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Dragon® Magazine

NO. 203



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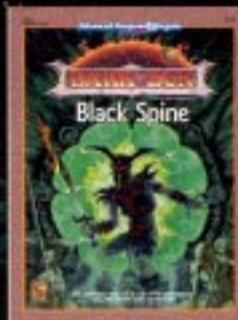


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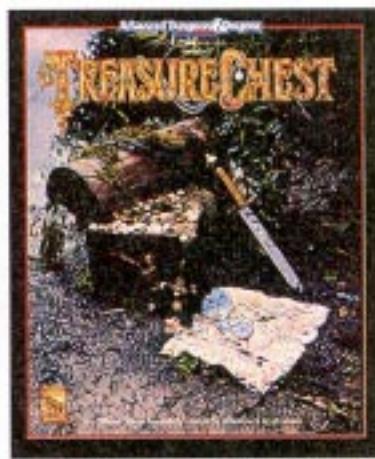
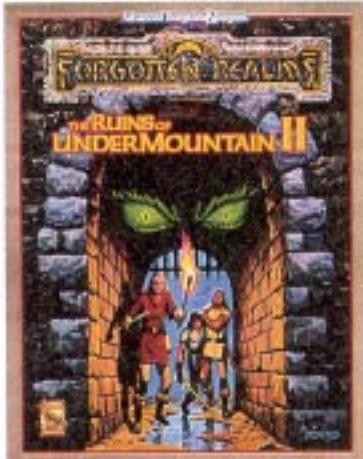
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COVER

If you haven't noticed, this month's striking cover art, "Nailed to the Gun", is the result of the collaborative efforts of veteran illustrators Timothy Bradstreet and Fred Fields. Turn to page 71 for the details on how two artists produce one illustration.

This painting is dedicated to the memory of Anneliese D. Wahrenburg, Fred Fields' mentor and teacher. Her recent passing was a tremendous loss to many.

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Letters

Mystery items found

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, 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.

A legal faux pas

Dear Dragon,

I've created a new rulebook for the AD&D® game that I want to publish. I would like to know if TSR is interested in this idea, and if it isn't, how do I publish it myself?

Name withheld by editor

The above letter is just one of many similar letters we receive at TSR, Inc. We also receive letters regarding new computer products that gamers have created for the AD&D® or D&D® games, or other TSR products. While TSR appreciates the efforts of all gamers who wish to contribute something to the games we produce, this is a very serious matter. A company like TSR creates intangible products such as characters, monsters, adventures, and even whole fantasy worlds, rather than producing nuts, bolts, TVs, or sewing machines. As such, our trademarks and copyrights are vital to the company's survival. It is for this reason that the person who wrote the letter above received a letter from TSR. Let me quote a portion of the letter.

"...We regret that we must advise you that TSR cannot allow the use of any of its copyrighted materials and/or trademarks, as any such use would infringe upon TSR's federal and common law rights. In order to fully preserve the great value inherent in its many important trademarks and materials, TSR must take all steps necessary to defend and protect its rights in its trademarks and copyrighted materials."

This means that only TSR, Inc., or those companies who receive express, written permission from TSR, can publish any material that deals with TSR's trademarks and copyrighted materials. That's it. There are no exceptions. In other words, the rulebook that the writer above created cannot be published legally by anyone other than TSR, Inc., or its authorized licensees. Remember that for most of you, the AD&D game is a hobby; for some of us, it's how we earn a living!

Now, this doesn't prevent people writing articles, short stories, and adventures for DRAGON® and DUNGEON® magazines. We want you to send us your article queries and module proposals—after you get the writer's guidelines and read and sign the TSR Disclosure Form. Reader submissions are the life-blood of both magazines.

Dear Dragon,

I'm writing in reference to the magical items mentioned in Jonathan Fox's letter in DRAGON issue #200. All the items Mr. Fox refers to can be found in the book, *Fantastic Treasures, Vol. I*, a ROLE AIDS® product from Mayfair Games. I hope this information gives Mr. Fox a hand.

I also hope someone can give me a hand in turn by letting me know where I can purchase other ROLE AIDS books.

Lesa Foster
Vicksburg MS

Thanks for the information, Lesa. I'm glad to know DRAGON Magazine can help solve some of the mysteries of the gaming industry. To answer your request, I suggest writing directly to the company and requesting a catalog. Write to: Mayfair Games, 5641 Howard St., Niles IL 60648.

Lost worlds?

Dear Dragon,

I recently picked up a copy of DRAGON issue #200 and was quite entertained, but I have two questions about the 1994 Production Calendar in that issue.

1. There is no evidence of WORLD OF GREYHAWK® or SPELLJAMMER® products. Why is this?

2. Since the MYSTARA™ setting is moving to the AD&D game, how are novice players going to learn how to play? I mean that's what the D&D setting was for—to teach new players to play before moving on to the AD&D game. Is TSR discontinuing the D&D game?

SPC Kevin Kehl
Schofield Barracks HI

Kevin, let me answer your questions in order.

1. There are no SPELLJAMMER or GREYHAWK products because TSR, Inc., has discontinued both lines because sales of both lines were sagging. This means you'll see no further products from TSR's Games Dep't., for these lines. DRAGON Magazine, on the other hand, will continue to publish material for both lines. In fact, we've gotten our hands on Carl Sargent's unpublished *Ivid the Undying* GREYHAWK manuscript and will be publishing selected morsels from it in the near future. Unfortunately, it is logically impossible to print the entire manuscript. Wolf Baur of DUNGEON® Adventures says that he and Barbara Young will consider submissions on a case-by-case basis. DUNGEON Adventures is primarily interested in publishing high-quality modules—not the setting used.

2. I don't want to re-ignite the controversy over the MYSTARA setting becoming an AD&D game world, but many gamers are obviously concerned over the fate of a favorite campaign setting. To answer your question, let me relate TSR's corporate plan regarding the D&D game and the MYSTARA setting, as I see it.

TSR is revamping its product lines to be more accessible to novice gamers. The first step in this was to create mass-market games that combine elements of board games and role-playing games—games such as the DRAGON STRIKE™ game and this year's WILDSPACE™ game. These games serve to introduce fantasy role-playing to nongamers. Gamers who are interested in the topic will be directed next to the 1994 revision of the classic D&D game set (available in June). The next step is the new First Quest: The Introduction to the AD&D Game set that comes complete with an audio CD. This set allows players to "graduate" to the AD&D game. The "new" MYSTARA setting will be compatible with this product. It is still the "introductory" campaign setting, but for the AD&D game. When players become familiar with the fundamentals of the AD&D game, they can move on to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® RAVENLOFT® PLANESCAPE™ or other settings.

The reason for this revamping is that TSR is committed to bringing new people into our hobby. Restructuring its product lines will help.

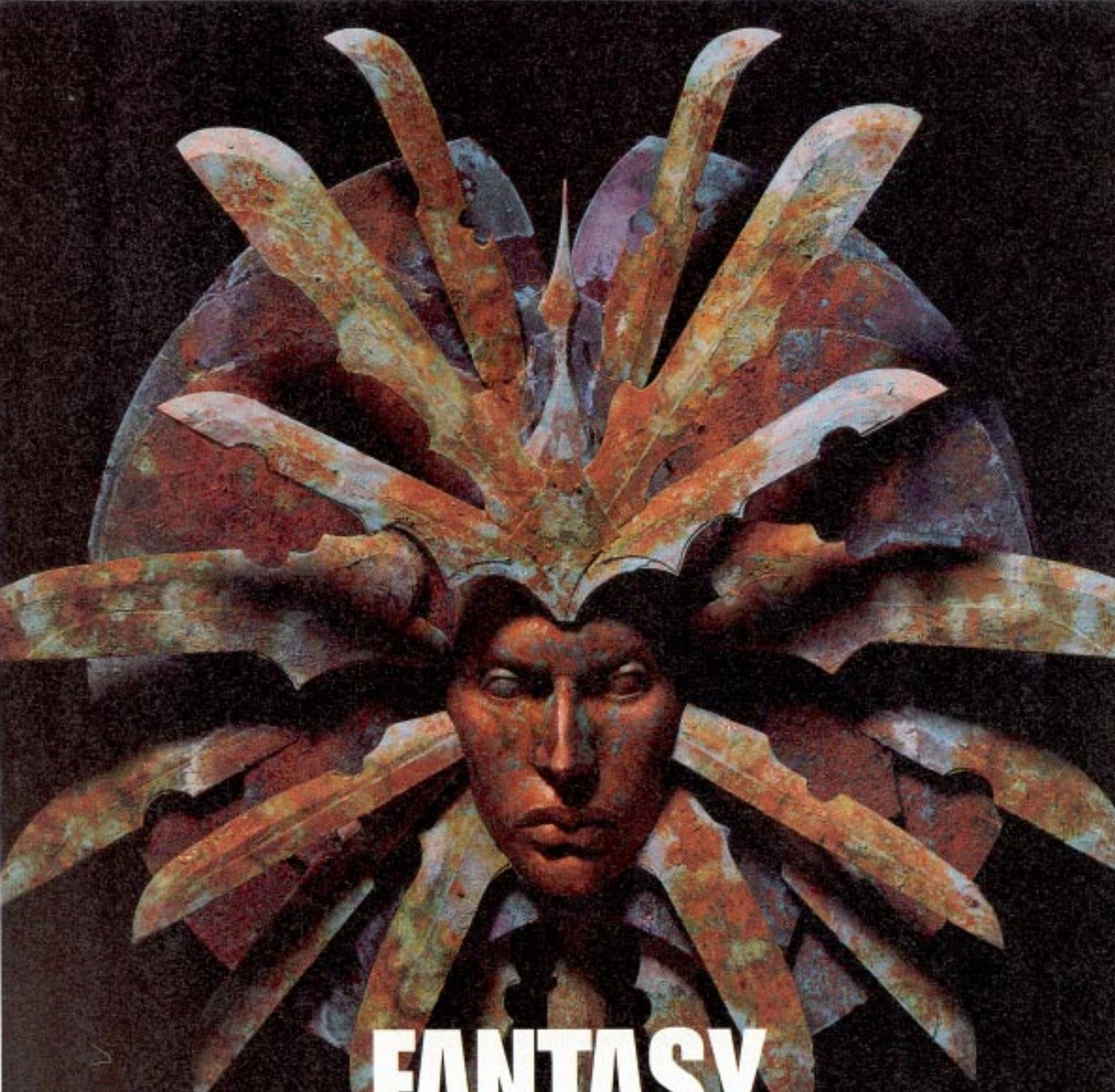
Stepping off the corporate soapbox, let me say that if you're still unhappy about the situation, there are steps you can take. You can write to TSR's Games Dep't., and voice your opinion.

Write to: Timothy B. Brown, Director of Product Research & Development, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. Another way to make your feelings known is simply by exercising your rights as a consumer by buying the products you like, and not purchasing products you don't like. Money talks as little else does.

Continued on page 118

On December 7, 1993, a gunman killed six people and wounded 20 more on a Long Island Railroad commuter train. One of the wounded is 26-year-old Kevin McCarthy, a long-time gamer. Kevin was shot in the head, and at the time of this writing, the left side of his body remains paralyzed. His father, Dennis, was killed in the shooting.

A fund has been set up to help Kevin and his family meet their mounting medical expenses. His friends, and the staff of DRAGON Magazine, ask all fellow gamers for assistance. Please send any donations to: The Kevin McCarthy Fund, 593 Nancy Rd., Mineola NY 11501. Let's pull together for one of our own.



FANTASY . . . TAKEN TO THE EDGE

COMING IN APRIL



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Editorial

I'm a game junkie ^{still}

I love games. I can't stop buying games. I guess I'm a game—especially role-playing game (RPG)—junkie. This addiction first became publicly evident just over three years ago, when I wrote an editorial that appeared in DRAGON® Magazine issue #166 (another issue with a science-fantasy theme) that dealt with my sordid gaming past. I revealed that when I was much younger I had played only TSR games. I then went on to describe several wonderful RPGs produced by other companies that I discovered after working here at TSR.

Since this issue's theme is science fantasy too, I thought it appropriate to mention some RPGs that I've come across since I wrote the first column. I do this for the same reason I wrote the other column: to broaden gaming horizons. This magazine is a fantastic (pardon the pun) forum for not just the AD&D® game, but for the gaming industry as a whole. There are scores of RPGs on the market, and I doubt anyone can keep up with all of them. This column (and this magazine) is just to make you aware of some good games that you might have missed. As in issue #166, this column is organized by gaming genre.

Fantasy: Chaosium, publishers of one of my all-time favorite horror RPGs, the CALL OF CTHULHU* game, issued a new edition of their sophisticated KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON* fantasy RPG in 1993. This comprehensive 350-page tome contains the core rules and elements of earlier supplements, plus new Celtic magic rules. Player characters (PCs) are young knights in King Arthur's Britain who strive to uphold chivalric ideals, protect the lands from ravening beasts and monsters, and accumulate enough glory to one day join Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The book is full of informative sidebars that provide reference and background information that lends this game its authentic flavor. I especially like the Character Traits rules. Traits are a *game mechanic* that adds to the role-playing possibilities of the game. What a great idea! Other sections deal with faeries, religions, family, lands, chivalry, and notably, female PCs in the Arthurian setting. This is a challenging game, not one for the *Monty Haul* school of gaming. If you're interested, check out this game at your hobby store, or write to: Chaosium, Inc., 950-A 56th St., Oakland CA 94608-3129.

Horror: I've gotten into this genre, both gaming and fiction, in a big way over the last couple of years. Perhaps that's why this genre is the only one where I'm mentioning two games instead of one. The first game you may already have heard about. The LOST SOULS* game, by Marquee Press, was first reviewed by Lester Smith in issue #186 of this magazine, and has received a lot of coverage throughout the industry since then. I don't want to rehash too much of what's already been said, but I am compelled to at least mention this RPG. Briefly, in this game the PCs are ghosts. These spirits died before their times, and are now trapped in a kind of limbo. Since they died before they were meant to, the ghosts cannot move on to any higher plane. They must build their karma to the point where they can move on. Standing in their way are evil spirits, witch doctors, and demons. If the PCs fail ("die" in other RPGs), they are reincarnated. The reincarnated form depends on how much karma they've accumulated to that point. The Reincarnation Table begins at pond scum, moves up through the animal kingdoms, and lists 10 different types of humans (from "lawyer" up to "saintly"). If you haven't noticed, this RPG combines dark humor and horror in a way few games ever have. It's an intriguing combination. If you can't find a copy in your shop, write to: Marquee Press, 14314 SW Allen Blvd. #400, Beaverton OR 97005.

The other horror RPG I want to mention is brand new. It's Pariah Press' WHISPERING VAULT* game, designed by Mike Nystul. I was lucky enough to receive a copy of the little "Black Book" edition of the game available only at conventions (Thanks, Bryan), and the full-size game should be available this month. This RPG's setting postulates that there are two realms of existence: the Realm of Flesh (our world), and the Realm of Essence. Sometimes, beings of Essence (many of whom "evolved" from flesh beings) hunger for the Realm of the Flesh and re-enter it, taking (or taking over) a body of flesh. These spirits (called the Unbidden) indulge their passions, often at the expense of our world. The PCs are beings of Essence called Stalkers who must take a physical form and venture into the Realm of Flesh to bind the Unbidden, return it to the

Realm of Essence, and cast it into the Whispering Vault so it cannot again escape to the Realm of Flesh. This game's systems are simple, and the character-creation rules are amazingly smooth. Your PCs can enter the Realm of Flesh at any point in history, and PCs can come from any background imaginable. This RPG involves some eccentric concepts, and the mechanics do not cater to hack-n-slash games, but to role-playing the horror genre. I'm looking forward to seeing the full game—I think Mike Nystul could have a hit on his hands. If you're interested in this game, write to: Pariah Press, 5744 W. Irving Park Rd., Chicago IL 60634.

Science fiction: The METASCAPE: GUILD SPACE* game is a huge space-opera RPG (in a big box) from a new game company located in Colorado: The Camelords, Ltd. This massive system comes with five books, a pad of PC record sheets, dice, counters, and six miniatures. (Also available is a basic set with fewer components and a lower price.) PCs play members of the Guild, an interstellar union of freedom-loving species. Guildspace is surrounded by potential foes, however. The evil Empire ruled by aliens, the Arithian Sphere of war-mongering peoples, and the Company, a corporate entity with no real borders, threaten the peace brought by the Guild. PCs seek to protect that peace, and have six races and 13 character "chapters" (classes or archetypes) to choose from. This RPG tries hard to cover all the SF bases. My favorite aspect of the game is the option that allows the game master (GM) to roll no dice during the game. The players make all dice rolls, the GM interprets the results. This allows a GM to concentrate on telling a good story, rather than checking charts or computing THAC0s. This is a massive system, not for the casual player. It's also incredibly complete. If you are up to mastering the system, this product is all you'll need to run an SFRPG campaign for a long time. For more information, see the "Short & sweet" section in this issue's "Role-playing Reviews" column by Rick Swan.

Science fantasy: One of the most talked-about games of the last few years is Phage Press' AMBER DICELESS ROLE-

The? Wraith first draft, White copyright Game

WOLF
1901

You've been warned

Don't run home to Mama.



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First Quest™

by James M. Ward

A new column where gaming pros relate their first role-playing experiences

When the editor of DRAGON® Magazine came to me, I thought it was a great idea. Let's create a series of articles about industry people's first experiences with role-playing games. As I recalled my first experience, I realized it wasn't nearly as exciting as other adventures and game experiences I've had over the years. What would be lacking in the retelling of my first experience was the true excitement and drama of the episode. I also believe you don't want to hear the retelling of a fantasy role-playing adventure. You can read one of the excellent short stories that appear in this magazine or one of TSR's adventure novels for a far more interesting tale. I thought it might be interesting to deal with what that first adventure did for me and its effects on my life. Effects I truly believe everyone has the chance to enjoy. If I may be allowed to get up on my soapbox, I'll cover some of those points.

One of my favorite stories deals with how I first started in this business. I was at the Lake Geneva News Agency in 1974 buying some fantasy and science-fiction books. In those good old days, a person could get a batch of books for ten bucks, which is all I had in my wallet at the time. As I scanned the shelves of books, another fellow came in and started scanning the shelves as well. When we were done we both had the same five books in our hands. We thought that was very funny. He introduced himself and we started talking about our favorite authors, and the discussion soon turned to Robert E. Howard and his Conan stories. The other fellow mentioned he had a game where you could play Conan and fight the forces of Set. I was caught hook, line, and sinker right there. A few weeks later I at his house getting help rolling up a character, and I was on my way to a twenty-year relationship that hasn't ended yet.

Dice took me forever to figure out. I was one of those gamers who waited a long time before I bought the rules and read my way through them. I quickly figured out when to roll the six-sided die (d6) for my sword or the four-sided die (d4) for my dagger. (Learning to read the d4 took me a bit of time). That 20-sided die (d20) took me forever to figure out. Saving throws, attack rolls, and anything else using that round d20 made me scrunch up my face wondering what in the world was the

number I was supposed to read. It got so embarrassing that I think I read the rules and learned out to play better out of sheer mortification.

Then, there was armor class. That's a caution. Lower is better, so a zero is much better than a seven. In almost everything else in the AD&D® and D&D® games, higher numbers are better. It took me months to figure things out.

Considering how fascinating and fun role-playing is, there's a tremendous number of things you shouldn't do while playing the game. Let me list a few of my "highlights" in hopes of helping others:

1. Never use a *sleep* spell on a giant.
2. Never use a *light* spell on a room filled with sleeping, magic-fearing natives.
3. Never throw a *lightning bolt* from a *staff of power* through a *cube of force*.
4. Never argue with your Dungeon Master. Even if you're right, even if it's a minor point, and especially when it's 11P.M. and everyone is tired.
5. You shouldn't laugh at other people's mistakes, especially when you want their cleric PCs to heal your character.
6. Being bold, brave, and daring doesn't always please the other players.
7. Complaining about the lack of treasure in a dungeon always makes the next three encounters unusually nasty.

Then there is the detailing of favorite characters. I wish I had a nickel for every character story I've heard. I make it a practice now not to talk about my characters just so that I don't bore people to tears. It's bad enough that people take forever to make decisions during the game. "Should I toss that *fireball* or should I use my *charm* spell?" "Gee, I don't know if I should use my crossbow until we've tried talking to that troll for a bit." That's why playing with a good mix of characters is so important. I tend to run quick-thinking, fast-acting characters. There are many conservative players whom I frighten away from the gaming table.

Equipment: now that's a word to live and die for. The AD&D game and the D&D game are wonderfully flexible when it comes to extrapolating medieval equipment-with magic thrown in. I think we all have our silver-coated daggers and darts. We all have our 10' poles of oak to ward off rust monsters. *Continual light* and *continual darkness* coins should be a

part of everyone's equipment lists.

The sense of wonder you get from your first magical item is almost impossible to describe to nongaming friends. I've tried a hundred times, to no avail. Hearing things like, "You don't really own the things; they're just imaginary—what's the big deal?" or "It's just a game." I can never tell if I should be shaking my head over what my friends are missing or groaning because they go just as nuts over images on a TV screen or a computer monitor.

