit contains 10 pieces that form two AD&D® game miniatures. The bases are 20-mm squares with a wealth of treasures including books, a statue, coins, a sword, and jewelry. A pole rises from the middle of the stand to support the main miniature. This pole needs some glue for support as it is loose.

The first figure is a 20-mm veined ball resembling a beholder. An open mouth filled with rows of sharp teeth proclaims this creature is carnivorous. The huge central eye with a heavy lid is open. The head is crowned with four eye stalks and twisting blood veins. One mold line around the main body will cause problems for those who are not careful.

The second figure has its central eye surrounded by a number of smaller eyes molded into the piece. This 20-mm ball has an open mouth with tooth detail visible. There are four tentacles (one of which was broken in shipping). The other six pieces form a line of eye stalks between the large eye and mouth. This miniature also has a mold line along the side that will require work.

This set would be a nasty surprise for

most AD&D game parties. Even with the work and assembly needed, these pieces are recommended at their purchase price of \$7.50 per pack.

### Grenadier Models, Inc

P.O. Box 305  
Springfield PA 19064

### Grenadier Models, UK, Ltd

25 Babbage Road  
Deeside, Clwyd, Wales  
UNITED KINGDOM CH5 2QB

### 3005 Lost Lands Adventuring Companions \*\*\*\* ½

The 10 figures included in this kit are a group of adventurers. The set is made of a lead-free substance and the figures are slightly bigger than 25-mm scale. The bases are all circular with plain tops figures are as follows:

The elven cleric measures 26 mm the base to the eyes. He is dressed in a long robe with an embroidered hem circled by a belt. Over this is a long coat with billowy sleeves. A vestment-type shoulder protector is present. The hands are bare and the staff in his right hand is topped with a symbol; this appears to be his only weapon. A row of bags hangs from a sash across his chest. His pointed ears are prominent, but he has a long beard in braids and a braided ponytail. The face is quiet and benevolent with good detail;

The human monk is dressed in a long robe cinched by a wide leather belt. The robe is hooded with the hood back on the shoulders. The front shows crisscrossed belts while the back has a stitched pack, a rope-secured bedroll, a coil of rope, and a waterskin. The figure holds a long wooden staff in both hands. His face is excellent with clear detail including eyes and nostrils. The monk has a tonsure and a well-trimmed beard. The feet are covered by boots;

The dwarf has fold-over boots, baggy pants, and a studded leather jacket secured by buckles. A thin belt secures a sword in a scabbard. A coil of rope runs from left shoulder to his right side at the waist level. Both hands are holding loaded hand crossbows. A gaunt face is framed by a square-cut beard and a back-tied bandanna. His hair falls below his shoulders and his face almost has an expression of fear;

The gnome is dressed in an almost Eastern robe. A tall cap surrounded by veils and capped by a medallion sit on his head. An elaborate coat with embroidered sleeves covers pantaloons and a flowery shirt. A short sword hangs from a sash and his arms are spread as if casting a spell. His feet are covered by slippers. The face is bearded and slightly homely with a concentrated stare;

The female halfling is tossing a crystal disk. A full chain shirt falls to mid-thigh. The belt supports a waterskin and five different small sacks tied with twine. Tight slacks and fold-over boots cover her legs



Sabbat Vampires (Ral Partha)



Beholder-Kin (Ral Partha)

and feet. A puffed blouse is beneath the chain as evidenced by the sleeve. Her hair is long and tied back, and the face is clear and looks as if it is concentrating;

The second dwarf is dressed with heavy boots and leather pants. His chest is covered with a plate-mail covering with a chain-mail shirt underneath going to mid-thigh. A wide belt with a fancy buckle supports nothing, while two sets of straps support a backpack. Both hands wear gauntlets while the left is holding a shield and a long sword with a jewel and runes in the hilt. A thin, bearded face filled with anger is framed by a full helmet with nose guard and spikes. The shield has a cross design while the shoulder protection is studded leather;

A female bard is dressed in knee-high boots, tights, and a quilted jacket with leather ties. A thin belt supports a pouch for her pipes on the right and a sheathed sword on the left. Her cape is a combination of cloth and treated wolfskin circled by a clasp. Her shirt is slightly open on top, and frilly sleeves leave both hands free. Her left hand is on the sheath and

her right hand holds a set of pipes. A long bow and a full quiver of arrows is secured to her back. Her face is half seen but has a small problem with filling by the left eye;

The elven fighter is dressed in a full set of chain mail. His hands are covered by gauntlets and a surcoat is belted by a medium belt. A chain and leather shoulder protector is offset by a large flat medallion. His face is stern in expression. The helmet has cheek protectors, slots for the ears, and a neck protector. A standard-shaped shield is on his left arm while the right holds a warhammer with runes;