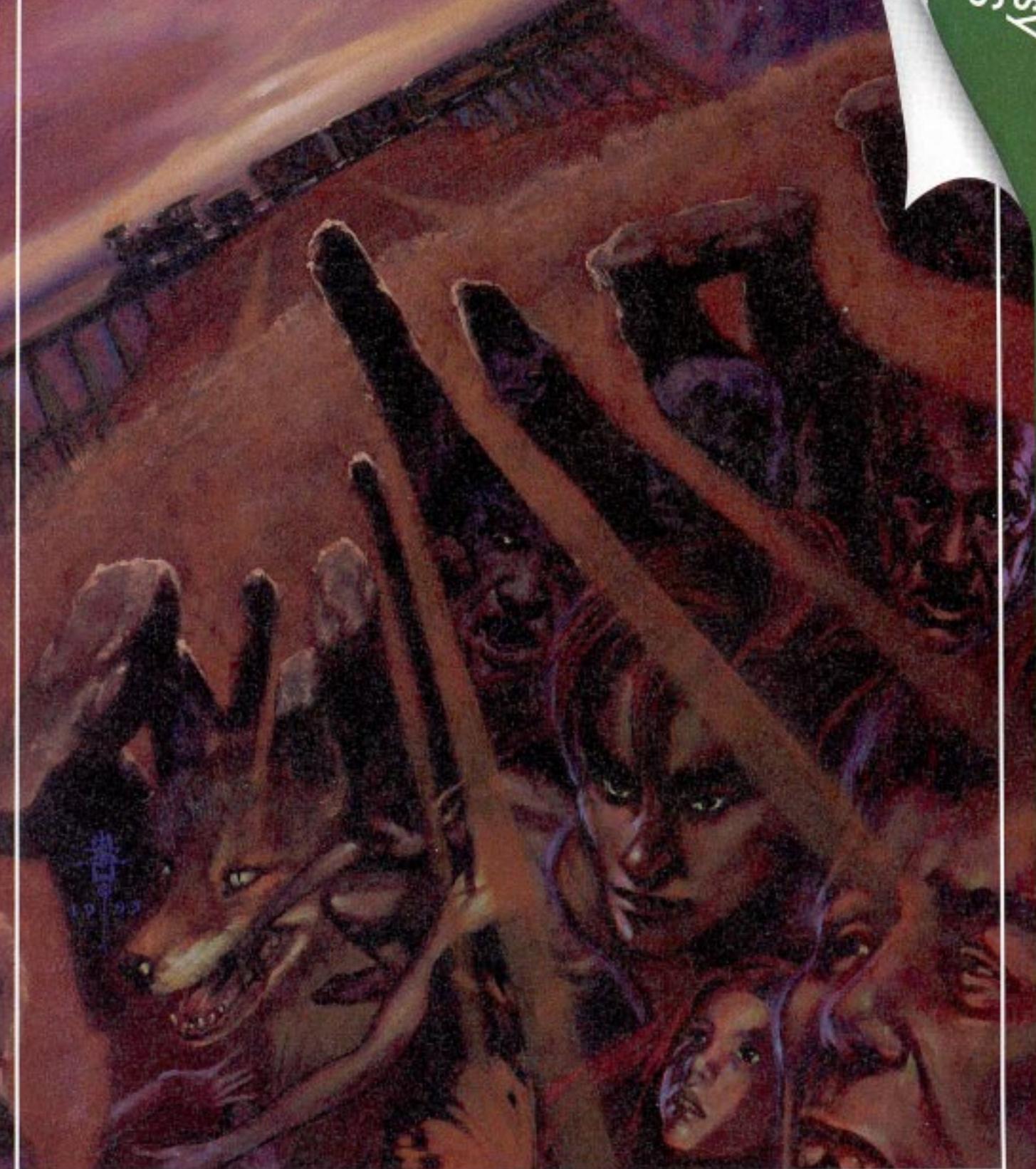
I and all role-players could ramble on forever in this vein, but I do want the chance to touch on what I've gotten out of the game. In those early years, TSR, Inc., was just a small group of friends struggling to keep up with a growing demand for product. Pretty much anyone with a typewriter and an interest could write for TSR. I was one of those lucky ones. Loving to read science fiction as well as fantasy, I was allowed to invent both the *Metamorphosis Alpha* and original GAMMA WORLD® games (with a lot of help). Being a former History and English teacher, I was interested in mythology and was allowed to write the *Gods, Demi-Gods, and Heroes* and DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ books (again with a lot of help).

I should take just a few seconds to state for the record that I know I'm no towering genius. I do have a strong imagination and can work out ideas well. All my products have been a synthesis of my talent and that of others, and I always appreciated the help. In those early days, I was a constant contributor to the *Strategic Review* and later to its bigger brother, DRAGON Magazine. I started writing novels and game books in the 1980s and have been doing products for TSR up through the present when the novel I cowrote, *Pools of Twilight*, made the best-sellers lists of B. Dalton and Waldenbook stores, and of Locus Magazine. (Now that's an experience that is hard to describe, both from the agony of the book-birthing process to the wonder of seeing it on the store shelves; it's a kick that never grows old.)

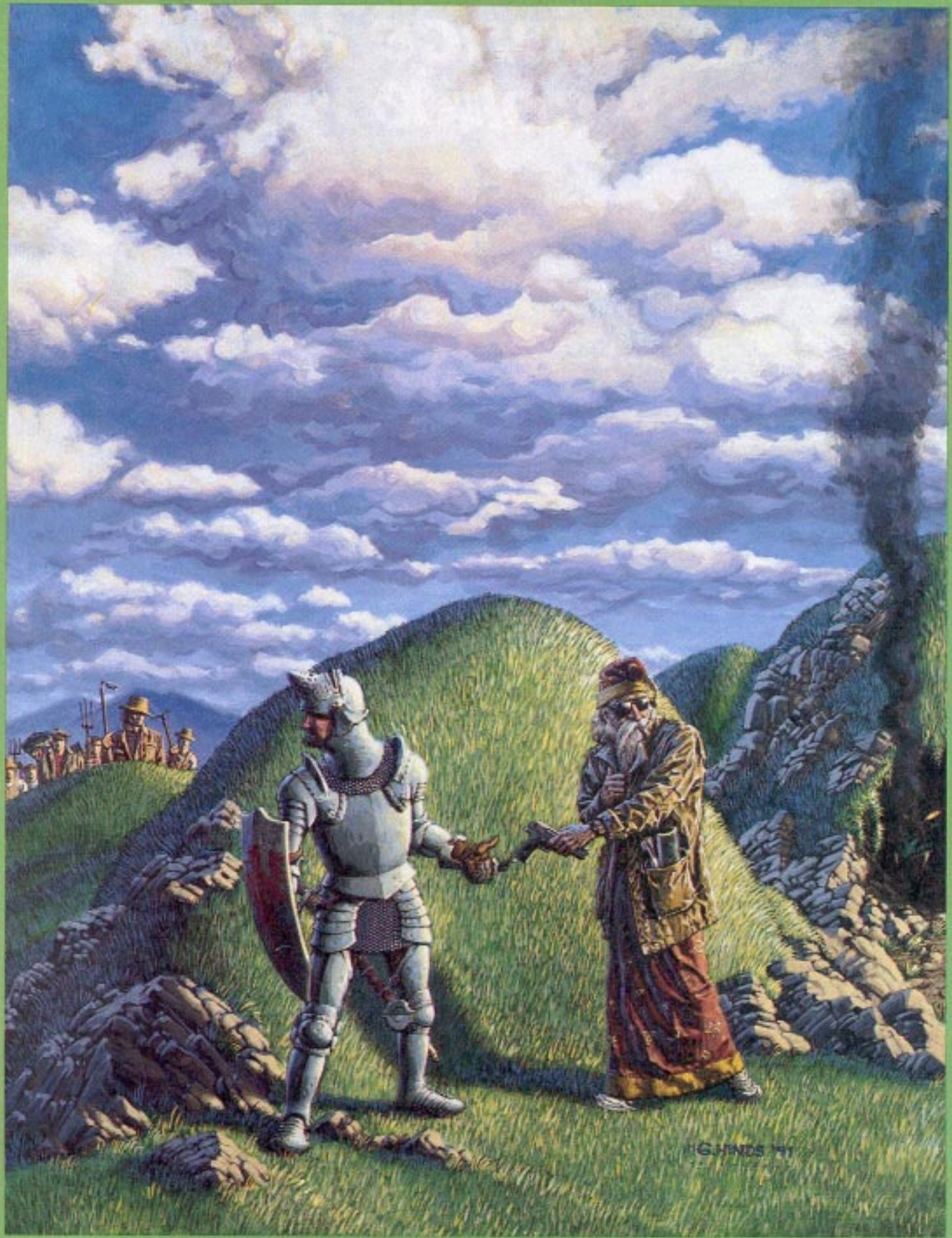
It's wonderful when your hobby can give back to you more than just a fun time, and role-playing certainly has done that for me. I hope it's done—or will do—the same for you.

*Where science and
fantasy collide*

Science
Fantasy



Artwork by Tom Dow



MORE GAMMA GOODIES

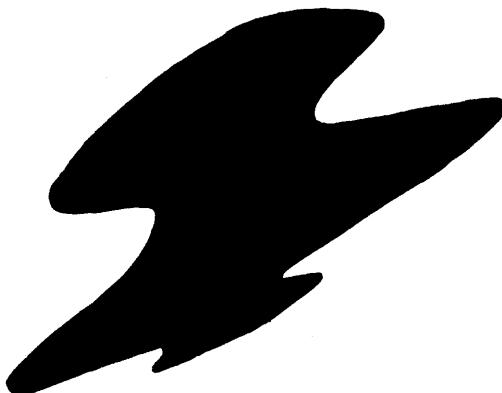
New equipment for the GAMMA WORLD® game

by Kim Eastland

Artwork by Gareth Hinds and Stephen Schwartz

One of the great thrills in TSR's GAMMA WORLD® science-fantasy role-playing game (RPG) is finding new high-tech devices and trying to figure out what they do. There is a myriad of artifacts in the new rules but, as the old saying goes, "You can never have too much good will, too many trade goods . . . or enough firepower". Therefore we present more goodies for greedy little Examiners and others who like things that go "whump" in the night.

Note: These items are considered to be in good working order and fully functional at the time of their discovery. Items that have costs listed as [XXX] indicate items that are rarely found for trade. Costs listed as ((XXX)) indicate extremely rare items that never are found simply for sale at a bazaar or by a caravan, but are special treasures or rewards for unusually hazardous tasks. All costs are in domars.



Laser pen

Tech level: V **Complexity:** 8
Duration: 1 hour **Avg. cost:** 100
Weight: .1 kg.

This 20-cm long, thin tube has a hole in one end and a button on the other. The laser pen is for marking leather, stone, plastic, metal, and other objects only. (It cannot etch duralloy.) It emits a laser beam that extends only a few cm beyond the end of the tube. Due to built-in sensors on the pen's tip that probe the surface area for hardness, the item cannot be used as a weapon (it turns itself off when detecting flesh, living hide, etc.), nor will it operate on flimsy or flammable materials, such as paper or cloth.

Kinetic damper

Tech level: V **Complexity:** 12
Duration: 10 rds. **Avg. cost:** [2500]
Weight: 8 kg.

This 10-cm unit is similar to a force-field generator, but guards against physical damage (such as bullets, arrows, melee attacks with standard weapons, frag grenades, and the like) only. It absorbs 60 points of damage, allows air (and gas, unfortunately) in freely, and has a base AC 18. In all other respects, treat it like a force-field generator.



Particle scrubber

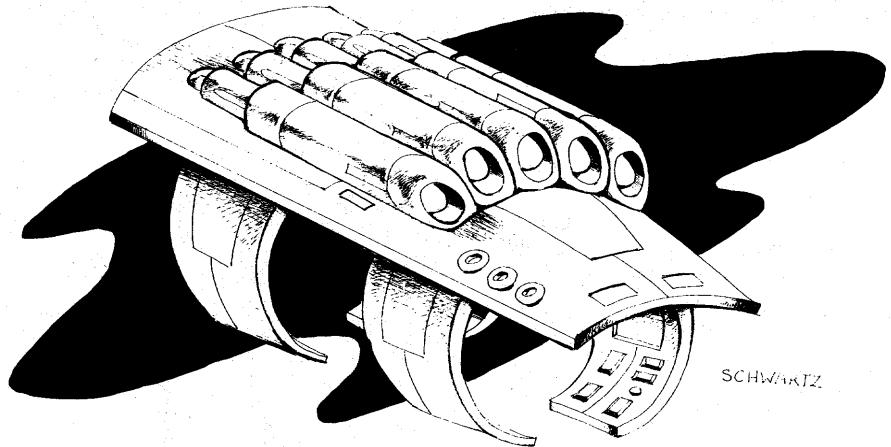
Tech level: V Complexity: 16
Duration: 30 rds. Avg. cost: 1000
Weight: .2 kg.

This 60-cm long wand emits a strange, unsettling vibration. (It has been known to spook mounts.) This vibration clears any loose paint, dirt, or other filth from any surface the wand passes over within 10 cm. The rate it cleans is approximately 30 linear cm per round. It also disinfects and sanitizes as it sweeps.

Velcan tube

Tech level: V Complexity: 13
Duration: 60 rds. Avg. cost: [1750]
Weight: 2.5 kg.

This 65-cm long by 10-cm diameter tube has an opening on one end and a pistol grip on the other. When it is fired, it fills an area directly in front of it with dazzling lights. The area filled is approximately a 15-meter sphere. Though the lights do no damage, it is impossible to see through them with any type of sight or sensor, be it natural, a mutation, or a device. The duration of this effect is $1d6 + 1$ rounds, but the velcan tube must be directed at the area the entire time. If the tube is aimed elsewhere during its duration, anyone in or looking through the lighted area is allowed a Difficult (10) IN check to see normally.



SCHWARTZ

Laser scissors

Tech level: V Complexity: 10
Duration: 20 rds. Avg. cost: [2100]
Weight: .5 kg.

This 30-cm long, metal alloy, "Y"-shaped device is lined inside the angle with laser lenses. When switched on, it cuts up to AC 15 material at a rate of 10 cm per round. Harder material ACs are cut at -1 cm slower per +1 AC (so AC 16 would cut at a rate of 9 cm per round, AC 20 at 5 cm per round, and AC 26 would not be cut at all). The item can be used as a weapon only if some appendage is placed in the angle and sliced off (then treat as UV laser pistol damage).

Stikemup

Tech level: V Complexity: 2
Duration: Special Avg. cost: [250]
Weight: 1 kg.

Stikemup is a super-strong, super-fast adhesive paste that comes in varying degrees of strength. Roll a $1d12 + 10$ for the PS rating (what is required to pull it off, pry it apart, or otherwise break the bond) e.g.; PS 22 strength stikemup can only have its bond broken by a character with a PS of 22 or better, or a corrosive of Intensity 22 or better. Stikemup comes in a squeezable tube with the approximate PS listed on the side (in terms of weight it can support). A normal tube contains six dollops.

If attaching something to a wall, door, etc. the character squeezes one dollop onto the surface, then places the object to be glued against it. This is all considered one action if the tube is already in hand. The next round the object is stuck fast to the surface. One dollop holds 10 kg. per point of its PS rating. (A PS-16 dollop of stikemup holds 160 kg.) Stikemup remains in place and bonded for up to five years if left undisturbed, longer if multiple dollops were applied.

Smart dart bracer

Tech level: V Complexity: 9
Duration: N/A Avg. cost: 310
Weight: 1.5 kg.

This long, thick plasteel bracer has five tubes that each hold one smart dart. It is worn on the forearm with a protective sheath underneath. When the arm is pointed and flexed in a certain way, one of the smart darts ejects from its tube. The ejection is strong enough to ignite the smart dart. No more than one dart may be fired in this manner per round, but it saves the wearer the time of locating a smart dart in his pack and throwing it. The user adds an additional +1 THAC for employing the bracer to launch the dart. The arm on which the bracer is located may have no other encumbrances on it—shield, armor, or devices of any kind.

Neutralizing pigments

Tech level: V Complexity: 4
Duration: Once Avg. cost: Varied
Weight: 1 kg.

Each opaque pigment comes in a 20-cm long, squeezable tube with enough paste to cover two adult humans. Each pigment is completely different in composition and acts to negate one type of attack for up to one hour or until washed off, whichever comes first. It is rumored that high-level Examiners (and other science-based character classes) know the secrets of creating the neutralizing pigments. Also, Wardents know how to work these pigments into plastic, plant fiber, or metal armor. It requires ten tubes of a specific pigment to render one human-sized armor invulnerable; no more than two type of pigments can be combined in a single piece of armor.

Color	Neutralizes	cost
Black	UV Lasers	[200]
Blue, dark	IR Lasers	[225]
Blue, light	Masks body heat	[100]
Bronze	Heat, up to 6d6 damage per round	[400]

Brown	Shaped force-field attacks (vibro weapons)	[150]
Clear	Neurosuppression fields (such as paralysis rods and stun rays)	[200]
Gold	Masers	[300]
Gray	Corrosives	[240]
Green	Electricity	[350]
Orange	Sonic (including sonar)	[550]
Pink	Agents that attack the skin, such as contact poison, gas, or spores	[450]
Purple	Blasters	[325]
Red, dark	Radiation	[700]
Red, light	Black rays	[5000]
Tan	Adhesive, such as that used on tangler nylon, webs, and stikemup (see above)	[225]
Yellow	Gravitic waves (a gravity gun)	[500]
White	Cold, up to 6d6 damage per round	[175]

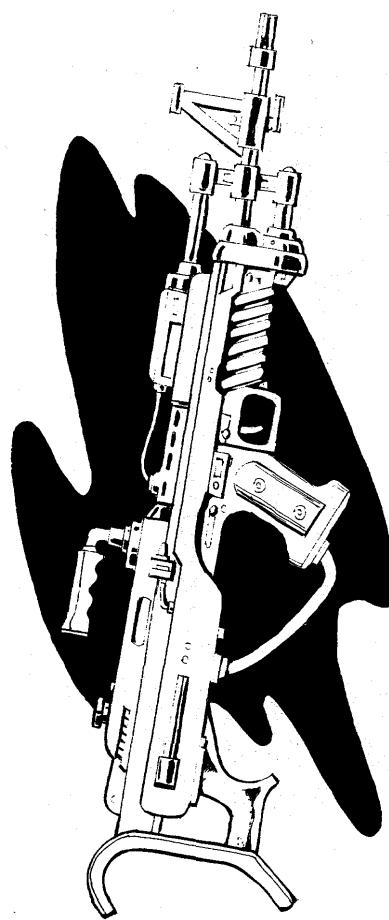
Repellents

Tech level: V Complexity: 5
Duration: Once Avg. cost: Varies
Weight: .5 kg.

Repellent containers come in many different sizes, each holding a number of different gelatinous portions, but the average container holds six. Each application of the gel must be smeared over the character and can cover one human adult. The containers are usually plastic with a pump applicator that plops the goop out in a two-hands-full portion. The repellent usually has a distinct odor, but only one type of creature finds it extremely repulsive, preventing that type of creature from tracking, eating, or even attacking the user (unless it somehow feels severely threatened). The repellent keeps creatures away for 24 hours.

A creature of average intelligence (IN 8 or better) of the same stock must make a tough (10) IN + CN modifier check every other round it is within 15 meters of a gel user. Failure means the creature cannot stomach getting anywhere close to the user (cannot attempt again for 10 + 1d10 minutes). Success means approach is possible, but actions of any kind, including movement, mental, skills, is as half normal. Some examples of repellents are:

Repellent type	cost
Feline mammals	80
Canine mammals	50
Primates (also humans)	((500))
Predatory avians	60
Predatory reptiles	100
Predatory amphibians	
Predatory insects	[200]
Predatory plant (depending on the basic stock)	[250]



U-Beam gun

Tech level: VI Complexity: 24
Duration: 2 shots Avg. cost: ((6000))
Weight: 4 kg.

This pistol with a funny-looking barrel is specifically designed for use by mutant-hunting Cryptic Alliance members and robots. A single hit by this weapon will completely negate all the mutations a character possesses for 10 + 1d12 hours, except appearance mutations (horns, antlers, gills, etc.).

If the target is of average intelligence (8 or better) it is allowed a Challenging (5) CN Check for its physical or plant mutations, a Tough (10) MS Check for its mental mutations. If successful, the character's period of loss is reduced by 75% (but will never be less than two and one-half hours of negation).

Brain jammer

Tech level: V Complexity: 25
Duration: 4 hrs. Avg. cost: ((4000))
Weight: 1 kg.

This 15-cm disc is usually worn around the neck for easy access. Once turned on, the person holding or wearing it cannot be mentally probed or contacted by empathy or telepathy, nor can Mental Control or Symbiotic Attachment affect him. It jams

these telepathic communications and powers, both incoming and outgoing, until the power cell is drained.

Portable purifier

Tech level: V Complexity: 20
Duration: 10 rds. Avg. cost: [1000]
Weight: 3 kg.

This one-meter long, 10-cm diameter cylinder is a cleaning device designed to rid the air of pollutants (such as a plant spore cloud burst, smoke, or gas). It will suck in and purify the air in a five-meter radius in two rounds.

Mine detector

Tech level: IV Complexity: 14
Duration: 2 hrs. Avg. cost: 450
Weight: 3.5 kg.

The hand-held mine detector is a 25-cm ovoid with a one-meter long, telescoping antenna on one end and a switch with an indicator window on the other. The antenna must be extended fully and the switch pushed towards the antenna to operate properly. The indicator window lights up if the antenna is pointing in the direction to a mine that is within 10 meters of the detector. If moving slowly (half walk movement rate, six meters/round maximum) and sweeping the detector back and forth in front of her, a character can make her way through a mine field using this device. The robotic mine detector operates similarly, but is linked directly to the robot's scanning and power systems and has triple the range.

Note: It is rumored that more complex, *super-detector* prototypes exist that actually display the exact range of the mine, the mine type, and the detonator type. These Tech Level V items are extremely rare and quite expensive.

Plastic melding rig

Tech level: V Complexity: 12
Duration: Special Avg. cost: [225]
Weight: 12 kg.

This special combination of chemicals (stored separately in three small tanks) provides the perfect heat spread to meld heavy-duty plastic or plasteel together without making the synthetics brittle or weakening them. The unit is equipped with a hose connected to a *melding gun* that looks like an oversized glue gun. The gun is placed at one end of where the two pieces meet and is drawn along the seam, instantly melding them together. (A meld is a weld caused by a super-fast melting together of synthetics.)

One chemical power cell is inset into the gun, and it is used to ignite the chemicals as they stream through from the tanks. The cell is used up when 100 linear feet are melded. The tank unit can be carried in place of a backpack or attached to a small, two-wheeled cart. One set of full tanks can meld 100 linear feet of seams.

TERRIBLY TWISTED TECHNOLOGY LOGY

Bizarre equipment
for Atlas Games'
OVER THE EDGE* game

©1994 by Robin D. Laws

Artwork by David Plunkett

Perhaps you've seen the ads in the backs of supermarket tabloids: "Secret knowledge of the Ancients. Anti-gravity. Magnetic Healing. Earth Energy. For FREE information send SASE to: AN-GRSC at P.O. Box 23535, Upper Montclair N.J."

Maybe you've heard a conversational aside that goes something like this: "You know, a friend of my cousin has developed a car engine that runs on water and gets 45 miles to the gallon, but the government wouldn't let him manufacture it."

Of course, if you send away to Upper Montclair, you're in for a disappointment—a murkily-photocopied pamphlet of nonsense set in small type. If you manage to track down that friend of your friend's cousin, he'll tell you the story is absolutely true, but he wasn't the designer of the engine—it was the father of a coworker. If you find the father of the co-worker, he'll send you farther along on your wild goose chase, and so on.

These modern legends of fake science are fueled by our dreams and desires, not the possibilities of real technology. Centuries ago, people invented myths about magic to fulfill their hopes—and haunt their nightmares. Today we do the same, but our imaginary miracle workers are scientists, not magicians.

However, in the psychosurreal world of Al Amarja, the setting of the OVER THE EDGE game, science, magic, and psychic powers intertwine to produce devices undreamt of by even the most fervent mail-order crackpot. In the city called The Edge, the man on the street calls these devices "Weird Tech" or "Fringe Tech."

"Weird Tech" is an imprecise term, covering any item of technology the speaker finds strange or unnerving. This is a relative judgement. A Yanomami tribal leader from the Amazon basin might feel comfort-

able with a Reptilizer (see below) because its effects are comparable to yoppo, their sacramental herb. On the other hand, he'd likely be appalled by an automatic garage-door opener.

There are a few generalizations one can make about Weird Tech. Most Weird-Tech devices relate in some way to the human psyche. In some cases, they directly alter perception or behavior. In others, they draw inspiration from mythology, from our most powerful hopes, and our deepest fears. They cross the boundaries between reliable, rational science, and the hazy worlds of psychic power and mysticism, where no experiment is exactly repeatable.

Al Amarja, for various reasons, is soaked in psychic and magical energy; many Weird-Tech devices draw on this bizarre background radiation as a secondary power source. This means that they may work only fitfully when taken off the island. Other devices, particularly those that figure in our modern myths about technology, might siphon latent psychic energy from people in their vicinity.

For example, apparent perpetual-motion machines aren't all that uncommon in Al Amarja. What their inventors don't realize is that they're not operating only on their own steam; they're sucking mental power from the unsuspecting residents of the neighborhood. The inventor, being closest to the device, is going to suffer the most mental drain—this reduction of his faculties makes it even more unlikely that he'll figure out the true nature of his amazing machine. Both The Neutralizers—The Edge's fearless hunters of the supernatural—and the government's Center for Paranormal Control spend a great deal of time on routine busts of perpetual-motion inventors. These groups are the inspiration for the shadowy government figures who always steal the miraculous discoveries of urban legend. Actually, they're protecting humanity from the soul-devouring properties of Weird Tech; as top Neutralizer agent Islam Petri often says, "There's no such thing as free energy, a free lunch, or a free gift."

What follows are descriptions of several devices that the average Al Amarjan might consider to be Weird Tech. These may contain references to OVER THE EDGE (OTE) mysteries that your group's GM wishes to keep secret. If you're a player in an OTE series, you'd better turn the page, or you'll find yourself in possession of forbidden knowledge your GM will have to hose you for having!

Along with the instrument's capabilities, we look at its appearance, what powers it possesses, just how impossible its technology is, and who currently uses or controls it. Also included is a "Warning" section, which details the hidden dangers of each device—you can use these as story ideas, or to introduce complications into the plot when your players get too complacent about using these tricky items.

If you don't run OTE, you may wish to adapt these devices to other contemporary or near-future games that mix magic, horror, and science, like Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU*, FASA's SHADOWRUN*, or GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY* systems. For example, in the CALL OF CTHULHU game, many of these devices would be right up the alley of the Fungi from Yuggoth. Others might be powered not by the psychic energy of unsuspecting humans, but from the limitless malignity of Azazoth; they might therefore have a SAN cost to use. Whatever game you play, you can retrofit these devices to the needs of your own campaign.

Brainostat

Capabilities: The Brainostat is an anti-security device designed to circumvent psychic and magical wards. A brainwave pattern is as reliable an identifier of specific individuals as fingerprints or DNA patterns. Many organizations in The Edge attempt to secure crucial locations by scanning the brainwaves of everyone attempting to enter; those who fail to match a set brainwave list, or whose brainwaves appear on a watch list, set off an alarm.

There are several different ways of setting

up such a ward, including a basic magic spell (The Omniscient Doorman, Level 4) or the Mind Frisker, an electronic device designed by the Gladstein movers. The Mind Frisker in particular is becoming rather common among The Edge's strange and powerful; the Gladsteins originally restricted it to other Mover cells but recently began to market it openly in The Edge as a source of operational revenue. Some organizations even employ low-level psychics as security guards; they'll perform a minimal brainscan on unfamiliar folks attempting to pass through their station.

As these warding methods become more common, a demand for technology to circumvent them has arisen. The Gladsteins have responded by creating the Brainostat, which copies and stores brainwave patterns. To create a facsimile of an unsuspecting person's brainwaves, the Brainostat must be set to record, placed within three meters of the victim, and left on for forty-five seconds. The copy becomes garbled if anyone else enters the three-meter radius during the recording period.

Even animals emit enough of a brainwave pattern to be picked up by the Brainostat, though usually anything lower on the evolutionary ladder than a bird won't leave much of an impression. (Some clever users of the Brainostat have gotten through defenses set to go off when encountering the mind pattern of any sentient being-by broadcasting the patterns of barn swallows.)

A simple flip of a switch and the Brainostat broadcasts the stored pattern to any warding devices within a 30-meter radius,

masking the actual pattern of the user. This is usually enough to fool even a live psychic, at least the bottom-of-the-barrel types who work as security guards.

Appearance: The Brainostat is manufactured to look like a cheap Walkman knock-off. When masking her brainwave pattern, the user must put the headphone look-a-like in her ears to establish the link. The Brainostat comes in six decorator colors. The basic model has a plastic shell; the others have an impact-resistant metal shell disguised to look plastic.

Energy requirements: The Brainostat runs on a rechargeable battery; it's about the size of a AA battery but configured differently. Its charge lasts for 30 minutes. The recharger unit weighs about 3 kg., and is 4 cm x 10 cm.

Weirdness factor: Although it's advanced beyond levels recognized by the world scientific community, the Brainostat doesn't actually break any laws of nature. It's based on the discovery that human minds broadcast extremely low-level wave energy; the Brainostat amplifies the energy in order to record it and then broadcasts it back at its original low level to receivers—magical or otherwise—that can pick it up.

Source: The Gladsteins make several models of Brainostat. The basic one, the BOS-5, can store only one brain pattern at a time; it retails for \$1,289. The BOS-10 stores up to five brain patterns and sells for \$1,489; the \$1,649 BOS-10ex is a similar item with a module that allows the user to download or upload brain patterns to or from a computer diskette. The top-of-the-line model, the BOS-20ex, has a 10-brain storage capacity, the diskette

module, and a 60-meter broadcast radius. It goes for \$2,089. Warranty extensions are negotiable. Be sure to specify PC or Mac compatibility when ordering the diskette module.

The Mind Frisker and Brainostat have become major cash cows for the Gladstein Movers, financing other research and development projects. The Mind Frisker is available through aboveground sources in The Edge—they're on sale at Gun Metal, for example. Prices range from \$650 to \$1,050 depending on model type. Brainostats are harder to come by, as the Gladsteins don't want to jeopardize Mind Frisker sales by suddenly flooding the market with an item that renders them useless. They have a distribution deal with The Net, so one must have a criminal connection to buy one.

The Gladsteins have a prototype Mind Driller, a device that can penetrate Brainostat masking 25% of the time. They plan to release it at a premium price several years down the road, when the Brainostat achieves greater market penetration. A Brainofax machine designed to foil the Mind Driller is already in the research stage.

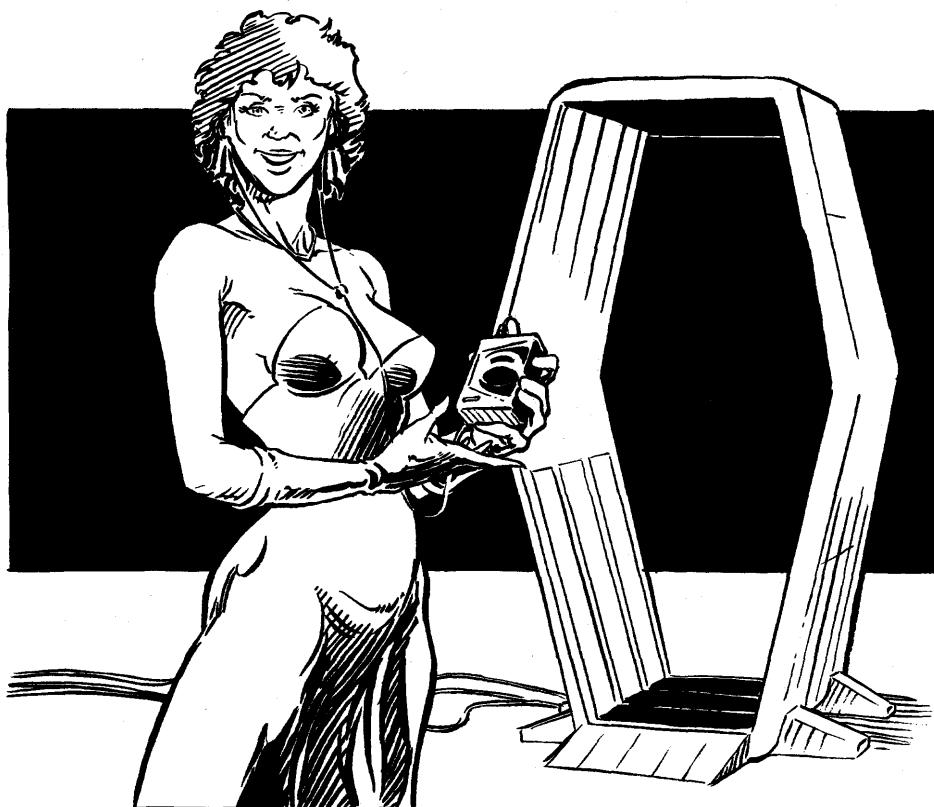
Warning: The Brainostat has an incompatibility problem with a particular non-standard version of the Omniscient Doorman spell. The ward still will be bypassed, but the spell sets up a feedback effect that begins to permanently alter the Brainostat user's own brain pattern to match the mask pattern. The victim gradually finds herself thinking like the copy source, becoming an agent of the organization she's penetrating—or even a barn swallow. The relevant version of Omniscient Doorman is rare—it was originally written in Basque and substitutes extract of ferret brain for the adder head used in the more common variant.

Hotline

Capabilities: Al Amarja attracts more than its share of spiritual seekers, men and women from all around the world who feel somehow lost, and come in search of contact with the divine. Accordingly, it houses more than its share of mystic quacks and psychic charlatans, ready to sell truckloads of crystals, potions, and self-help tapes to the rich and unwaried.

The truly unlucky, however, end up buying a Hotline, a device sold by Kergillian operatives. The street-corner hustlers who sell them are armed with a seductive promise: the Hotline, when worn somewhere near the head, awakens the latent psychic powers everyone is born with. With time, even the most unperceptive soul can develop abilities to humble Uri Geller.

Actually, the Hotline isn't to the inner world of psychic awareness, but to Kergillian HQ at E-Z Sleep. The Kergillians can monitor the thoughts and perceptions of anyone wearing a Hotline. They can also



plant thoughts in the victim; any "psychic" revelations are actually whispered into a microphone by a Kergillian at the monitoring station. The Kergillians use their customers as sleeper agents, waiting until the opportunity arises to make use of them. Typically they whisper dark and unsettling commands to drive the recipient mad; then they order him to kill an enemy of the Kergillians.

Three out of four would-be psychics toss their Hotlines away when they begin to stir disturbing thoughts, but the Kergillians are happy to succeed 25% of the time. When they do, they get an entirely expendable agent who can't be traced back to them.

Appearance: Hotlines are usually made of copper, and can be formed into various types of jewelry. The most popular models are earrings, though they also appear as chokers, bracelets, and even headbands. There's also a Hotline attachment that fits on the arm of a pair of eyeglasses.

Energy source: Like many Weird-Tech devices, Hotlines draw their power from the psychic resources of the user. This means, ironically enough, that they actually reduce a person's psi potential! Hotline users become chronically tired and irritable—which makes them more susceptible to being driven crazy.

Weirdness factor: Hotlines are alien technology. An earthly scientist attempting to analyze one would be hard-pressed to

find anything but solid copper; all its functions occur on the molecular level.

Warning: A true psychic becomes nauseated in the presence of Hotline; they can be counted on to tell the user to throw it away. Some might even be able to trace the source of the Kergillian broadcasts. Kergillians have limited experience with human psi powers and underestimate the risk of exposure they're taking by selling Hotlines in a population with as many psychics as The Edge.

Moonlight

Capabilities: A Moonlight does what you'd guess: it emits moonlight, in an intensity matching that of a normal, commercially available flashlight. It's mostly used by Neutralizers and their allies, to expose werewolves and other lunar-triggered monsters during the daylight hours. Any being that reacts to moonlight will react to being caught in its beam as they would to a full moon.

Some sorcerers who require moonlight for their ritual magics have acquired moonlights on the black market; they're considered the most convenient new product since freeze-dried henbane.

Appearance: Moonlights are manufactured to mimic brand-name flashlights from all around the world.

Energy source: Moonlights use special batteries—which also mimic the appearance of best-selling brands of regular

batteries. They run on lunar energy, and are rechargeable if left out on a brightly moonlit night. Each hour of charging permits two hours of use; maximum battery capacity is twelve hours of use.

Weirdness factor: Lunar energy is a supernatural power source. Although Moonlights work all over the world, they register as magical to spells and devices that scan for such things.

Source: The Moonlights were developed in the 1920s by early Neutralizer researchers, and have since proven to be a staple of the well-equipped horror-hunter. Because they've been around for a while, a number of them have slipped out of Neutralizer control. On the black market, they fetch anything up to \$1,000. Early models are prized by collectors of supernatural antiques; a secret auction hosted last year by Sir Arthur Compton netted \$250,000 for a 1923 prototype.

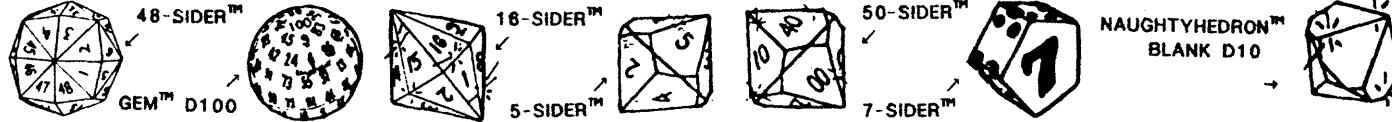
Warning: A Moonlight is a safe and effective tool for fighting the spread of lycanthropy, provided you're prepared for what the unsuspecting were creature does when you shine it on him while he stands in the check-out line at the supermarket.

NDE helmet

Capabilities: All around the world, people who experience close brushes with death report similar experiences: they see themselves floating out of their physical bodies and rushing into a glowing tunnel.

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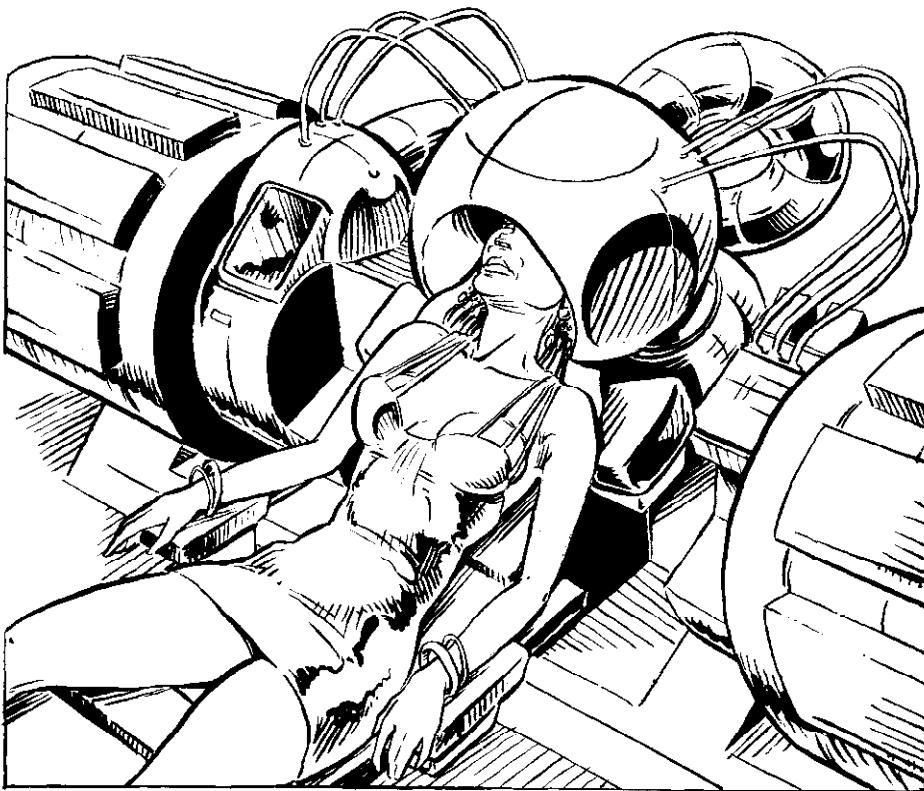
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At the end of the tunnel comes a joyous reunion with departed friends and family. Those who have these Near Death Experiences (NDE for short) often find themselves changed forever—they become more contemplative or plunge into spiritual exploration, seeking out new mystical or religious truths.

For a small minority, however, such questing isn't enough. It's the transcendent feeling of the NDE that they desperately want to recover. This is the demand the marketing geniuses at Great Beyond Tours, Inc., are ready to fill—with a generous profit margin, naturally.

The device they use to do this is the NDE helmet. It's placed on the subject's head and connected to a control board. The subject is sedated; transmitters in the helmet stimulate the cerebral cortex, flooding it with a particular pulse of electromagnetic energy. This gives rise to the same sort of hallucinations—the out-of-body trip, the tunnel, the reunion—generated by the brain as it shuts down during death.

Great Beyond's sales personnel tell their clients that the helmets briefly kill them and bring them back to life; this actually isn't so. But their customers would be outraged if they thought they were being sold hallucinations instead of the "real thing".

Appearance: The helmet is a big, black, metal device that covers the subject's entire head and shoulders; it's connected to the control board by thick copper cables that closely resembles "monster cable" sold at stereo stores. The board looks like a cross between a 1960s-era megacomputer and a recording-studio control panel.

Energy source: The NDE equipment is

plugged into normal electrical sockets. It uses about as much power as a refrigerator.

Weirdness factor: The device is about a decade ahead of conventional neuroscience in its ability to trigger the desired hallucinatory response with just the right jolt of magnetic energy, but there's nothing supernatural about it.

Source: Great Beyond Tours, Inc., is a profitable business run by research neurologist Dr. Umberto Zarcone. A few years back he accidentally discovered how to induce pseudo-NDE; he decided to keep the discovery secret in order to make more money from it. Zarcone lives in Palermo, Italy, and visits his flagship Great Beyond shop, just off the Plaza of Flowers, about once a month. The manager of the store is Alessandra Ondrus, a native-born Al Amarjan woman with a soothing helmet-side manner. Zarcone is cautiously testing how acceptable his business is; if it fails to raise a scandal, he'll quietly start to open shops in North America.

Warning: If a conspiracy knew that a certain person they wanted out of the way was a Great Beyond patron, they might break in and have an Oppenheimer rewire the equipment so that it really did kill him—for good.

Normalenses

Capabilities: Normalenses are contact lenses with advanced microcircuitry installed along their edges; the circuits are designed to receive data from the subconscious mind, and to send information to the wearer's perceptual centers. Normalenses analyze all visual stimuli received by the wearer; anything that fails to conform with his basic worldview is edited out. Instead, the lenses transmit to the brain images that he will accept as normal.

For example, a Mossad agent who bursts into a suspected enemy hideout and finds it crawling with unearthly Betelgeusans has his perceptions instantaneously edited by the lenses. They access his memory for a more suitable image; instead of nasty toad-lobsters from space, the agent sees a cell of rifle-toting Abu Nidal operatives. The agent sprays them with gunfire; as it pings off the Betelgeusan exoskeletons, he sees enemy agents shrugging off the barrage with the help of bulletproof vests. He makes a strategic retreat, and later reports the incident to headquarters. If his superiors knew they were sending him into an alien lair, they interpret his debriefing accordingly. If not, both the agent and his bosses will be in the dark forever.

Note that the lenses don't store information, so they have no objective standard of normality to enforce. Instead, they rely on the user's mind for a bank of images that mesh with his beliefs. So, if a dedicated UFO hunter hot on the trail of the Kergilians were to accidentally burst in on an Abu Nidal hideout, he'd see the Betelgeusan guards he was expecting instead of a pack of human radicals! The lenses can reinforce a false, paranoid view of the world as effectively as a debunking, rationalist one. (Of course, in Al Amarja most paranoia happens to be factually correct.)

Appearance: A set of Normalenses looks almost exactly like a mundane pair of hard contact lenses. Only a microscopic dark ring around their outside edges is a clue to their true nature.

Energy source: Normalenses draw on the mental energy of the wearer. They require this energy only when active—that is, when altering visual input to the user. For every 10 minutes the lenses remain in operation, the user needs an extra twenty minutes of sleep to wake up well-rested the following morning. After prolonged usage (a couple of hours of constant operation) a user may find himself becoming drowsy, or may have trouble thinking clearly. This psychic fatigue is subject to a wide variance between individuals, depending on their usual level of physical and mental health.

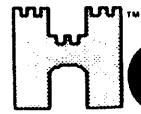
Weirdness factor: Normalenses are true Weird Tech, fusing cutting-edge microcircuitry with psychic mind-altering strategies. Only a fringe scientist versed in mind control and computer-chip technology would be able to determine their true function.

Source: Normalenses were designed by Prof. Adelmar Carlos Valle Machado of the top secret, NATO-affiliated Neutralizer research department in Brussels, Belgium. The Neutralizers seek to keep the truth about paranormal activities safely hidden from the world; they requisitioned the lenses for distribution to various Western intelligence agencies. They allow these agencies—the C.I.A., MI-6, C.S.I.S., and so on—to send operatives untrained in dealing with fringe realities into possible magical or psychic situations without frying

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their mindsets and making them useless for mundane espionage. Most agencies have small cells of weirdness-aware operatives, but they're often overworked; sending in an inexperienced cloak with a pair of Normalenses is often a necessary stopgap measure.

The supply of Normalenses is closely monitored by Neutralizer HQ; they are manufactured only in Prof. Machado's lab and may be requisitioned only by a handful of authorized high-ranking intelligence officials in various Allied nations. Neutralizer operatives also may order them; Islam Petri, for example, has two pairs safely stashed away in a secure Edge hiding spot.

It's hard to say what a stray pair of Normalenses would bring on the black market; no doubt the value would be high. However, it's likely that a Neutralizer or cloak team of some sort would actively search for any set that went missing—this would make any potential buyer think twice before shelling out megabucks.

Warning: Although Normalenses protect the user's cherished assumptions about reality, and therefore his sanity, the information-editing process can expose him to danger. An agent who mistakenly thinks his opponents are common crooks instead of evil sea anemones from the depths of time will probably make bad—possibly fatal—decisions.