The human fighter wears boots, leggings, and pants. He is wearing split leather armor. The belt is thin with an irregular buckle. A belt supports the bow and quiver that hangs from his back. His hands are gloved and both arms are covered by sleeves. His right hand holds a curved blade while a thick, wooden, cross-shaped shield with metal facings is strapped to his left arm. He is wearing no head covering and has a full head of shoulder-length hair, a mustache, and a medium length beard. Facial detail is fair, but as a whole, this



Lost Lands Adventuring Companions (Grenadier)



WARHAMMER 40,000\* game (Games Workshop)

figure does not seem to be as clearly molded as the others;

The last figure appears to be a noble fighter or a paladin. He is wearing full plate armor with hinged joints and metal boots. His breast and back plates both have a number of embossed designs and figures on them. He is wearing a coif and his hands and arms are armored with plate or heavy gauntlets. His left arm has a plain shield and his right holds a plain long sword. His face is that of younger man with a sense of eagerness as he is preparing to charge his foe. His helmet is half size and crested with a jewel.

The set has good quality and usage potential for a number of other game systems including the AD&D or D&D® games. A problem with this set was that both my review copy and a set that I had in store stock had two monks and no Fighter-with-cross-shield figure. When I called Grenadier they sent me a new figure very quickly. Two of my customers have reported three-day service and courteous treatment. I highly recommend this set even at the \$18.95 price tag.

### Games Workshop, Inc.

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Baltimore MD 21227-1072

### Games Workshop, Inc.

Chewton St.  
Hilltop, Eastwood  
Nottingham NG16 34Y  
ENGLAND

### 0151 WARHAMMER 40,000 game

\*\*\*\*\*

Games Workshop has just re-machined an old favorite. The WARHAMMER 40,000\* boxed set is the second edition of this game, and the first thing to strike you is the bright and vibrant artwork on the box. The second striking fact is the weight. This box is chock full of miniatures and extras. Let's examine the contents of the box. We'll follow their list.

80 plastic Citadel miniatures including 20 marines, 20 space orks and 40 gretchin. All figures are multi-pieced and have the long pins for the round, slotted bases. The space marines have 28-mm scale suits. They are in standard armor and are armed with a two-handed bolt gun. This

bolt gun is a one-piece casting that includes hands. This piece fits onto two pegs and over the soldiers' wrists. A jump pack is added onto the peg on the back. There are two troopers with standard flamers that assemble the same way and all figures have their weapons at the ready. The two heavy-weapon troops have their right arms molded with the weapon. The launcher has missiles molded into the rack and is a fairly detailed weapon complete with skull on the grip. A sighting device is over his right eye and a trigger is held in his left hand. The belt has a skull buckle and a pouch. The sergeant has his helmet off and his head is exposed. He is carrying a bolt pistol plus a chain sword.

All the orks are identical. They are armed with bolt pistols and old-fashioned axes with heavy blades. They are wearing heavy combat boots and trousers. Each's torso armor is a spiked, padded tunic cinched by a belt with a horned skull and pouches on both sides. The glare on each's face is framed by a triple-horned helmet. There are a few mold lines and no flash. These figures should be easy to do conversions on and the space-marine style shoulders make this a different type of figure from those previously seen.

The gretchin are all identical 18-mm cannon fodder. They are armed with auto-guns and their only real armor is their spiked helmets. These gretchin are dressed in simple shoes, tunics, and pants and if you could remove the gun and replace it with a spear you would have good fantasy troops. There are some mold lines that are easily cleaned up;

The rulebook is a 98-page book that includes a color center showing much of GW's available figure line painted. This part is a help for doing the orks and gretchin as well as some different types of marines. The back contains abbreviated charts and hit tables. I recommend that you immediately make several copies. The meat-and-potatoes rules are clear, concise, and lead the new player through the game step-by-step. There are a large number of line illustrations that provide reinforcement and examples for the text, and make learning the rules easy as well as entertaining. The book covers a number of advanced rules as well as basic principles and strategies;

The Codex Imperialis book gives a good overview of the history of the empire and sets the background and flavor for the game. The majority of the book is geared toward the empire and all its different types of troops, although there are introductions to all of the different races involved. Individual unit statistics are available but not special formations or army lists. This book is also heavily illustrated with text support graphics;

The 80-page Wargear book is a collection of many of the different weapons and their statistics. The weapons are broken up by ranges and types, not by race used, so you have to look for who uses them

Besides illustrations and statistics, there are some basic strategy and uses included;

Weapon templates and counters are labeled by size and type of weapon. This is a huge improvement over previous templates that you had to dig through and memorize what weapons went with them. The templates are printed on heavy stock and in several colors, but I still recommend that they be laminated if possible;