Reptilizer

Capabilities: In movies and pulp novels, henchmen, thugs, and guards often willingly fight to incapacitation or death for their cruel masters. If a heroic fighting machine beats up nine of them, the tenth still howls his battle cry and leaps into a guaranteed pummelling.

In real life, it's harder to get anyone, no matter how fanatically dedicated to you, to risk severe harm on your behalf. Human instincts of self-preservation are just too strong—even the most successful behavior-conditioning techniques fail a certain percentage of the time.

The Reptilizer always works. It's an implant that transmits a neurological damping field to almost every area of the brain. It permits only a few basic animal instincts—for food and for territory—to surface in the conscious mind. Its name is based on the outdated notion of a "reptile brain" comprising the most basic, primitive portions of the mind. Actually, there are no reptiles as unrelentingly violent as a person with a Reptilizer installed. Reptilized subjects are so territorial that they rush into frenzied combat with anyone who enters an area they identify as theirs. Left alone together, a number of subjects always struggle to create a dominance structure. Those who survive this process then co-exist as a band, united in their efforts to repel intruders. For combat purposes, treat the Reptilized as Maniacs.

Unless they wish their Reptilized subjects to guard an area they have no interest in returning to, a user of the devices needs to carry a remote unit (usually called a "Sleepy Lizard") in order to pass by without being attacked. Reptilizers broadcast a field set to detect the presence of these units. When they do, they switch functions, shutting down all brain activity in the subjects, who mill about in a stupor until the holder of the Sleepy Lizard is a safe distance away. The units can be tuned to one of several hundred possible frequencies; this prevents anyone with a Sleepy Lizard from circumventing any and

all Reptilized subjects.

Archvillains with an eye for legal niceties secure slave contracts with subjects before Reptilizing them.

Appearance: The Reptilizer is a small metal plate, 1 cm × 1.5 cm, with two sharp prongs on its back; the prongs are inserted into the forebrain in the installation operation. Sleepy Lizards are small computer chips; they're often embedded in rings, brooches, belt buckles, and other unobtrusive vessels.

Energy source: Reptilizers are fiendishly efficient; they're powered by the psychic energy they drain from their subjects. Sleepy Lizards are passive devices, reacting only to the fields generated by the Reptilizer; the power they use for these brief moments is also supplied by the minds of the subjects.

Weirdness factor: Powered by psychic energy and a fringe understanding of neuroscience, these items may not work in mundane parts of the world.

Source: It's unclear whether the Reptilizer was first invented by the Movers or Pharaoh operatives; at any rate, one group evidently stole the blueprints from the other, and both now make use of them. The Movers also occasionally give them to people they're attempting to influence. As a result, Reptilizers are scarce but not unknown in The Edge—anyone moving within its secret power circles will be familiar with them.

Warning: PCs attempting to get past a gang of the Reptilized should be very certain that their Sleepy Lizards are tuned to the correct frequency; wise users change frequencies periodically.

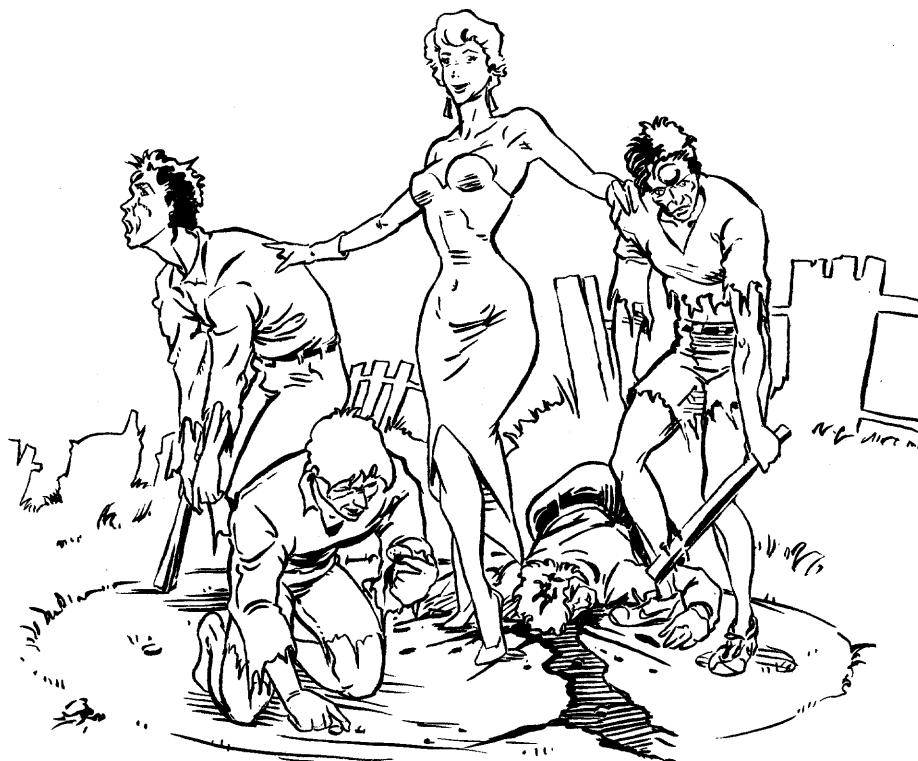
If one manages to dislodge a Reptilizer from a subject's forehead, he'll immediately cease hostilities and curl up into the fetal position, sobbing and gasping. This is risky: a misjudged blow to the forehead can kill the subject—and it's still murder to kill the Reptilized.

Anyone Reptilized for more than a few days suffers brain damage and traumatic stress disorders. Serious brain damage inevitably occurs within six months—long-term subjects are good for little but permanent institutionalization or continued subjugation to the device.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the strange items of technology found in The Edge. Some are growing in popularity, others are losing their market share. Just pray they don't show up in a department store near you!

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"Lookin' fo chum

Missions in FASA's SHADOWRUN* game

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Artwork by Tom Dow



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FASA's **SHADOWRUN** game takes place in the next century, in a high-tech cyberpunk world that has been transformed by the reappearance of magic and magical creatures. Governments, megacorporations dragons, crime families, and small political outfits—poli-clubs—all fight for influence, if not outright control. Large-scale warfare is out, at least for the moment; now the combat is small-scale, and often takes place in the shadows. This is the realm of the shadowrunners.

In this world, there is an almost infinite variety of adventures that the PCs can take part in. Inevitably, some PC classes (or "archetypes," as they are known in the game) are better suited for certain adventures than others. This article points out the types of adventures possible in the SHADOWRUN world, and the archetypes best suited to them, along with examples of how to get the various archetypes into particular adventures. Everyone has a role to play, whether he be a former wage mage, a street shaman, rigger, decker, or street samurai (including the dwarf, elf, ork, and troll street samurai in the back of the *Street Samurai Catalog*).

Mission types

Corporate extraction

The megacorporations vie with one another for new products and technological breakthroughs with which to grab a larger share of the market. If one corporation (or "corp") gets ahold of something the others don't have, it naturally occurs to those other corps to grab it, whether it be computer records and blueprints, a prototype device, or even a research scientist. Besides, hiring a "snatch-and-run" team to grab the goodies is certain to be cheaper than Research & Development costs on a modern high-tech project. At worst, they even the odds with their competitor; at best, they gain a huge advantage.

Who will Mr. Johnson be looking for in the way of kidnappers or thieves? Armed muscle is vital in this sort of mission, so street samurai, human and ork merce-

naries, former company men, and possibly a rigger (to drive the getaway car) all can sign up, and probably the burned-out mage archetype as well. If this extraction screws up the rival's exploitation of the environment, then tribesmen and shamans (the latter if magic is needed) also may be attracted. Continuing with the possible need for magic, the former wage mage, street mage, and street shaman also could find employment. For that matter, the former wage mage (and the former company man) might have inside information, if it's their old corp that's the target.

If the corp wants a more subtle operation, particularly if the target is a person, then other archetypes may be useful. Gang members may be used as cannon fodder, and if the extraction team is composed almost solely of them, the extraction may simply look like an ordinary robbery or kidnapping rather than something that seems to have corp fingerprints on it. If the target is a person, the detective archetype could check up on his likes, dislikes, and general routine, to make things easy for the extraction team. For example, if the targeted individual is a music lover, the team could set up a trap by starting a little nightclub of their own (paid for with corp funds), with a rocker on hand to draw the target into a trap on the ground of the shadowrunner's choosing.

For extraction of computer files, of course, the decker and elven decker archetypes are necessary. Most of the time, they work alone, but if the computer is a stand-alone system (i.e., not linked up with the Matrix) in order to avoid such attention, as well as computer viruses and worms, then most of the muscle mentioned above may be necessary just for the decker to get at the computer. The corp might be security-conscious enough not to have the location of the computer mentioned in its records, necessitating the use of a detective or a spell-caster with detection spells to find it.

A variant on the corporate extraction is the rescue mission, in which a kidnapping victim or stolen piece of equipment is to be retrieved. This mission plays the same as a standard extraction mission, except that in this case, there is no chance of drawing the target into a trap; she can't go anywhere! In addition, since the kidnapping corp knows somebody's likely to come looking for their prize, secrecy and security will be even heavier than usual, so detective work or detection spells will be more important in finding the target, and even more muscle may be required for the actual extraction. In an extreme case, panzers and attack helicopters may be required to crash through the corp's defenses, or at least to get the defenders' attention, requiring the services of more riggers. A rocker also might show up to hold a concert for company employees or an open-air festival for the general public next door, again to provide a diversion for the true extraction team.

Security guards

With all this stealing and kidnapping going on, it is obvious that security guards are in demand. Again, street samurai, mercenaries, former company men, and burned-out mages are ideal for this sort of work. With a large enough complex, riggers may be hired to operate patrol vehicles, while former wage mages, street mages, street shamans, and (in the countryside) shamans may be used to provide magical defense. A low-profile safehouse or the like could be protected by locals: gang members in the city or tribesmen in the countryside. Not only can they put up a fight, but since they are where they belong, their presence alone will not tip off anyone to the fact there is something there to protect. To defend computer records, of course, deckers and elven deckers are necessary. Poachers really do make the best gamekeepers.

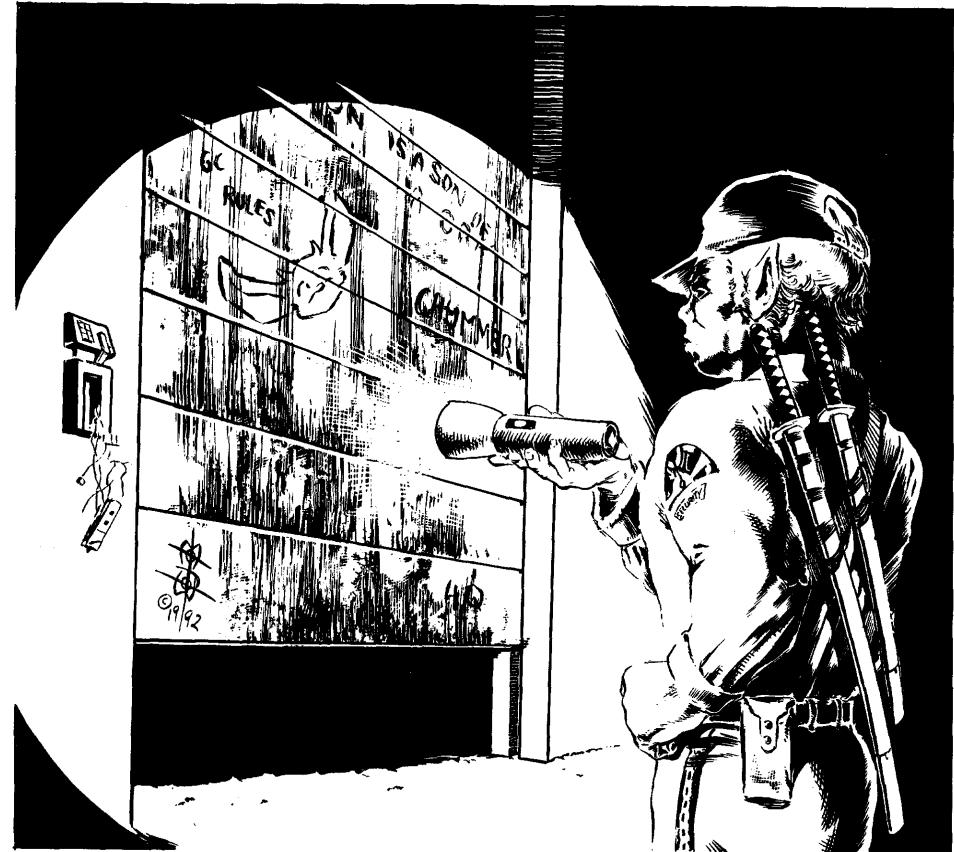
Collections

Basically, this is an extraction mission to get something nobody is trying to protect, but one that might run into trouble with the locals, both humanoid and animal. Typically, this involves going into the great outdoors either to prospect for metals or other minerals (possibly on tribal lands), or to gather materials for use in magic and the creation of magical items. Hunting animals and monsters also counts, whether for food, magical raw materials, valuable body parts such as fur or ivory, or because they're such a nuisance or menace that there's a bounty on them.

Talismongers make a big business by

gathering and selling raw magical ingredients, and any sort of character can take up this occupation, but to be sure of his sources, a spell-caster probably will want to gather his own. This means that there will always be at least one spell-casting type along on the expedition, probably several: the more, the merrier, and several poor mages may have to pool their funds to finance a single expedition. If they are going into tribal lands, a tribesman or shaman is necessary for negotiations. Perhaps a rocker could give a free concert in exchange for limited mining rights. If such is not available, or if there are plenty of big, dangerous animals in the neighborhood, then all the muscle types that are useful as security guards and combat troops will find employment here. There will be plenty of opportunities for hostile encounters. Just finding the right stuff can take weeks, and all mining and digging must be with old-fashioned tools such as picks and shovels: high-tech power tools spoil the dweomer. Make sure the soldier-types bring along lots of ammo.

In some cases, of course, the animals themselves are the prize. As with the AD&D® game and other fantasy role-playing games (RPGs), the body parts of fantastic creatures can be used as spell components and ingredients for magical items. The unicorn and greater unicorn (from the *Paranormal Animals of North America* book) both have high-value horns, as does the unicorn fish (giant narwhal). Some Awakened creatures are even good eating, such as the devil jack diamond and the gila demon. How about starting a



burger chain serving white buffalo burgers? Does Kentucky-fried roc tickle anyone's fancy? Perhaps the creatures have a bounty on them because they find people tasty. In *Paranormal Animals*, both the juggernaut and the megalodon are mentioned as having bounties on them. Break out the high-powered rifles and assault cannons (and the trauma patches), chummers, we're going big-game hunting!

There is, of course, the "bring 'em back alive" option: taking Awakened creatures alive. Clients could be zoos, eccentric collectors, museums, circuses, mages who either want to experiment on them or to breed them to insure a steady future supply of magical raw materials, or corps looking for experimental subjects or guard animals. Unfortunately, narcojet guns and even the largest net guns are only made to handle human-sized targets and those only slightly larger, such as trolls. The shadow-runners will be on their own when it comes to finding the means to capture the big beasts, to say nothing of finding large enough cages for them and the means to transport them. Even with ultramodern conveniences, monster hunting can be rougher in the SHADOWRUN game than in the standard fantasy game. Did you enjoy selling baby dragons and dragon parts in a fantasy game before taking up the SHADOWRUN game? Bad news: in this world, dragons can become the heads of multinational corporations and the operators of amusement parks, they can ally with the biggest environmentalists' groups and natives to help protect a wilderness area, and in one recorded case (Dunkel-

zahn), even jacking into the Matrix. Let's see a fantasy dragon top that!

Smuggling

This involves sneaking goods into or out of an area. Gang members and the standard combat types are the main archetypes who engage in this sort of business practice, and shamans and tribesmen might get involved in wilderness areas. Any type of mage or shaman can be brought along if magical backup is required. Aside from combat, they can detect patrols with divination magic, or use illusions to cover the smugglers' retreat. If a rocker gets her own band together, perhaps they could smuggle some items in their instruments, assuming that no one would even consider the possibility that they might have smuggled goods in their luggage. Most smuggling involves goods stashed in a vehicle of some sort, making this the mission of choice for riggers. The two decker archetypes, of course, do it all in the Matrix, stealing funds and information without help from anyone, as long as they have access to the target's computer system.

Espionage

This is one of the few missions that de-emphasizes combat, but can be one of the most fun. If the PCs do their jobs right, they won't need to fight, but if they screw up, the odds against them will be so great that they haven't a prayer anyway. Theoretically, anyone could be used in a spying mission, but the detective archetype is the best man for any spying job that doesn't involve computer-stored information. In

that case, of course, the decker archetypes are the ones for the job. On a lower level, the gang member could pick up the word on the street, and the tribesmen could learn what's going on in the great outdoors. If someone in the know loves music, he might get so excited upon meeting a real live rocker that he lets slip a few bits of information that he shouldn't have. Perhaps the former wage mage and company man still have friends at the old office, or they could sign up to work at a new corp as cover for their undercover activities. The same goes for the burned-out mage, if she used to be a wage mage. For simple reconnaissance instead of cloak-and-dagger missions, a rigger could drive a recon vehicle of some sort, while a tribesman or a mercenary type trained in recon work could check up on what's going on around a secret installation. Even spell-casters can find things out using detection spells, or sneak around under cover of illusions.

Wetwork

This is what happens when a corporate leader, research scientist, law-enforcement type, or rival gang leader is good at what he does, but can't be bought (or extracted, in the case of the research scientist). Since he isn't going to work for you, and he's hurting you with his operations, then the only thing left is to take him out. Most terminations involve only a single assassin, who is almost always a company man or a street samurai. If he has magical defenses, a spell-caster of some sort could be used, and a gang member could mug him on the street and then geek him, to lull suspicions of corporate involvement by making it seem to be an ordinary violent robbery. Likewise, a rigger could turn him into just another hit-and-run statistic, or run him off the road (and over a cliff). This category also includes sabotage, to destroy a formula or prototype that cannot be stolen.

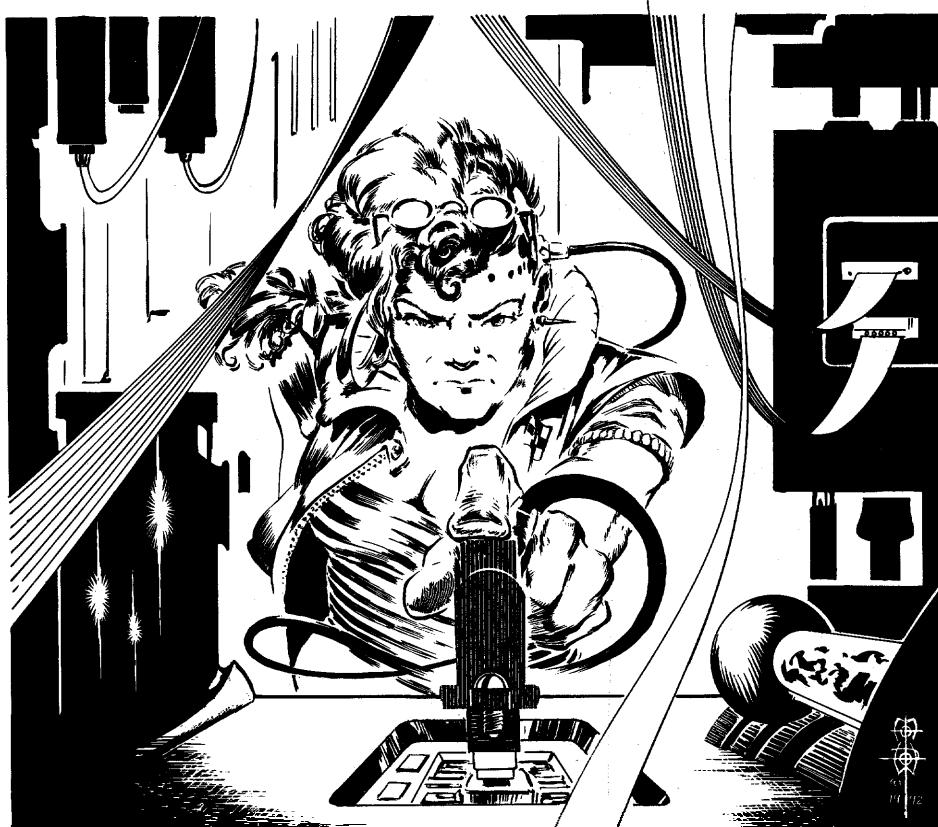
Combat

This can be a termination on an heroic scale; to wipe out a rival gang, destroy a rival corp's installation, or rub out a local tribe. Raids on heavily-guarded places, for whatever reason, also count, causing this category to overlap with some of the other missions. All fighter-types are used in this, as are all spell-casters who have spells that work in battle. Riggers can handle panzers and gunships, and possibly other combat vehicles as well. Gang members in the city, or tribesmen in the country, also can be used as local combat experts or cannon fodder. Large-scale warfare, however, doesn't occur too often in this game.

Putting it all together

This section consists of a series of adventure examples, with suggestions on how to get various archetypes involved in them.

Adventure #1: Aztechnology and MTC are competing for government contracts



from the UCAS and CAS for a new super-powered jet engine. If one side's air force gets it, the other has to have it as well. Aztechnology is slightly ahead of its rival, so Mr. Johnson of MTC is in the market for shadowrunners. Their mission, should they chose to accept it (turning down missions doesn't earn you much yen, chummer), consists of what military men call a reconnaissance in force. Plainly put, they must find the lab where the research is taking place, raid it, and snatch the plans or the top scientists working on it. Failing the last part, they are to wreak whatever havoc is necessary to at least be sure that Aztechnology doesn't complete their project, either.

The party in this case starts with a decker, who hits the Matrix to find out where the project is and who is working on it, as well as little details like how good the security is. One decker is enough to start with, but hiring another may be necessary if the first gets iced for his trouble. For the actual hit, a collection of street samurai and mercenaries, human and otherwise, is assembled, with riggers driving trucks and Banshee panzers for transportation and support. If possible, a street mage or shaman with combat spells will be brought along for additional support, with one skilled in healing magic (a Snake-totem street shaman) for taking care of any injuries incurred.

Adventure #2: This is a more delicate operation: corporate extraction. A rival company's scientist has just made some stunning breakthroughs, and Mr. Johnson (him again?) wants him, so a kidnapping is in order. Needless to say, Mr. Johnson wants him alive, so this little operation has to be planned very carefully.

Now it's time for some good old-fashioned detective work. A detective is hired, she sneaks around the scientist and his ring of security guards, and lists where he likes to hang out in his off hours. In this instance, let's assume he likes modern rock, and chooses his hangouts accordingly. The party uses corp money to rent a fly-trap place and turn it into a hot new nightclub. A rocker archetype is hired to play the siren, and the word gets around about that hot new singer, Lori Lei.

When the prospective target shows up to listen, the rest of the team is waiting in ambush. The actual snatch is made by a number of gang members (who blend right in with the other patrons), ex-company men, and street samurai. Because the prize is a human being who must be kept alive at all costs, there will be a street mage or shaman with healing powers along, just in case the scientist gets caught in the crossfire. Needless to say, the scientist gets precedence over any wounded shadowrunners, and rightly so. If Mr. Johnson discovers that the prize is dead because you hogged all the medical treatment, not even the strongest healing magic will be able to save your PCs.

Adventure #3: This is a nice, simple

mission: security-guard work at a corporate facility. All the shadowrunners have to do is defend their employer's property against all comers, no matter how numerous or heavily armed.

This is the type of scenario where human and ork mercenaries really shine, with street samurai a close second. While these types are being rounded up, a human or elven decker may be going through the corporate records of their employer's chief rivals, to find any indication of preparations for an attack. As always, mages or shamans will be hired if they can be had, with those using combat spells taking precedence over healers.

Adventure #4: In this one, a mage needs a firedrake bone to turn into a wand that focuses fireballs. It's safari time, boys and girls! Needless to say, at least one mage is going to be along on this one. Shamans also might be useful, and even a burned-out mage can give useful magical advice. Of course, street samurai and mercenaries are still going to be needed as muscle, and a rigger or two may be necessary to transport the party.

Adventure #5: The party must collect a large quantity of crystals for their corp's wage mages to make charms out of. This scenario is similar to Adventure #4, but differs in several ways. First, while a hunting party could disguise its motives until they actually see the beast they want (after which it's a matter of "shoot, loot, and scoot"), one that sets up mining operations will not be able to hide its activities from the locals, including many Indian tribes who don't want to see Mother Earth ravaged any further. Thus, besides taking on the local wildlife, the party has to deal with the Indians or whoever owns the land in question.

Party composition will vary. The bloodier-minded guys will simply hire more mercenaries and street samurai, along with any mages and shamans with combat spells that they can find. Similarly, more riggers may be needed, to drive combat machines such as the Banshee panzer as well as trucks. For role-players, more diplomatic types may be found. Shamans of nature or regular tribesmen may serve as ambassadors to smooth any ruffled feathers. Rockers might give free concerts in exchange for a limited use of tribal lands, and shamans and mages who have healing spells can make themselves quite useful, indeed. Even the combat types could be useful in diplomacy, if they agree to make the area safer by killing off the nastier Awakened creatures infesting it.

Player flexibility

In many role-playing campaigns, no matter what genre is used, more experienced players often play more than one character at a time. Given the varied nature of SHADOWRUN adventures, this sort of thing is almost mandatory if the players want to avoid getting stuck in the rut of

running the same sort of adventure over and over again. PCs who are not deckers obviously will not be able to share the adventures those characters have in the Matrix, and decker PCs generally do poorly in wilderness adventures far from computer terminals. In a world filled with action and adventure, the PCs never should be able to predict just what sort of adventure they will be going on next.

Given the sort of flexibility the players need to have to be able to play characters well-suited for going on any type of adventure at a moment's notice, it would seem to be a good idea for each player to design several characters of different abilities, such as a decker, a shaman, and a street samurai. When an adventure comes up in which one character is better suited for than another (no shaman is going to go bumming around in the Matrix), the players can switch characters, cooperating with the GM to come up with a reasonable explanation for the replacement in game terms. If several characters are equally suitable, then the player could use one to replace the current character if she is wounded and recuperating.

This sort of solution works best if the players involved are of sufficient flexibility to handle a wide variety of character types. Being a decker does not prepare one for a life of dealing with magic, and neither is adequate training on its own for the life of a shoot-'em-up street samurai or mercenary. If a player who has only played one sort of character tries this, the result will be a succession of improperly played characters. Fortunately, the SHADOWRUN game, with its mixture of fantasy and cyberpunk elements, appeals to older and more experienced gamers who possess this flexibility.

It is obvious that, in the SHADOWRUN game, the types of characters required for each adventure vary widely, due to the changing natures of the jobs at hand. The party that kidnaps a scientist in an extraction adventure may spend the next adventure as security guards who must make sure the extracted person's former employers don't launch a re-extraction raid to take him back (or to kill him). To a lesser degree, this variation is true of all RPGs, but the speed of travel in modern and futuristic games makes this tendency more pronounced. If you are comfortable with playing two or more archetypes, particularly if you are skilled enough to handle more than one character at a time, you should have a fine time playing the SHADOWRUN game, which is, after all, the whole point.

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FOR YOUR PRE-REGISTRATION PACK

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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) and telephone number(s) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. **No** call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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

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

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

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: \$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 anime and open gaming. Registration: \$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.

POINT CON I, March 12-13 WI

This convention will be held at the University Center on the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus in Stevens Point, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a games swap and seminars. Send an SASE to: GASP, Box 41, University Activities Office, University Center UWSP Stevens Point WI 54481.

PRINCECON XIX, March 11-13 NJ

This convention will be held at Whig Hall on the campus of Princeton University in Princeton, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and

miniatures games. Registration: \$15. Write to: Matt Zinno, 432 Pyne Hall, Princeton NJ 08544. Make checks payable to Simulation Games Union.

SOUTH MOUNTAIN '94, March 12-13 PA

This convention will be held at the University Center of Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$10/weekend or \$7/day preregistered; \$13/weekend or \$10/day at the door. Write to: Bernard Lee, P.O. Box 0230, Lehigh Univ., Bethlehem PA 18015.

CHAOTICON '94, March 18-20 NY

This convention will be held at Clarkson University in Potsdam, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5/day or \$10/weekend. Write to: William Sanders, Clarkson Univ., Box 6987, Potsdam NY 13699; or E-mail to: gauntlet@craft.comp.clarkson.edu.

BOGGLECON 2, March 19 PA

This convention will be held at the Easton Inn in Easton, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games, dealers, a painted-miniatures contest, demos, and RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$10 plus game tickets. Send a long SASE to: Michael Griffith, 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091.

DAY OF CONFLICT, 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 CONFLICT, 1250 N. 68th St. #206, Wauwatosa WI 53213-2896.

NANOCON V, March 19 MI

This convention will be held at Fisher Hall on the campus of Michigan Tech in Houghton, Mich. Guest of honor is Jody Lynn Nye. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, demos, costumes, and anime. Registration: \$4 (\$3 with a valid student ID). Write to: NANOCON V, c/o James Leithead, 65 Isle Royale #11, Houghton MI 49931.

RUCON IV, March 19-20 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.

MAGNUM OPUS CON IX, March 24-27 SC

This convention will be held at the Hyatt

❖ indicates an Australian convention.
✽ indicates a Canadian convention.
● indicates a European convention.

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, anime, 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: \$17. 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.

CONNCON '94, March 25-27 CT

This convention will be held at the Danbury Hilton & Towers in Danbury, Conn. Guests include Jean Rabe and Sam Lewis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events. Write to: CONNCON, P.O. Box 444, Sherman CT 06812.

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: \$30. Write to: MID-SOUTH CON, P.O. Box 22749, Memphis TN 38122.

SOUTHERN MAINE CON '94 ME

This convention will be held at the University of Southern Maine's Portland Campus Center. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration rates vary. Write to: Table Top Gamers, c/o Richard Davis, Powers House, Univ. of Southern Maine, 96 Falmouth St., Portland ME 04103.

SF3SIG '94, March 26-27 IL

This convention will be held at the Rockford College in Rockford, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$3/weekend or \$2/day. Write to: SF3SIG, College Box 237, Rockford College, 5050 E. State St., Rockford IL 61108.

LITTLE WARS* '94, March 31-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.

CONQUEST '94, April 1-4 ♦

This convention will be held at Melbourne University High School in Melbourne, Victoria. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, demos, open gaming, dealers, videos, and fund-raising for charity. Registration: \$20 (Australian) plus a small competition fee. Write to: CONQUEST '94, P.O. Box 312, Knoxfield, M.D.A. Victoria, AUSTRALIA, 3180.

RUNES '94, April 2 TX

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn-North in Ft. Worth, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$6. Write to: Gargoyle Games, P.O. Box 100073, Ft. Worth TX 76185.

CLARE-VOYANCE '94, April 8-10 CA

This convention will be held on the campuses of Claremont Colleges in Claremont, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show. GMs are welcome. Registration: \$5, plus a \$2 fee per game. Write to: Games Central, Storyhouse Claremont McKenna College, Claremont CA 91711.

ONEONTACON '94, April 8-10 NY

This convention will be held at the Hunt Union on the SUNY campus in Oneonta, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, videos, door prizes, and a special speaker. Registration: \$9 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Discounts for students, GMs, and clubs are available. Send an SASE to: ONEONTACON '94, c/o Student Assoc., SUNY-Oneonta, Oneonta NY 13820; or E-mail to: davisw144@snyoneva.o-neonta.edu.cc.

MADICON 3, April 8-10 VA

This convention will be held at Taylor Hall on the campus of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. Guest of honor is Sharyn McCrumb. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies, dealers, and RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$10 (\$9 for students). Write to: MADICON 3, c/o SFFC, JMU Box 7202, Harrisonburg PA 22807; or e-mail: STUDSELETY@VAX-ACS.JMU.EDU.

PENTECON VI, April 8-10 NY

This convention will be held on the campus of Cornell university in Ithaca, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5. Write to: Convention Coordinators, c/o CSSS, Room #B29 White Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca NY 14853; or e-mail: Pentecon@cornell.edu.

UBCON '94, April 8-10 NY

This convention will be held on the North campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo in Amherst, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a con suite, an auction, an art show, and anime. Registration: \$9/weekend or \$6/day preregistered; \$10/weekend or \$7/day on site. Write to: UB SARPA, 363 Student Union, SUNY-Buffalo, Buffalo NY 14260.

GRYPHCON '94, April 9-10

This convention will be held at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an auction, and movies. Registration: \$14/weekend or \$8/day preregistered; \$16 and \$10 at the door. Write to:

GRYPHCON, c/o University Centre Administration, Room #266, University Centre, Univ. of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, CANADA N1G 2W1.

CON-TROLL '94, April 15- 17 TX

This SF&F convention will be held at the Clarion Inn in Houston, Tex. Guests include Margaret Weis, Alan Gutierrez, and Robert Neagle. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, panels, demos, gaming, and filking. Write to: CON-TROLL Conventions, P.O. Box 740969-1025, Houston TX 77274.

I-CON XIII, April 15-17 NY

This multimedia convention will be held on the campus of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, N.Y. Guests include Harlan Ellison, Gregory Benford, Peter David, and Julius Schwartz. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, dealers, Japanimation, and gaming. Registration rates vary. Write to: I-CON XIII, P.O. Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790-0550.

TECHNICON 11, April 15-17 VA

This SF&F convention will be held at the Brown Center for Continuing Education in Blacksburg, Va. Guests include Ellen Guon, Holly Lisle, and Tom Monaghan. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, panels, filking, videos, anime, computer games, and dealers. Registration: \$24; \$20 for students. Student discounts are available. Write to: TECHNICON 11, c/o VTSFFC, P.O. Box 256, Blacksburg

AMERICON '94 April 16-17 NJ

This Convention will be held at the Clayton American Legion Hall on the Clayton/Franklinville border in New Jersey. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$11/day preregistered; 12/day at the door. Game fees average \$2. Dealers and GMs are welcome. Write to: AMERICON, c/o Carl Thunder, P.O. Box 125, Mullica Hill NJ 08012.

HAVOC X, April 16-17 MA

This convention is also the Northeast BATTLETECH* Regional Tournament. It will be held at the Sheraton Tara hotel in Framingham Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include individual and team BATTLETECH* competitions. Write to: Brian Reddington-Wilde, 46 Highland St., Reading MA 01867.

AMIGOCON 9, April 22-24 TX

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn-Airport in El Paso, Tex. Guests include Roger Zelazny and Dell Harris. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15 before April 15; \$18 at the door. Write to: AMIGOCON, P.O. Box 3177, El Paso TX 79923.

GAME FAIRE '94, April 22-24 WA

This convention will be held at the Student Union Building of Spokane Falls Community College in Spokane, Wa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include anime. Registration: \$18 before April 11; \$20 on site. Write to: Merlyn's, North 1 Browne, Spokane WA 99201.

NAME THAT CON 7, April 22-24 MO

This SF&F convention will be held at the Airport Hilton in St. Louis, Mo. Guests include

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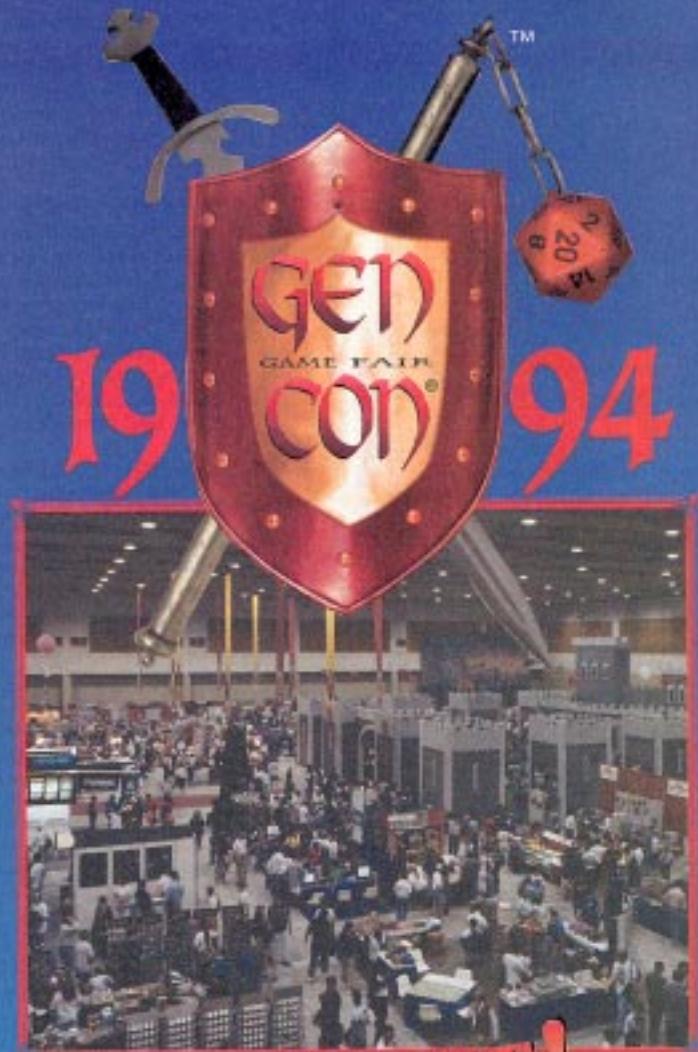
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Alan Steele, Aviva, and Mickey Zucker Reichert. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, videos, an art show, and dealers. Registration: \$18 before March 31; \$21 thereafter. Single-day rates will be available at the door. Write to: NAME THAT CON, P.O. Box 575, St. Charles MO 63302.

POINTCON XVII, April 22-24 PA

This historical, SF, and gaming convention will be held at the U. S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, dealers, computer games, and an auction. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Write to: USMA War games Committee, ATTN: POINTCON, P.O. Box 3429, West Point NY 10997.

KETTERING GAME CON X, April 23-24 OH

This convention will be held at the Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA™ Network events, computer games, and a game auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429.

MAYOCON '94, April 23-24 MN

This convention will be held at the Kahler hotel in Rochester, Minn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer and video games. Write to: RMGC, 4211 Countrywood Dr. SE, Rochester MN 55904.

MAGIC CARPET CON II April 29-May 1 GA

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Dalton, Ga. Guests include C. J. Cherryh and P.M. Griffin. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Send SASE to: MAGIC CARPET CON, PO. Box 678, Rocky Face GA 30740.

WIZARD'S CHALLENGE XII April 29-May 1 *

This convention will be held at the Delta Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Guests include Skip "Sage Advice" Williams and Sam Chupp. Registration: \$15 (Canadian). Write to: Ken McGovern, Wizards Challenge, 2101 Broad St, Regina SK CANADA S4P 1Y6.

SPRING OFFENSIVE IV, May 5-7 IL

This convention will be held at Illinois Central College in East Peoria, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5/weekend or \$3/day, plus game fees. Write to: Dave Kinsinger, The Game Room, 116 Walnut, Washington IL 61571-2646.

MARCON 29, May 13-15 OH

This convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Columbus, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Guests include Philip Jose Farmer, Barbara Hambly, Boris Vallejo, and Forrest J. Ackerman. Registration: \$26 before April 1; \$30 on site. Write to: MARCON 29, P.O. Box 211101, Columbus OH 43231.

OASIS 7, May 13-15 FL

This convention will be held at the Orlando North Hilton in Altamonte Springs, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, plus dealers, an auction, videos, and panels. Guest of honor is Raymond E. Feist.

Write to: OASFIS, P.O. Box 940992, Maitland FL 32794-0902.

MADISON GAMES CON '94, May 14-16 WI

This convention will be held at the Edgewood High School in Madison, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a game auction. Judges and dealers are welcome. Write to: Pegasus Games, 6640 Odana Rd., Madison WI 53719.

PARADOXICON II, May 21-23 *

This convention will be held at Carleton University's Tory Building in Ottawa, Ontario. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting competition and a game auction. Registration: \$25 (Canadian) preregistered; \$35 on site. Write to: PARADOXICON II, CUSC, c/o Students' Assoc., 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA K1S 5B6.

GAMESCAUCUS II, May 27-30 CA

This convention will be held at the Airport Hilton in Oakland, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, two painting contests, and movies. Registration: \$25 before May 1; \$30 on site. Write to: Trigaming Assoc., P.O. Box 4867 Walnut Creek CA 94596-0867.

MIGSCON XV, May 27-30 *

This historical gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Hamilton, Ontario. Events include board and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Write to: MIGSCON XV P.O. Box 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Hamilton, Ontario, CANADA LSL 8E9.

NASHCON '94, May 27-29 TN

This convention will be held at the Days Inn-Airport in Nashville, Tenn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include guests, dealers, and a game auction. Registration: \$18 (\$15 for HMGS and NASAMW members). Write to: NASHCON '94, c/o Games Extraordinaire, 2713 Lebanon Pike, Nashville TN 37214.

3-RIVERS GAMEFEST '94, May 27-30 PA

This convention will be held at the Airport Marriott in Pittsburgh, Penn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$18. Daily and visitor passes are available. Write to: Andon Unltd., 3-Rivers Gamefest '94, P.O. Box 3100, Kent OH 44240.



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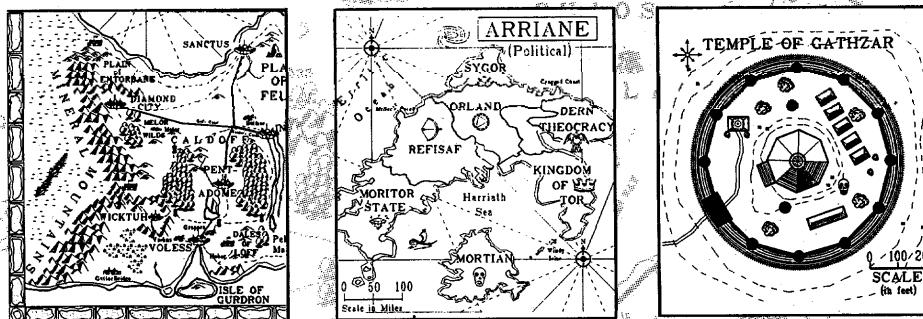
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The Blue Books of Othyisar Du'Morde

by Leonard A. Schmidt

Artwork by Nick Rose

A dark, stylized illustration featuring a man with a pale, skeletal face and a wide, toothy grin. He appears to be wearing a dark, tattered robe. To his right is a large, dark horse with a single red eye. The background is filled with jagged, black, jagged shapes resembling shards of bone or ice, and several bright, branching lightning bolts striking down from above. The overall mood is macabre and otherworldly.

Appearance: These three volumes are somewhat smallish, traveling spell books. Dark-blue in hue, they are each 1' high by 9" wide and 3/4" in thickness. The covers and backs are stained behir hide stretched over thick steel frames. Inscribed into the spine of each book is the symbol of the mage, Othyisar, a small, plain circle of bluish-white shot through the middle with a single, forked stroke of electric-blue lightning.

The covers of all three books are blank and rough, like sandpaper to the touch, and in some places the behir scales have started to come off, due to the great amount of handling of the books. Each book contains fifty pages of smooth, thick vellum, written in the long, thin handwriting of their creator.

History: This trio of tomes belonged to the Arch-Mage Othyisar Du'Morde, a

human evoker from the mountain ranges northeast of Calimshan (in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting) who has lived well beyond his years. Specializing in spells that generate or harness electrical energy as their basic vehicle, Othyisar long ago exhausted his studies here on the Prime Material plane. Releasing his followers and apprentices from service, the wizard left his smallish keep among the storm-fraught peaks and sought travel on other planes.

It is rumored that, for a time, the wizard settled in one of the mysterious Towers on a peninsula of the quasi-elemental plane of Lightning, observing the creatures and wonders there. No contact was ever attempted, and there was no word from the mage until six winters ago when, after more than a decade of absence, Othyisar resurfaced, eager to begin sorting out the various notes and experimental results he had brought back with him.

After settling a minor dispute with a group of stone giants who had taken up residence in the wizards deserted home (and hiring a few dozen dwarves to repair the damage done during the "negotiation"), the Blue Mage began traveling about the Realms. Accounts of his travels vary, but it is known that he sought out such distant and varied places as the Great Rift in Shaar, the jungles of Chult, and even the uttermost reaches of the frozen wastes beyond Ten Towns. Some say he was visiting old acquaintances, others that he was trying to reclaim various objects sold by the clan of stone giants, and a few maintained that he was seeking out materials and components with which either to create new spells or construct some magical device.

Whatever the reasons, Othyisar is known to have lost three of his traveling spell books during these journeys. These books contained many of the mage's most frequently used spells, as well as several unique spells that he either created or found during his journeys among the Inner Planes.

The first was stolen by a rival evoker while Othyisar was passing through Waterdeep; the man later turned up dead in his own house, the apparent victim of a poisonous knife wound. The book was nowhere to be found however, having long since been copied and sold. The location of the volume today is unknown.