Play sheets and reference sheets are the same as the back cover of the rulebook; laminate these and your other copies for the sake of longevity;

A card-mounted ork Dreadnought illustration. This stand-up can be used in place of the miniature;

20 full-color card ruins. These are one- and two-story ruins that must be assembled from flats. The buildings are easy to assemble and colorful but would have benefited from more variety;

A full set of dice including special sustained fire, artillery, and scatter dice. Several weapons require dice not included in the set, however;

Miscellaneous cards and counters. These multi-colored, heavy cardstock pieces give you squad set-ups, missions, and weapon statistics for beginner-level games. These can be placed in front of the players for ease of play. Overwatch and other status counters help keep bookkeeping to a minimum;

A basic painting and rulebook. Painting tips and simple turn-by-turn single troop combat;

A scenario booklet contains a minicampaign made from several scenarios that also can be played singly.

The game is similar in mechanics to the WARHAMMER FANTASY BATTLES\* game, but the instructions are much clearer, Turn sequence is logical and the effects are balanced between close combat and ranged weapons, neither being more devastating than the other. Ryan Tranter noted this game is much more dependent upon using tactics and cover than just heavy weapons and gimmicks. Vehicle combat has been simplified and is a lot faster and easier. Play moves quickly, although my crew groused about the four-turn time limit being arbitrary; it also forces people to move into combat. There were some complaints about the scenarios being stacked in favor of the space marines since they can save on a three through six, but most battles came out fairly even.

I strongly recommend this game as a SF miniatures game for beginners. GW has a large support net in place and a lot of figures available. The price is very reasonable at \$59.99 for this much material.

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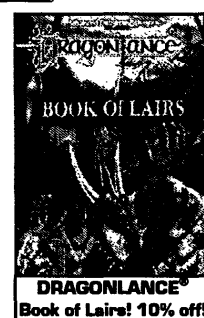
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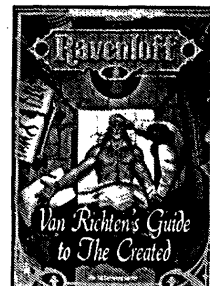