The second book was lost on a sojourn into the vast wastelands of Anauroch during a pitched battle with a blue dragon. The wizard managed to escape with his life, but the dragon held the book within her lair until she was slain some years later by a group of shadowy warriors calling themselves "The Silent Ones". Having passed through many hands since then, the original volume is said to now rest with a reclusive elementalist in western Sembia, among the Thunder Peaks.

The last and most powerful book was left behind while making a hasty retreat from a

cavern deep within the Thaymount. Caught by a pair of Red Wizards while "procuring" an object of unknown composition and value, Du'Morde was forced to flee the cavern, but not without the device he sought and only after collapsing a goodly portion of the ceiling upon his pursuers. Almost certainly recovered from the cave-in, this book is thought to be in the keeping of the Zulkir of Evocation.

It has been several years since the losses of these books, and many sages and wizards have had the opportunity to peruse the spells contained therein, including the venerable Elminster, who is thought to have seen at least copies (if not the originals) of all three. The first book contains the spells *alarm*, *hold portal*, *normal aura* (a new spell described below), *read magic*, *shocking grasp*, *charge* (described below), *knock*, *lightning strike* (described below), *strength*, *lightning bolt*, and *staffspell* (described below). The second of the so-called Blue Books contains the spells *dig*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, *lightning shield* (described below), *Bigby's interposing hand*, *passwall*, *transmute rock to mud*, *chain lightning*, *move earth*, and *static field* (described below). It is rumored that the last book contains the more potent spells of *electric bow* (described below), *vanish*, *mind blank*, *storm* (described below), and *time stop*, though this is not certain as only a few have ever seen it.

The first book is not magicked or protected in any way. The second has a special form of *charge* spell on it (known only to Othyisar) that renews itself once every day, so that the first person touching the book on any given day will be shocked for 42 points of electrical damage (save for half damage.) The third book is dweomered with an *avoidance* spell, and written with magical ink such that the words temporarily disappear if the book is brought within an *anti-magic shell* or similar magic. It is not known whether the present holder of this tome has managed to dispel the *avoidance* without damaging the book itself.

The spells created or found by Othyisar Du'Morde are described as follows:

Normal aura (Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 1 Components: V,S
Range: Touch CT: 1 round
Duration: 1 day/lvl. Save: Special
Area of Effect: Special

By means of this spell any item of 5 g.p. weight per level of the caster can be given a nonmagical aura, so as to hide any magical nature of the item from prying eyes (and *detect magic* spells). If the object bearing the normal aura is actually held by any creature detecting for magic, he is allowed a saving throw vs. spells to perceive the item's true aura. Otherwise, the object appears to be normal to any detection magic. Any wizard specializing in illusionary magic who uses either a *detect magic* or *detect illusion* on the object will

gain a saving throw with a +4 bonus if he is holding the item. Any magical item with an intelligence or alignment cannot be affected by means of this spell.

Lightning strike (Evocation)

Level: 2 Components: V,S,M
Range: 10 yds. CT: 2
+ 1 yd./lvl.
Duration: Instant. Save: 1/2
Area of Effect: 1 or 2 creatures

This spell causes a small bolt of lightning 1" wide to shoot forth from the caster's outstretched fingertip, striking the indicated target for 1d6 points of damage for every two levels of the caster (2d6 at 3rd, 3d6 at 5th, etc., to a maximum of 5d6 at 9th level), with the target creature receiving a save for one-half damage. The bolt may be forked as a normal *lightning bolt*, striking two targets who are within 10' of each other for the full effect. The *lightning strike* is not powerful enough to cause structural damage to any building or wooden craft, as a *lightning bolt* does. The spell is otherwise the same as the third level spell *lightning bolt* (q.v.) except that the strike will not rebound off solid materials such as stone walls.

Charge (Conjuration, Abjuration)

Level: 2 Components: V,S
Range: 0 CT: 4 rounds
Duration: Special Save: Special
Area of Effect: 1 object

The caster of this spell brings forth an electrical charge from the quasi-elemental plane of Lightning, to be placed onto an inanimate object or item to protect it from the touch of any but the caster. If placed on a living being or sentient object, the dweomer fails and the spell is lost, doing no damage to the target or the caster. The first living creature to touch the charged object is shocked by an electrical discharge for two points of electrical damage per level of the caster. A save for one-half damage is allowed. The *charge* is transferred through any conductive material, so it is passed through daggers, tools, etc. The charge lasts until triggered by a living creature, dispelled, or negated by the caster. The caster may negate the charge by touching the object so protected if she desires, but the spell will not harm the caster in any event.

Staffspell (Evocation)

Level: 3 Components: V,S,M
Range: 0 CT: 1 round
Duration: 3 rds./lvl. Save: None
Area of Effect: Special

This spell creates a stout staff of electricity 6' long. The staff does damage as a normal quarterstaff, but for every five levels of the caster the staff gains a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls, for a maximum of +3 for a 15th level or higher wizard. It also can be used as a light

source, brightening from a dull glimmer to the equivalent of a *light* spell upon mental command by the caster. The staff may be used by the wielder only if he has a weapon proficiency in the staff, and may not be passed to others for their use. The staff does double damage (2d6) to all water-based creatures. The material component for this spell is a small wooden rod 18" in length, cut by the caster himself from a stout oak, and is consumed by the spell.

Lightning shield (Evocation, Alteration)
 Level: 4 Components: V,S,M
 Range: 0 CT: 1 round
 Duration: 2 rds. Save: Special
 +1 rd./lvl.
 Area of Effect: The caster

This spell is identical to the fourth-level spell *fire shield* (q.v.), except that it creates sparks rather than flames around the caster's body, and as noted below:

A.) Sparks are cold, and any lightning-based attacks will be saved at +2 on the dice, with either one-half or no damage taken. All acid-based attacks are normal, but double damage is sustained. The material component for this version is a small rubber ball.

B.) Sparks are hot, and any acid-based attacks are saved at +2 on the dice, with either one-half or no damage being taken. All lightning-based attacks are normal, but

double damage is sustained. The material component is a scale from a black dragon or a small piece of marble.

Type A has black sparks, and type B has bluish-white sparks. Note that this spell does not work in conjunction with a *fire shield*, and if the caster places both spells upon herself, each cancels the other out in a brilliant flash, negating both magicks and leaving the caster stunned for 1-3 rounds.

Static field (Evocation)

Level: 6 Components: V,S,M
 Range: Touch CT: 1 round
 Duration: 1 hour/lvl. Save: Special
 Area of Effect: On object or creature

This spell creates a field of electricity around any object of the caster's choosing. The object receives a saving throw of a 20, with a +2 bonus if it is a magical item, plus any magical bonuses it may have. If cast on a living creature, a saving throw is made for the creature at a +2 bonus. A successful save indicates that the target evaded the static field before it fully enclosed; failure means entrapment. Anyone attempting to enter or leave the sphere may not, as the field acts as a *wall of force*, and anyone touching it takes two points of electrical damage per level of the caster, or one-half damage if a save vs. spells is made. The caster cannot be harmed by the spell, but may not enter

the static field as long as it is intact.

The sphere can be created to a maximum of two feet in diameter, plus six inches for every two levels of the caster. Therefore a 20th-level wizard could create a *static field* as large as 12' in diameter, easily large enough to contain a man-sized or smaller being. Only objects that fit within the sphere can be so protected. If an attempt is made to enclose something that doesn't fit within the caster's maximum size, the spell fails and is lost. The *static field* is immobile and cannot be moved, thereby trapping any living creatures caught within.

The sphere may be brought down only by a *disintegrate* spell (which has a 25% chance of destroying the enclosed item(s) also), a successful *dispel magic* by someone of higher level than the caster, a *wish* or *alter reality* spell. A *rod of cancellation* will destroy the field (consuming the rod in the process, however), as will a *moderakainen's disjunction* spell. (Note that the *disjunction* also affects the items within the *static field*.)

The material component is a perfectly formed glass globe, 2" to 3" in diameter, containing a chip from the tooth of a blue dragon. The globe is broken on the item or creature to be enclosed by the sphere, not harming the object or creature but shattering the globe and dissolving the tooth. Breaking the globe on a conscious creature requires a successful attack roll. This spell is affected by permanency.

Electric bow (Evocation)

Level: 7 Components: V,S,M
 Range: 0 CT: 7
 Duration: Special Save: None
 Area of Effect: Special

When cast, this spell creates a light-blue, glowing bow of +1 value in the caster's hands (or on the ground at his feet, at the caster's option.) The bow can take any one of many forms, depending on the level of the caster, as shown on the chart below:

Caster's level	Bow created
14th-level	light crossbow or short bow
15th-level	heavy crossbow or composite short bow
16th-level	long bow
17th-level	composite long bow
18th-level	ballista

The caster may choose any type of bow allowable to his level or below. The *electric bow* created is as a normal bow (ranges, firing rate, etc.), and it can strike any creature as a +3 weapon, though its true bonus on attack and damage rolls is only +1. The bow can be used by the caster as if she has proficiency with the weapon in question, or by anyone of the caster's choosing who has proficiency in the weapon. The spell cannot create bows that give bonuses for exceptional strength. The bow exists until dispelled or it has fired all its arrows.

The bow automatically loads itself when

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drawn or cocked, a missile of lightning appearing in the weapon. The ballista cocks and loads itself upon the verbal command "Load," and fires upon the command "Fire," each action taking one round for a fire rate of 1/2. Flight arrows are created for short and long bows, and the appropriate quarrel appears for crossbows. These arrows do damage as normal arrows of the type of bow employed, the weapon bonus of +1, any bonuses the user may have with a bow, plus an extra point of damage for every two levels of the caster above 12th (+1 at 14th, +2 at 16th, etc.).

As many missiles may be fired from the bow as the caster has levels. However, if an arrow or bolt, magical or not, is placed or cocked into the bow, it disappears and the spell is lost, as only the special lighting arrows of the spell may be shot from the bow. The material component for this spell is a trio of fine tail feathers hand-picked from a quail, tied together with the bowstring of the bow used to bring the bird down. The Bowman who shot the bird must have been at least 8th level at the time of the kill.

Storm (Alteration)

Level: 8 Components: V,S,M
Range: 10 miles CT: 1 turn
Duration: 1 hr./lvl. Save: Special
Area of Effect: 2-mile radius

By casting this spell, the mage causes a horrendous thunderstorm to break in any vicinity he so chooses. After the casting of the spell, it takes one turn for the clouds to gather, regardless of the current weather conditions. Another turn after this the storm breaks, and rain pounds down with lightning bolts striking all over the area of effect at random.

The caster may direct one of these bolts every five rounds, at the cost of shortening the spell's duration by one hour each. The caster may direct only as many lightning bolts (directed bolts are treated as the third-level spell,) as he has levels minus two, so that a 20th-level mage could direct a total of eighteen bolts, shortening the spell's duration to only two hours (at one bolt every five rounds, it would take a minimum of one and a half hours to direct all eighteen lightning bolts.) A bolt may never be directed by the mage if doing so would negate the hour of duration in which the attempt is made. For instance, if a 16th-level wizard cast a *storm* spell and let it rage for fifteen hours without directing any bolts, he could not direct one in the last hour of the spell as that bolt would negate the hour of the spell that was already taking place. These bolts cause damage as a 6d6 *lightning bolt* (save for one-half damage,) and strike in a 5' diameter column (striking a maximum of four closely huddled man-sized creatures.) This

spell is extremely useful in assaulting towers, castles, and other fortified structures.

The caster must concentrate for the entire duration, and any disturbance during this time will negate the *storm*, causing the rains to cease and the clouds to disperse in one turn. This spell also may be cast through a crystal ball. The rains of the *storm* falls at the rate of 1/2" per hour. The material component of this spell is a used (previously stricken) lightning rod, which the caster hurls at the sky to cause the clouds to gather. The rod will fly straight up into the clouds, where it will be consumed in a brilliant lightning flash.

The last page of the third book seems to be a "shopping list" of sorts, two lengthy columns of items, creatures both in part and whole, rare flora and curious earthen materials. More than three-quarters of these items have small marks by them, leading anyone looking over the list to think that it is of materials sought by Othyisar Du'Morde on his journeys. As to what purpose these materials might hold is anyone's guess, for there are no notes or other markings of any kind save a short sentence about picking up "crystal globes" or "glass globes/spheres". Nothing is known about this reference or its relation to the listed materials.

Ω

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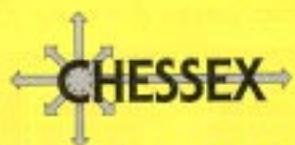
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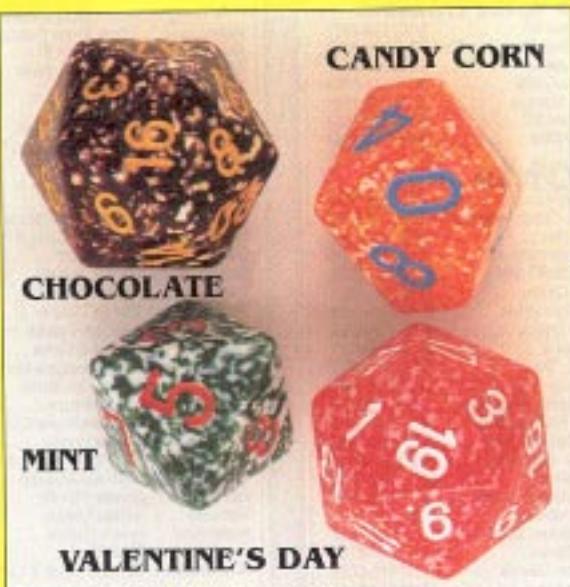
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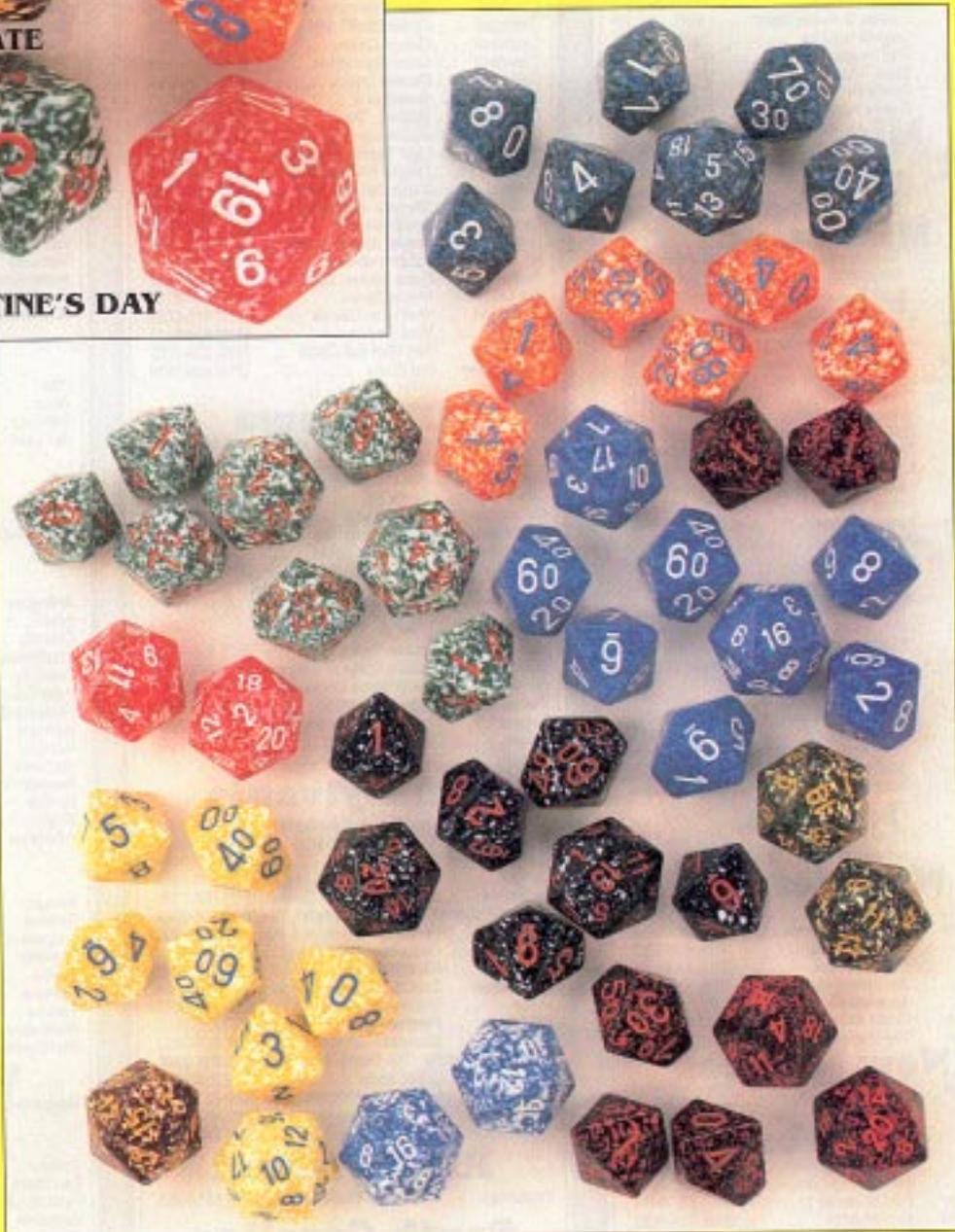
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AMAZING

ENGINE™

System Guide

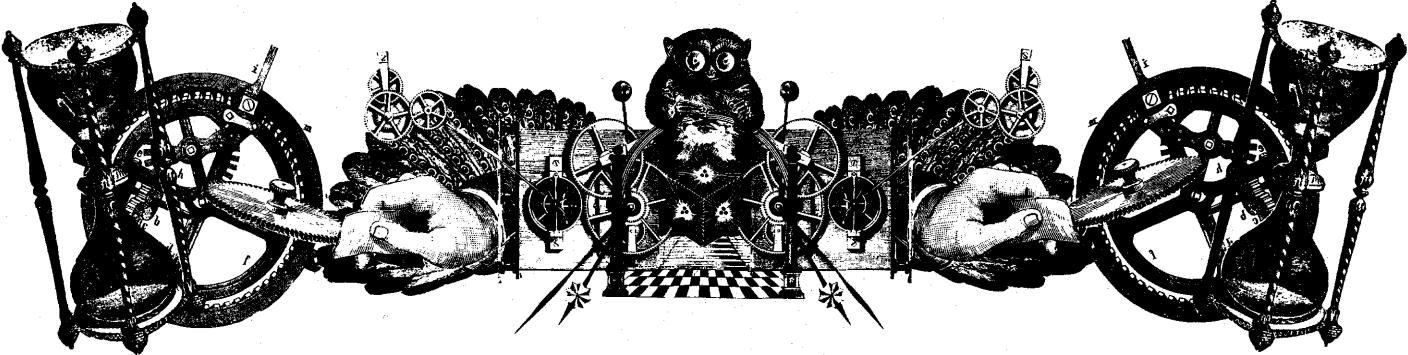
In the next 16 pages, we're giving you a look at the AMAZING ENGINE™ game system. What you have here is the System Guide—all the rules you need to create a character and conduct basic activities such as combat, movement, and skill checks. Also here is the heart of the AMAZING ENGINE concept—the player core, which makes it possible for one basic player character (PC) to adventure in a multitude of settings.

To use these rules to their fullest effect, you need to pick up a Universe Book. Each of these describes a world in which your PC can operate, ranging from a mysterious, magical Victorian England to far-future interplanetary conflict.

The fifth Universe Book, *Once and Future King*, has just been released. In this fantastic setting, PCs interact with King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table in an age of artificial intelligence and interdimensional travel. Other Universe Books include: *The Galactos Barrier* setting, the MAGITECH™ game, the *For Faerie, Queen, and Country* setting, and the BUGHUNTERS™ game.

If you're looking for new gaming vistas to explore, the AMAZING ENGINE system will take you there. Have a good trip, and have fun!

DEN



The AMAZING ENGINE™ Role-Playing System

Note: If you are already familiar with the basic rules for this game system, feel free to turn directly to the Universe Book portion of this product. Any rules modifications specific to this setting are included there.

The AMAZING ENGINE™ role-playing system is more than just a single role-playing game, be it fantasy world or science fiction universe. Instead, the AMAZING ENGINE system provides the basics for creating a wide variety of role-playing settings—anything from consulting detectives investigating fairy realms to deadly aliens stalking hi-tech space marines—and as much as can be imagined in between.

System Guide and Universe Books

To do this, the AMAZING ENGINE system consists of two parts. The first part comprises the basic rules for creating player characters and having those characters use skills, fight, and move; the System Guide, which you are reading right now. These rules are found in all AMAZING ENGINE products. This section also details how players and GMs can change settings while transferring benefits player characters have gained from previous play.

The second part of the system comprises the rest of each Universe Book. Each Universe Book is a complete role-playing game. It is not necessary to buy every Universe Book to play in the AMAZING ENGINE system. Game masters can run campaigns in just a single universe, choose only science fiction or only fantasy, or play in both according to their personal whims.

The AMAZING ENGINE system is more than a mere collection of universes. In this system, the advances a player character gains in one universe can be used to help PCs in other universes. Starting in a new setting does not call for starting over from the beginning; this means players and GMs can experiment with the wide range of universes.

The Player Core and Player Character

The heart of the AMAZING ENGINE system is the combination of the player core and the player character. The player core is the framework around which PCs are built. The same player core is used from universe to universe.

The PC is the actual collection of numbers, skills, and other abilities used to role-play in a given universe. A player will have a different character in each universe, but these characters may all be generated from the same core.

When creating player cores, the players must make certain decisions about the kind of characters they want. They can choose different emphases for the four different pools (see next column) that define a character: Physique, Intellect, Spirit, and Influence. These choices, made while creating the player core, reflect in all PCs created from that core. Each pool offers a pair of choices. Does a player want characters that are generally strong and influential, or ones who are intellectually superior and athletic? Physical characters can be either

muscular or quick; spiritual characters can possess great psychic potential or strong wills.

Of course, the same ability is not always the best in every universe. A muscular but psychically weak character who does quite well in the BUGHUNTERS™ game may be at quite a disadvantage in the MAGITECH™ game, where wizards needing strong psyches to manipulate magic are a common sight. Therefore, the same player character is not used in every universe. Instead, the player core allows each character to be tailored to the needs of each universe—within the limits of the player's original choices. Players who emphasized Physique will still have characters who are either faster or stronger than most others. Those who chose Intellect will have smarter characters, either in learned skills or intuitive understanding. The player core forms the archetype around which a single player's characters are all set.

The Ability Pools

The player core consists of four different ability pools: Physique, Intellect, Spirit, and Influence. Each pool has two attributes that define the player character. When creating the player core, only the ability pools are used. When creating a PC, or playing that PC in a single universe, only the attributes are used. Once the first character is generated, ability pools never affect the actions of a PC and attributes never affect ability pools. The ability pools' corresponding attributes are:

Fitness and Reflexes. These attributes of Physique measure all things physical about the character.

Learning and Intuition. These attributes of Intellect define the character's mental power for learning useful skills.

Psyche and Willpower. These attributes of Spirit are the sources of the PC's mystical potential and strength of will.

Charm and Position. These attributes of Influence generate the values affecting the character's social interactions.

The Attributes

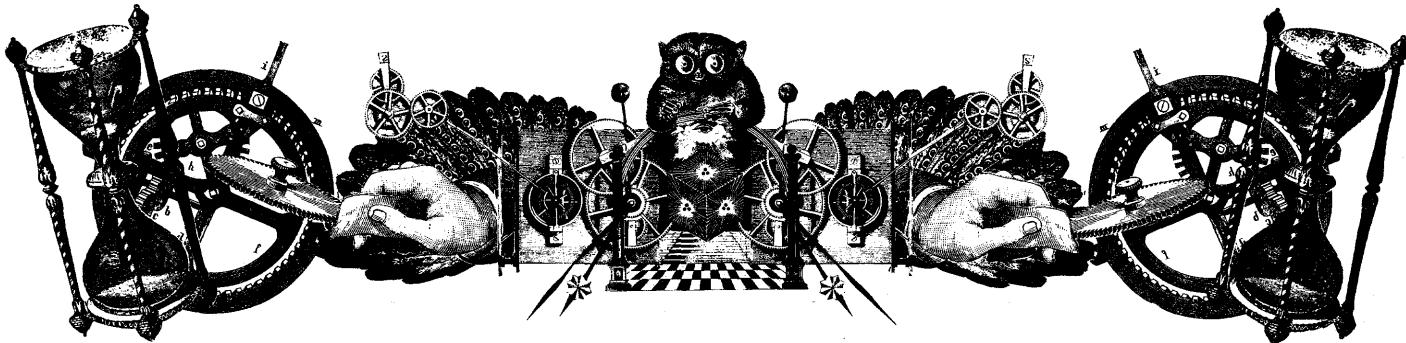
As noted, the eight attributes are more precise breakdowns of the corresponding ability pools, and they define a specific character in a specific universe. Beginning characters' attributes have values from 3 to 50, with 25 being the approximate average score. (Characters generated from the core later in a campaign may have higher scores.)

Fitness. A measure of bodily strength, Fitness reflects the characters' muscles and their ability to use them effectively. Fitness affects the amount of damage characters can cause in hand-to-hand combat, and the amount of body damage they can take.

Reflexes. This attribute measures characters' reaction speed and hand-eye coordination. It is used for scoring a hit in combat, and (along with Willpower) determines the amount of stamina damage characters can take.

Learning. This measures characters' knowledge in areas requiring long training or study. In some universes, it may represent a degree or period of schooling. Learning affects the number and kind of, and chance of success at, skills characters can have.





Intuition. This encompasses the characters' ability to remember random trivia, innate wit, street smarts, comprehension, and worldliness. Intuition is applied to skills picked up through observation and practice, without long periods of study. Like Learning, Intuition affects the number and kind of, and chance of success at, skills characters can have.

Psyche. The universe is filled with more things than can be measured or imagined by physical science—or at least an AMAZING ENGINE™ universe may be. Psyche represents the characters' potential to perceive and manipulate the spiritual and metaphysical world. In a given universe, this may determine the characters' magical ability, psychic powers, or plain old luck.

Willpower. As a measure of mental fortitude, this ability indicates how well the characters can endure pain (along with Reflexes, in the form of stamina points), block mental attacks, or resist psychic possession.

Charm. In RPGs, characters must interact. This attribute rates the characters' personalities and the way others are disposed toward them. Charm is used to influence reactions of NPCs and can affect the success of some magical and psychic skills.

Position. This attribute provides a rough rank for characters on the ladder of social advancement, whatever form the rungs take in a particular universe. Depending on the setting, Position may translate into military rank, fame (or infamy), wealth, title, class, or even occupation. Position is used to deal with officials, finance large purchases, and secure special resources, and also at special social functions.

Generating the Player Core and Player Character

The process of creating the player core is woven into the steps of creating the first player character. As you create this character, you will have to make a number of choices for the core that will affect the character. In later steps, numbers rolled for the PC's attributes will affect the final results of the player core. Thus, the procedure for creating your first PC (and player core) is slightly different from that used when creating subsequent PCs from the same core.

The first task in creating a character is to decide what kind of character you like. You can do this even before knowing what kind of universe your GM is going to use. Do you prefer strong characters, able and ready to fight; charmers who can talk their way out of any situation; intellectuals good at solving problems; or magically-charged wonder-workers? Think about your ideal character.

The next step is to translate your ideal into game form by ranking the four ability pools of the core from best to worst. Using a sheet of paper (or the Player Core Sheet on page 18), write the numeral 1 (best) next to the pool for which you want the best chance for high scores. Then rank the remaining pools (2,3, and 4), remembering that the one ranked lowest will usually have the lowest scores. Later die rolls do not guarantee anything.

In the third step, begin creating your first actual PC by choosing four of the eight attributes and rolling four 10-sided dice (4d10) for each

one. Add the four results, and note the total in the space next to the attribute name. (Do this in pencil, since the attributes may be modified in a later step.) The attributes chosen need not correspond to the ranking of attribute pools done previously. You can choose one, both, or no attributes of any given pool in this step.

Now, generate scores for the four remaining attributes by rolling 3d10 and adding the results. Note the totals in their appropriate places.

Once the basic numbers have been generated, modify the attributes based on the rankings you gave the ability pools (1–4). The rankings determine the number of points available to divide between the two attributes of that pool (15, 10, 5, or 0). You can divide these points however you wish, but no ability pool can have more than 50 total points.

- Rank 1: 15 points
- Rank 2: 10 points
- Rank 3: 5 points
- Rank 4: 0 points

The modified numbers are your PC's attribute scores.

With the PC attributes determined, you can now finish creating the player core by figuring your ability pools' dice ratings. Do this by adding the two attribute scores of each pool and dividing by 10. Fractions are rounded up to the next whole number. Write these numbers next to "Dice." Although this total has no effect on a PC during play, it is needed for creating other characters in other universes.

Creating Characters from the Player Core

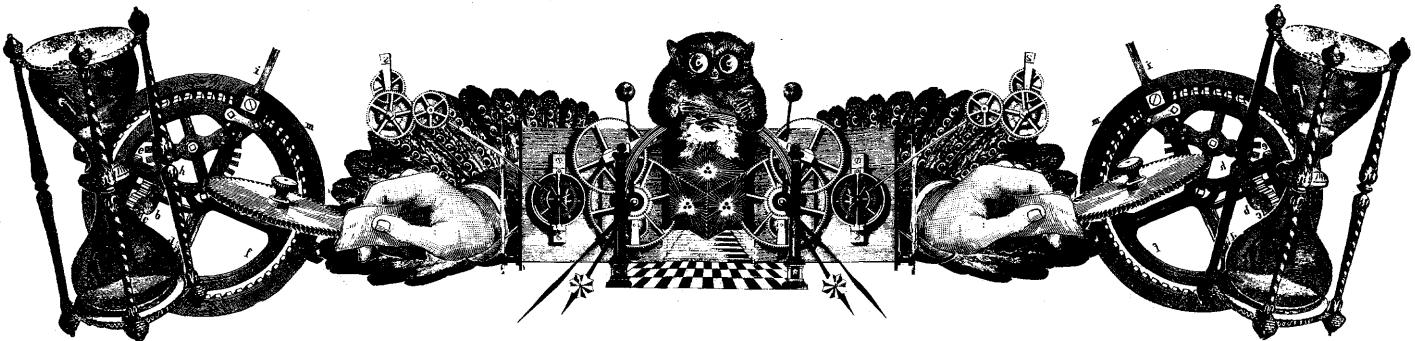
Once you have created a player core, you are ready to create new characters for other AMAZING ENGINE settings. These characters are made using the player core, and follow different steps from those you used for your first (or "prime") character.

You build PCs from the core by assigning dice to the different attributes. Each ability pool has a dice rating (this was the last step you performed in creating your prime character). These dice are divided in whole numbers between each pool's attribute pair. In addition to these dice, all new PCs have 7 "free" dice the players can assign as they see fit. However, unless stated otherwise by the universe-specific rules, no attribute can have more than 5 dice assigned to it. Once all dice have been assigned, the appropriate numbers are rolled and totalled, just as before.

After the dice are assigned, rolled, and totalled, the next step is the same as for your prime character from this core. Using the same rankings you assigned to your ability pools, use the points each rank gives (15, 10, 5, and 0) to modify your PC's attributes. As before, no PC can have an attribute rating higher than 50.

Once the attributes have been modified, the character creation process stops. Do not recalculate the dice ratings for the player core. The dice ratings can only be altered by spending experience points earned by the PCs created from that core.





Multiple characters can be created from the same player core. However, you should have only one character from the same core per universe. Multiple characters per core in the same universe would give you an unfair advantage over players with only a single PC per core. You can create multiple cores, however, each with its own prime character; use the rules for "Generating the Player Core and Player Character."

A detailed, complete example of creating a player core and a prime character is given on pages 14-15.

Life and Death

A crucial part of any role-playing game is the risk of injury and death to the PCs. Every time a PC tries something dangerous or gets in a fight, she can suffer damage. This damage is measured in points, subtracted from a character's total. In the AMAZING ENGINETM system, there are two types of damage: *stamina* and *body*.

Stamina damage is caused by the host of bruises, grazes, cuts, burns, jolts, and effort spent avoiding serious harm. A character who loses all her stamina points does not die—she falls unconscious. (This may result in her death, however.) Unconsciousness comes from the combined effects of blood loss, concussion, shock, pain, and just plain exhaustion. If an attack causes 10 points of stamina damage and your character has only 4 remaining, the excess points are ignored. Your character falls unconscious. However, all future attacks automatically cause body damage.

Body damage represents wounds and injuries that seriously threaten the health of your PC. These include bullet holes, stab wounds, broken bones, serious burns, bites, and other unpleasantries. When your character loses all her body points, she's dead.

Just how many stamina and body points your PC has varies from universe to universe. In some, such as that of the BUGHUNTERSTM game, combat is one of the main activities. Here, your PC will need lots of stamina and body points. In others, like *For Faerie, Queen, and Country*, combat is a last resort when all others have failed. Characters in such a universe have lower stamina and body point totals to discourage players' desire to solve every problem with guns.

In all universes, however, stamina and body points are calculated from the same attribute scores. Fitness is used to figure body points. Characters with high Fitness scores will always have more body points than those with poor Fitness scores, no matter the universe. Willpower and Reflexes combined are the base for stamina points, so that those with high scores in these attributes will have more stamina points than those with low ones.

Injuries and wounds do heal, allowing your PC to regain lost stamina and body points. Because the two types of damage reflect different causes, each heals at a different rate. Stamina is regained in two stages; 1 point in the first 10-60 minutes ($1d6 \times 10$), then $1d10$ points per eight hours of light activity ($2d10$ per eight hours of bed rest or sound sleep). Body points heal at the rate of 1 per week. Rest, nursing, and hospitalization can increase the rate of healing; to what extent depends on the universe. After all, the hospitals of a pseudo-Victorian London are nothing like the sickbay facilities of a 23rd-century starship!

Beyond the Player Core: Fine Tuning

In any AMAZING ENGINE universe, your PC is more than the sum of her attribute scores. There are many other choices to make; however, these depend on the universe in which your character is playing. While all the choices are defined for your character in the Universe Book section of this product, the range of options is explained here in general terms.

Base Adjustment

Every universe of the AMAZING ENGINE system is different, so a suitable starting character for one may not be right for another. Therefore, a given universe may apply a *base adjustment* to certain of your PC's ability pools. This adjustment increases every affected attribute by the same amount. (A base adjustment of +30 to the Physique pool means you add 30 to the base Fitness score and 30 to the base Reflexes score.) The adjustment must be made *after* calculating your PC's base attribute scores.

Species

Up to now, nothing has been said of just what your PC is, and from the examples it's easy to assume everyone's human. However, this need not be the case. In some universes, you may have the opportunity to create characters that are members of some other species. Your character could be an intelligent being evolved from dinosaurs, belong to an alien race from another star, be a combination of human and machine, or (comparatively simply) have fairy blood. The universes of the AMAZING ENGINE system have all of science fiction and fantasy to draw upon, so the possibilities are nearly endless!

Gender

There is nothing in the player core that determines your PC's gender. In most universes, you can choose it freely. However, in some cases there may be special restrictions or different choices, particularly when playing an alien (nonhuman) PC. The Universe Book describes any such rules additions.

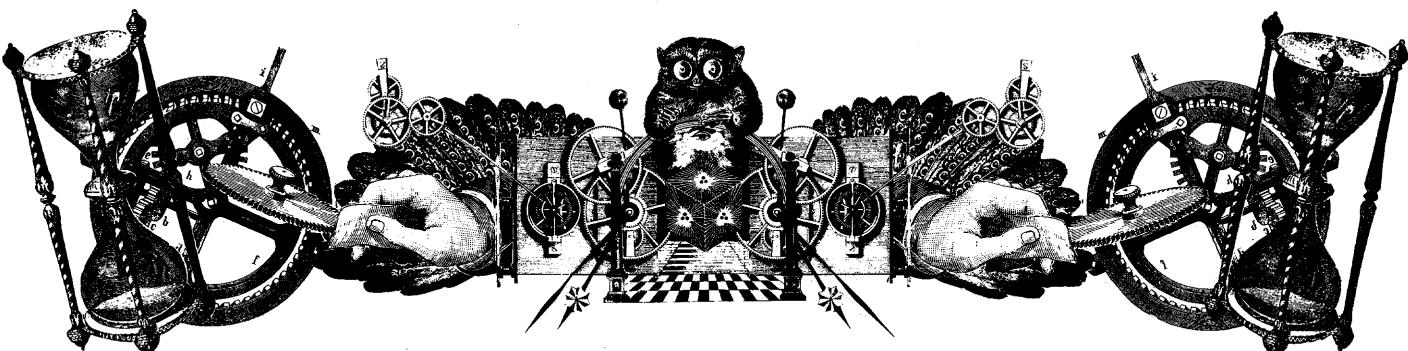
Handedness

For convenience, your character uses the same hand as you do in real life. Of course, if you're playing a four-armed g'rax, special rules may apply.

Appearance

Again, unless your PC is an alien, you can describe your character's looks however they please you. He could be tall and willowy, or she





could be short and blunt. It is recommended that you create a character description that matches the attribute scores. If your character has a miserable Fitness score, it doesn't pay to imagine him as strong and muscular.

Professions and Skills

At some point in her imaginary life, your PC probably went to school, learned a trade, or at least got an education on the street. In the AMAZING ENGINE™ system, what your PC knows is defined by her profession. No matter the universe, every character has a profession, varied though they are. In a Victorian fantasy setting your PC might be a consulting detective, consul of the Foreign Office, Oxford don, navy ensign, or medium. A completely different set of professions exist in a world of high space opera; space freighter captain, alien spy, smuggler, and psychic are only a few possibilities.

Likewise, the exact benefits of a profession can vary from universe to universe. The Victorian consulting detective might know material analysis, chemistry, fisticuffs, craniometry (measurement of people's skulls), heraldry, and fencing; his counterpart in a world of modern magic could well possess flying carpet driving, spell analysis, handguns, karate, and empathy.

When you create a PC for a campaign, your character must be given a profession from those offered in that particular universe. The Universe Book lists these. Choosing a profession does not determine what your PC is currently; it only tells what she was, and therefore what she knows at the start of the campaign. From this basis, you can make of your PC what you want.

Skill Groups

Note: Reference this Universe Books skill listing as you read this section.

Every profession includes a listing of skill groups falling within that profession's purview. These skill groups form the basis of what a character can learn, given her profession. The skills categorized under each grouping are all related to that area of study or use, although the skills themselves may be quite different. For example, a scholarly character may have "Humanities" as a skill group. Checking the information in the Universe Book, you find the listing for Humanities. Under it are several different scholarly areas and skills that all have to do with the humanities (like Linguistics and Theology), though they are not always related to each other.

Certainly not every profession has the same skill groups. The scholar's studies in humanities would be ill-suited to the needs of a soldier in the 23rd century. Her skill groups would include things like Sidearms and Comm-gear. The skills of the Sidearms group are vastly different from those of the Humanities group.

In addition to organizing skills, the skill groups also show the skills' order and relevant attributes, both important to using skills in play.

Skill Order: In each list, skills are arranged in ever-smaller steps of specialization. Before a skill can be learned, your PC must know all preceding steps. For example, look at the following list.

Sidearms (R)

- Coherent Beam (R)
- Laser rifle (R)
- Particle beam (R)
- Projectile (R)
 - Modern (R)
 - Antique (R)
 - Blunderbuss* (R)
 - Rifled musket* (R)
 - Assisted (R)
 - Energized (R)
 - Flechette (R)

General Medicine (L)

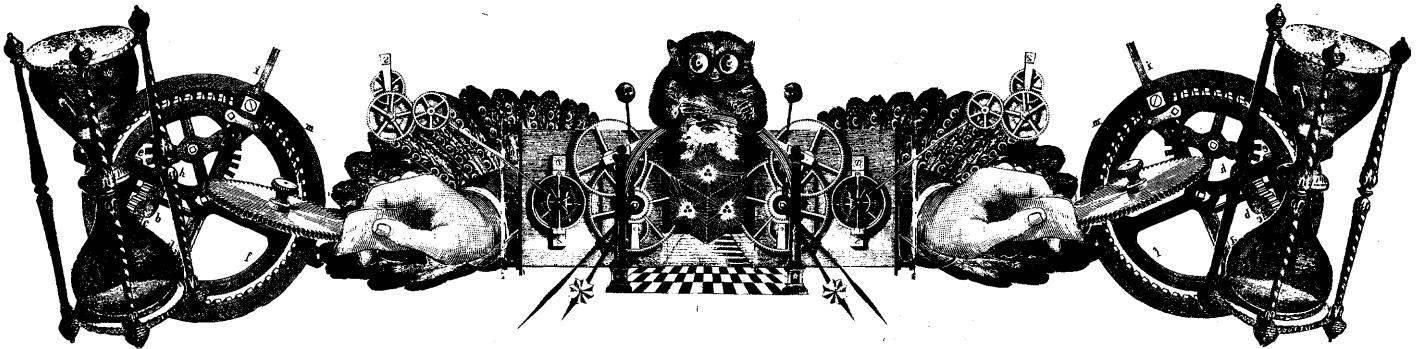
- Xeno-biology (L)
- Arcturean medicine (L)

Each level of specialization is indicated by indentation, just as in an outline. Once your PC has learned a skill (Sidearms or General Medicine, in the above listings), she has a basic familiarity with everything grouped below it, allowing her to attempt any of those specialties. However, your PC's chance of success decreases when attempting things of greater specialization than her training level. The degree of penalty depends on what the PC knows and what she's trying to do. She cannot know the Rifled musket enhancement unless she knows Antique weapons, which she cannot have until she has taken the Projectile specialization. (She need not know Coherent beam weapons before she can know Projectile; these two are at the same level, and thus are unrelated.) The precise penalty varies from universe to universe. A typical penalty is -10 to the PC's chance of success per each level of difference. (In the above example, a PC familiar with projectile weapons trying to use a rifled musket does so at a -20 penalty: -10 for not knowing the Antique specialization, and -10 for not having the Rifled musket enhancement.)

Enhancements: Some specialized skills do not require your PC to gain new areas of learning or technique, but only call for the refinement of existing knowledge. Your PC doesn't "learn" anything new; she only improves what she can already do. These specialties are called enhancements, and are noted by an asterisk (*) on the skill groups.

For example, under Antique Weapons, *Blunderbuss* and *Rifled musket* are enhancements. The basics of loading and firing each are essentially the same, and the same goes for any other antique weapon (the larger skill category). The differences are that a character skilled in Blunderbuss is more familiar with the particular quirks of that weapon. The same does not apply when comparing Antique Weapons to Modern Weapons, or General Medicine to its specialty Xeno-biology. In these





cases, the skills involve new learning, new techniques, and new facts that must be mastered in addition to the basic understanding of Sidearms or Medicine.

Knowing an enhancement gives a PC a bonus (typically +10) when using that particular skill—but only that skill. A PC who knows the Blunderbuss enhancement and uses that weapon gains a +10 bonus to her skill roll. She does not gain that bonus when using a rifled musket, however, even though both weapons require the Antique Weapons specialty.

The bonus for an enhancement does not accumulate across levels the way that penalties for lack of a specialty do. For instance, a character with the Blunderbuss enhancement gains only one bonus when rolling against the Sidearms skill, despite the fact that there are two levels between the skills.

Starting Skills: After you have chosen a profession for your character and noted down the skill groups, you can select skills for your PC. The number of skills your PC can have depends on her Learning and Intuition scores.

First, you must choose those skills dictated by your PC's profession: the things that allow her to operate effectively in whatever career she has chosen. You can choose any skills from the skill groups named by that profession. Your PC can have 1 skill for every 10 points of Learning (or fraction thereof, rounded up). Specialized and sub-specialized skills can only be chosen if the preceding skills are also learned.

After you have chosen those profession-based skills, you can pick other skills from any skill group regardless of the PC's profession. These skills represent your PC's general knowledge, interests, curiosity, and hobbies. Select one skill (from any skill group) for every 15 points of Intuition your PC has (ignore fractions in this case). Additional skills gained may be within the PC's profession or completely outside it. As before, your PC cannot learn specializations or sub-specializations unless all previous skills are known.

As you select skills, note the names and relevant attributes (noted in parentheses after each skill) on your character sheet.

Skill Checks

Although your PC may know how to apply a skill, this is still a long way from using the skill correctly and successfully. As a real person, you might "know" a foreign language, but could still make an error when talking to a native speaker. Furthermore, not everyone is equally adept; not every first-year French student speaks first-year French equally well. The same is true, of course, for your PCs.

Every time your PC attempts to use a skill, you must make a skill check to see if the effort succeeds. This entails rolling percentile dice, applying any bonuses or penalties as required, and comparing the result to one of your PC's attribute scores. The relevant attribute score is noted in parentheses after the listing in the skill group: Fitness, **Reflexes**, Learning, Intuition, Psyche, Willpower, Charm, and Position.