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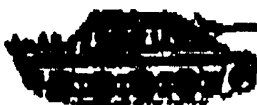
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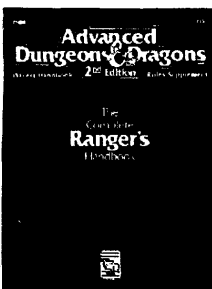
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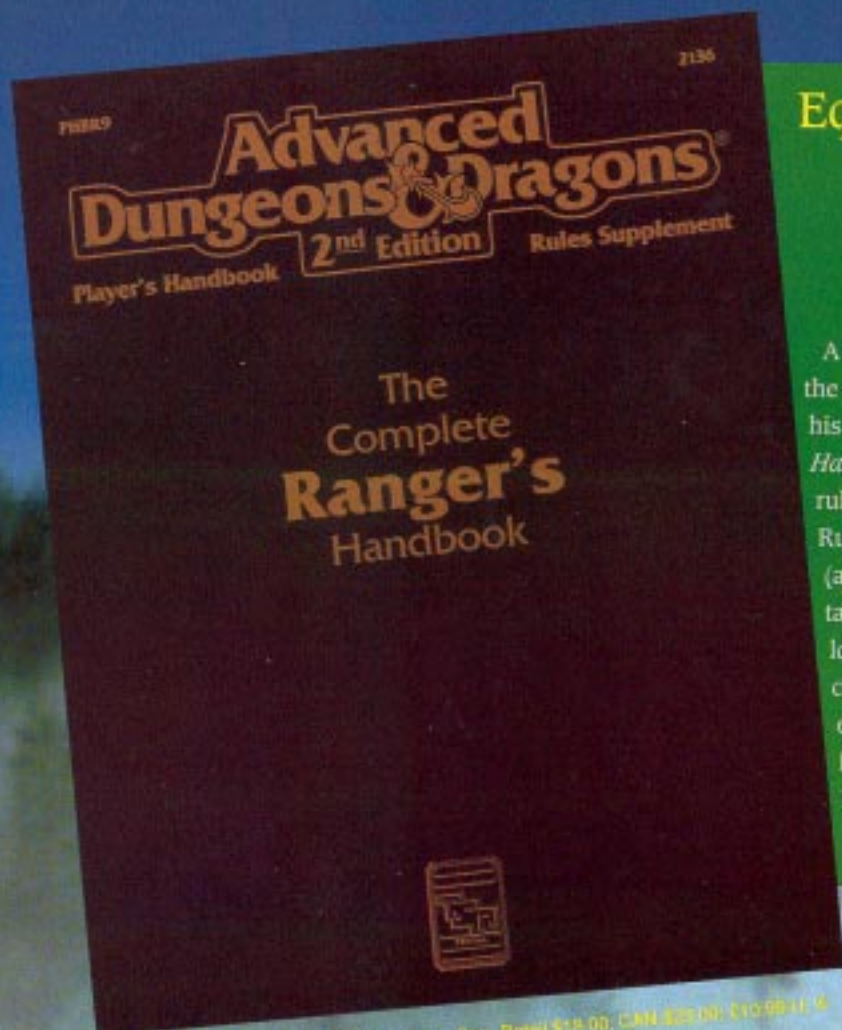
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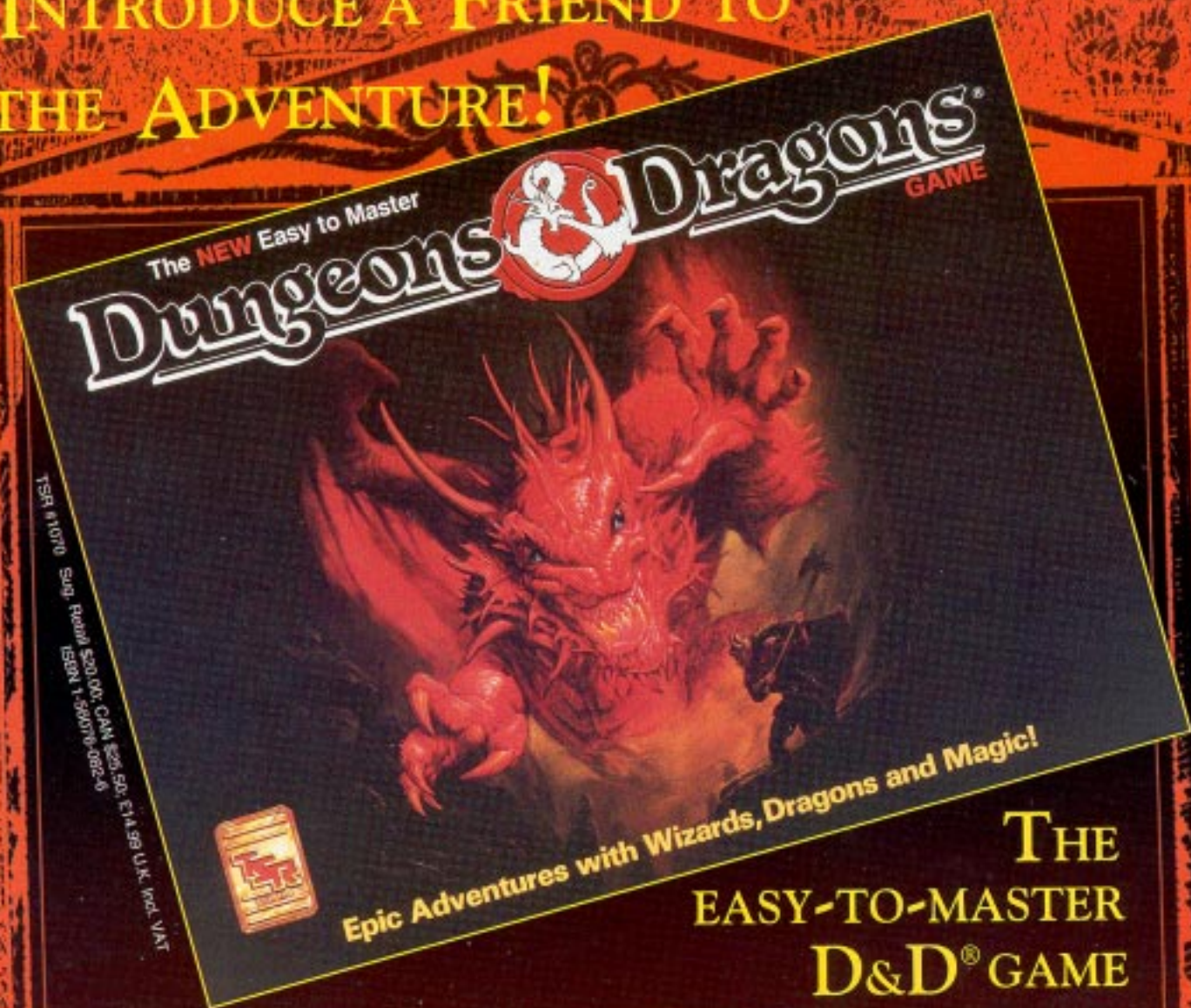
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