If the (modified) die result is less than the PC's attribute score, the

attempt succeeds. If the (modified) die result is greater than the score, the attempt fails. A skill check always fails on a roll of 95-00, but there is no corresponding chance for automatic success.

Easy and Difficult Tasks: Skills are applied to tasks of varying difficulty. For your PC with mechanical skill, fixing a stubborn lawnmower is just not the same as rebuilding the engine on a sub-orbital jet. The former is a task of basic simplicity, the latter a highly demanding and complicated job. Clearly, your PC's chance of success in each endeavor should not be the same.

A skill check is not required every time your PC does something skill-related. For example, driving to the supermarket does not require a skill check. A character trained as a spaceship pilot need not make a skill check every time he travels through space. It is assumed that every skill provides a level of basic understanding. Thus, skill checks can be ignored for simple and familiar tasks.

When the result is uncertain, a skill check must be made. Characters with Firearms skill can handle a gun without a skill check, but they may not hit the target—a skill check is required to find out. If the check succeeds, your PC performs the action successfully: hitting the target, whatever. If the check fails, the action fails with appropriate consequences.

Your PC can also attempt actions of even greater risk and skill, so much that a normal skill check is still too easy. She may want to shoot an item from a person's hand, or calculate an obscure scientific formula. Based on the situation, the GM can reduce the chance of success to reflect the difficulty of the action. Guidelines for the modifiers are given as appropriate in the Universe Books.

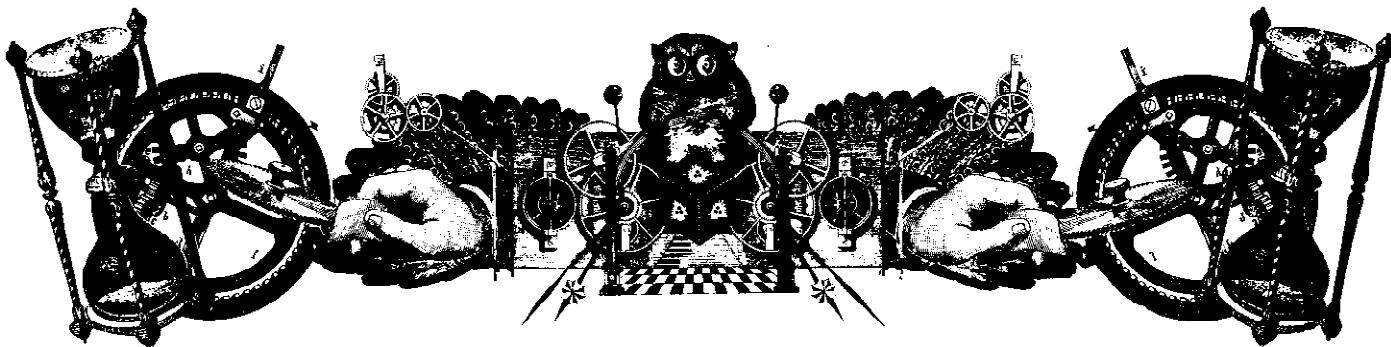
At other times, your PC may attempt something more specialized than she is trained for. In this case, even the simplest task requires a skill check (with the penalty for not knowing the specialty applied), since any specialized knowledge is assumed to be beyond your PC's basic understanding. Tasks that would require a normal skill check become extremely difficult for those without the proper background, while things difficult for a specialist become nearly impossible.

Unskilled Characters: No matter how well-rounded and prepared your PC is, there are always times when she is faced with a problem for which she is simply not trained. Faced with such a situation, your PC may have little choice but to try her best.

Whether your PC can even hope to succeed depends on the skill normally required to perform the task. If this is a Learned skill (one that uses the Learning attribute for skill checks), the task is impossible. Computer programming, biochemistry, and surgery are all examples of Learned skills. Without the proper training, your PC simply has no clue about what needs to be done. For example, she cannot repair a malfunctioning high-energy gas laser. The only thing she's likely to do, without the proper training, is increase the damage.

Actions based on nonLearning skills can be attempted by even those lacking the proper training. In this case, the PC has a default chance equal to half the appropriate attribute score. Even the most basic actions require a skill check (there is no automatic success), and the





attribute score is halved for the attempt. The other penalties, for specialization and difficulty, still apply.

Margin Ratings

In most cases, the actual outcome of a skill check doesn't change, regardless of how well or poorly the PC did, so you can simply translate the skill check into story details. Roll well below the success number, and your PC did the task extremely well. Roll high—close to failing—and it was a struggle, but she succeeded. Roll drastically greater than the success number, and your PC botched things royally.

For example, your PC, Anya, and her companion, George, are trying to jump across a pit, with a villain in hot pursuit. You roll a 17 (needing a 54 or less), while George's player barely rolls below the necessary number (69 out of 71). Right behind your PCs, the villain attempts the leap. His roll is a 93, well over the 51 needed. In this case, the GM might say, "Anya, you clear the pit easily, then bend down and help George, who nearly failed and is clinging to the edge by his fingertips. The thug chasing you slips just as he starts the leap. There's a horrid scream as he falls out of sight." Both player characters succeeded and there was nothing gained by doing better, while the thug failed and would have fallen in any case. If Anya had not been there, George would have simply hoisted himself over the edge to safety.

At other times, you need to know not only if your PC succeeded or failed, but to what degree. These are known as critical successes or critical failures. Skills that require them are defined in the Universe Books. In *For Faerie, Queen, and Country*, Louis the forger is altering a will. A successful skill check results in a will that fools most people, but Louis needs a critical success to dupe the court's handwriting expert. In the BUGHUNTERSTM game, Harmon, the demolitions man, is faced with a complicated time bomb. Success obviously defuses the device, but there is the risk he pulls the wrong wire. This would be a critical failure, causing the bomb to detonate immediately.

Critical successes and failures are defined by *margin ratings*. Success margin ratings are noted as S#: S2, S5, etc. Failure margin ratings are noted as F#: F8, F7, etc.

In such instances, the success or failure margin is found by reading the 1s digit of the skill check roll. For a critical success, the skill check must be successful *and* the 1s digit must be equal to or less than the success margin. For a critical failure, the check must be failed *and* the 1s digit must be equal to or greater than the failure margin.

For example, Louis has a 45 on his attempt to forge a signature. The skill notes a success margin of 1 (S1) for a perfect forgery. Louis' player rolls the skill check, and the result is 40. Louis succeeds! Not only that, but it's a critical success, since 0 is less than 1 (the success margin rating). If Louis's player had rolled a 29, the forgery would have been successful but imperfect. On a roll greater than 45, the forgery would have failed completely.

Note that, statistically, margin ratings give characters with higher attribute scores a greater chance of amazing successes and a lower chance of horrible failures at any particular task than characters with

lower attribute scores. In effect, success and failure margins serve as fractions of a character's skill, so as that skill increases, the margins become automatically more beneficial. Applying them to the 1s digit of a skill check simply makes it very quick and easy to identify them during play.

Movement

Character movement is divided into three speeds: walking, running, and sprinting. Each is defined by a speed in meters/turn and a duration of minutes or turns.

Measurements

To ease the transition from one universe to another, this game system uses a consistent set of measures for figuring game time, movement, and weight.

In this game system, all distances, volumes, and weights are given metrically. Although unfamiliar to some, the metric system is best suited to meet the needs of universes ranging from high fantasy to hard s-f. Distances are given in meters and kilometers, weights in grams and kilograms, etc.

Game time—the imaginary time spent by PCs to do anything, as opposed to the real time you spend describing your PC's actions, rolling dice, thinking, etc. while playing—is organized into turns, minutes, hours, and days. A turn is roughly equal to 10 seconds of action, and is used for combat and other time-important actions. Minutes, hours, and the rest are self-explanatory. A given universe may have weeks, months, and years equivalent to those of our Earth, or may use a quite different system (especially in s-f settings).

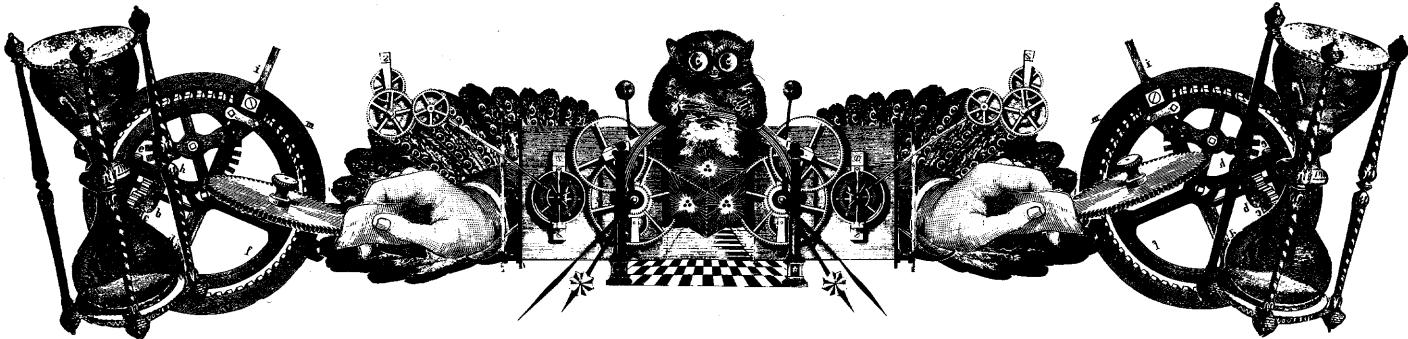
Speed

Walking is the slowest and most common movement. A person walking can cover up to 15 meters per turn. (In general, people unconsciously adjust their strides to those of their companions to walk at a uniform rate.) Characters can walk for an indefinite amount of time, although the hourly movement rate of 5,000 meters should be used if PCs travel for longer than 30 minutes at a time.

Running is a brisk jog or long, loping stride, good for covering considerable distances at a quick pace. It is not as flat-out fast as your PC can run, since your PC is trying to conserve some strength for the long haul. Most PCs run a distance equal to their Fitness in meters per turn. Notably unfit characters (those with Fitness scores of 14 or less) run and walk at the same speed: 15 meters per turn. A character can run for a time in minutes equal to his or her Fitness rating.

Sprinting is a burst of speed, in which your PC tries to cover a short distance as quickly as she or he can. Each turn your PC can sprint a distance in meters equal to his or her Fitness score. (A PC with a Fitness score of 32 can sprint 64 meters in 10 seconds.) Sprinting can be maintained for turns equaling one-tenth the PC's Fitness score (Fit_





10), rounded down. Amazingly unfit characters (those with Fitness scores of 7 or less) cannot sprint or run, although they still walk at normal speed.

Carrying Capacity

Another important modifier for your PC's speed in any situation is the weight she is carrying. The movement rates given assume the PC is not loaded down with excess goods that would slow her pace.

Your PC can carry goods equal to her Fitness score in kilograms without penalty. A PC with a Fitness of 21 can carry 21 kilos (about 46 lbs.) of gear and supplies without significant difficulty. When carrying up to twice this weight, the PC's running and sprinting speeds are halved. At three times the base weight, the PC cannot sprint or run, and may only walk meters equal to her Fitness score before having to rest.

If a player tries to tax her PC's Fitness by spending experience points (so she can lift a greater-than-normal weight), the benefit lasts until the PC fails a Willpower check. Like an Olympic weightlifter, the PC puts her legs and back into a heroic effort to lift the great weight. Every muscle in her body strains until her Willpower finally gives out. When the PC fails this check, she suffers 1 point of stamina damage. Players can use experience points to tax their PCs' Willpower to improve their chances of passing this check, too.

Pushing the Limits

It is possible for PCs to run and sprint faster or farther than their normal allowances by taxing their Fitness scores and making attribute checks.

Any PC can sprint faster than is normally allowed in a given turn by taxing his ability. The player must spend experience points to increase the Fitness score. However, a PC can never increase his speed by more than 50% in this way (he cannot add more than half his Fitness score). This increase is only effective for a single turn. The player must continue to spend experience points to maintain the PC's pace on subsequent turns.

Any PC can also try to exceed his duration. At the start of each turn, when sprinting, or minute, when running, during which the PC wants to run longer than his normal duration, the player makes a Willpower check with percentile dice. If the result is lower than the PC's Willpower score, he keeps going for that turn or minute; otherwise, he must stop since he's exhausted. PCs who fail the check suffer 1–2 points of stamina damage. Note that players can spend experience points to increase their PC's Willpower for this check.

For more information on taxing attributes, see "Taxing Attributes" in the "Experience" section of these rules.

Resting

Flat-out sprinting and long-distance running make for exhausting business, and your PC must rest at the end of any dash. PCs must spend

time resting in minutes equal to the minutes spent running or turns spent sprinting. Sprinting three turns requires resting three minutes. Characters resting cannot run or sprint, but can walk up to 10 meters per turn.

Vehicles and Special Movement

Since the AMAZING ENGINE™ universes can encompass anything from lizard-drawn chariots to anti-gray sky-sleds, rules for movement are part of the Universe Books. In addition, a Universe Book may present unique movement rules to reflect any special conditions of that universe. Heavy gravity, magical terrains, other dimensions, and weightlessness are all possible complications unique to specific universes.

Combat

Sooner or later, fighting becomes part of every role-playing game. The AMAZING ENGINE system is no exception, although the emphasis on fighting (and just how dangerous it is) will suit the story needs of the universe. For example, combat in *For Faerie, Queen, and Country* is an infrequent thing, and dangerous when it occurs. A character can be killed with a single shot. At the other extreme, battles are frequent and heroic (and often magical in nature) in *The Galactos Barrier*, a swash-buckling universe of high space opera. The BUGHUNTERS™ game, where characters are the elite of the interstellar armed forces, is almost entirely combat-centered.

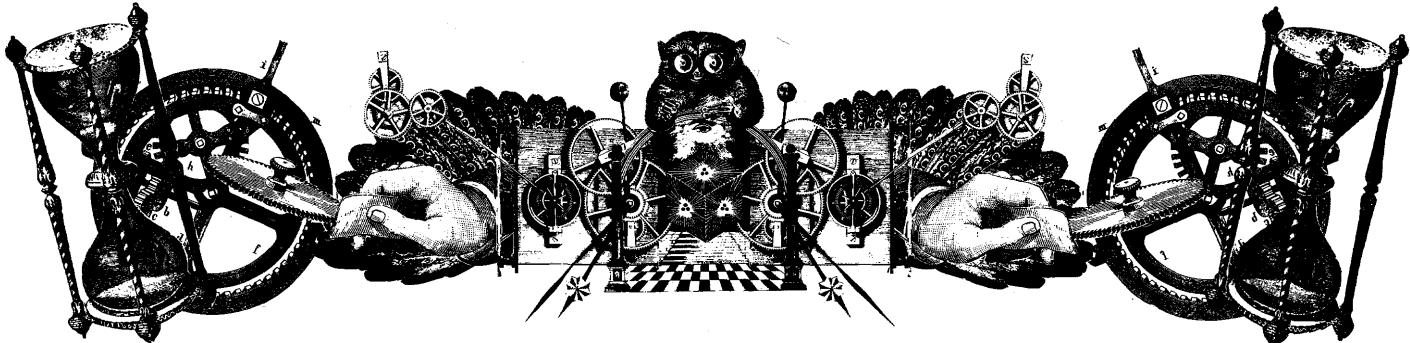
Because of the differences among universes, the things described herein are basic procedures that do not change from setting to setting, such as the differences between ranged combat and melee, and how to make an attack roll. *Every Universe Book contains additional combat rules.* At a minimum, these include weapons available in that universe; a maser rifle just won't be found in a world of armored knights and dragons. It could appear in a world of cybernetic knights and chrome steel dragontanks, however.

Some universes, such as that of the BUGHUNTERS game, place a greater emphasis on combat than others. Accordingly, the combat rules for these universes incorporate detailed rules for things like special combat maneuvers, penetration, knock-back, and recoil. Other universes may keep the combat rules to the barest minimum in favor of other role-playing aspects.

The Combat Sequence

Because combat can be a confusing event with six or seven characters to a side, each trying to do something different, the AMAZING ENGINE system (like most RPGs) organizes combat into a series of steps, each complete sequence taking one turn, each turn being roughly 10 seconds of time (allowing the GM flexibility in resolving combat actions). Each turn repeats the sequence of events until one side is defeated or manages to escape.





- I. Determine advantage (1st turn only)
- II. Players declare PC actions; GM decides NPC actions
- III. Determine initiative
- IV. Resolve actions

I. Determine Advantage: This is the "jump" one character or group might have on another when the encounter begins. It is used in situations such as two groups (friend and foe) stumbling onto each other unexpectedly, a group being betrayed by someone the members trusted, or the party walking into an ambush. The character or party who has the advantage automatically gets the first action and may have a bonus on chances to hit the targets.

Advantage is checked at the beginning of any encounter, before any actions are taken. After the first combat turn, advantage is normally no longer checked, since both sides are perfectly aware of what the other is up to—at least in general terms. In some instances, however, additional advantage checks may be called for: a new attacker appearing from an unexpected direction, or an event unanticipated by one or both sides.

The basic method for determining advantage is for both sides to roll percentile dice and compare the result to the highest Psyche score in each party. If the check passes, the group is forewarned, however slightly. If the check fails, the group is unprepared and the other side gains the advantage. If both sides succeed, no one is caught unprepared. If both sides fail, everyone is caught flat-footed. If either side rolls a 95-00, that group is *surprised*—caught completely off guard—and is particularly vulnerable. The "Advantage Outcomes" table appears on page 18. (The properties, equipment, and situations of different universes can modify a PC's check. Some possibilities include thermal sensors to spot what is normally unseen, or psionic powers to detect thoughts. Any such modifiers will be noted in the Universe Book.)

The side with the advantage automatically goes first on the opening turn of combat. Its members gain a +5 modifier on any attack or action opposed by the other group. The side without advantage goes second, and suffers a -5 modifier on any like action.

If one party is surprised, they essentially do nothing for an entire turn during which their opponents have the freedom to move, attack, talk, run away, or whatever (with the +5 modifier) without a reaction from the surprised group. In the next turn, the surprised group is considered unprepared while their attackers have the advantage (they act first and gain the +5 modifier, while their opponents act second and suffer a -5 modifier).

II. Declare Actions: Except for situations of advantage and surprise, you must declare what action your PC will take before knowing in what order both sides will act (the same applies to the GM). Tell your GM what action your character will take in the coming turn. Try to be as specific as possible, given that you don't know the intentions of the other side. For example, if your PC attacks, state her target in advance. The GM has many things to track, so the more you can help, the quicker and more exciting the game will be.

In general, it is best to keep actions short, ideally things that can be

completed within 10 seconds. Not only does this help prevent confusion, it also means your PC is ready to react to new situations in the next turn. You should also be ready to say quickly what your PC will do, since the GM can penalize your PC for your hesitation. Combat requires snap judgments and you should be ready to play the part accordingly. Reasonable questions are allowed, but delaying the game while you try to make a decision is apt to result in your PC losing her action that turn.

III. Determine Initiative: If neither side has an advantage or surprise in combat, you need to know in what order everything happens. This is done by determining initiative at the beginning of every combat turn, unless one side has advantage over the other (because of die rolls or GM's ruling). A single initiative is normally determined for the entire group, although universes with detailed combat rules may require each individual to roll initiative.

Check initiative by rolling 1d10 and modifying the result. The modifier equals 10% (for simplicity, the 10s digit) of the best Reflexes score on each side. A character with a Reflexes score of 37 adds 3 to the die roll. Only those PCs present and active in the combat are considered in this initiative roll. The side with the higher modified die roll acts first.

In addition to PCs, any thing or event beyond the control of either group has its own unmodified initiative roll. If the enemy lobbs a grenade at your PC's feet, at the start of the next turn the GM secretly rolls 1d10 for the grenade's initiative (to see when it explodes). Your PC may have a chance to throw it back, or dive for cover—or she may not.

Prepared actions, like holding a gun on someone and demanding surrender, are special initiative situations. Normally, the prepared PC (or NPC) automatically goes first ("Move and I shoot, you ugly bug."). However, your PC can try to beat out the opponent if you roll a successful Reflexes check. (The GM may apply modifiers to your chance of success.) If you succeed, your PC can take an action before her challenger reacts. Fail, and she just wasn't quick enough.

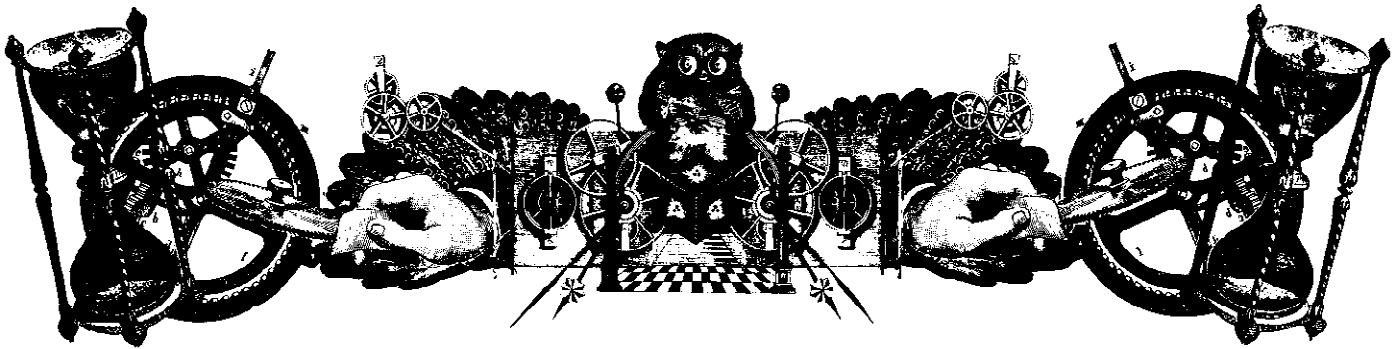
IV. Resolve Actions: Most often, this involves playing out some kind of combat. So, you'll need to know how you go about . . .

Hitting Your Target. Whenever your PC attacks (or is attacked), actually hitting what she aimed at is no guarantee. Virtually all attacks require a die roll to determine a hit or a miss. Only the inescapable are exempt from this rule.

In melee and ranged combat, your PC's base chance to hit equals her Reflexes score. However, this chance is modified according to the target area and the mitigating circumstances. If the roll is equal to or less than your PC's modified Reflexes score, the attack hits the target and damage is determined. If the roll exceeds the score, the attack misses.

Target Areas. Anytime your PC (or anything else) makes an attack, you must specify one of three target areas: general, nonvital, or vital. Different chances to hit apply to each area, and successful hits result in different damage effects.





General targets are anywhere on the opponent's body; your PC is just trying to land a fist or make a shot without concern for pinpoint accuracy. General targeting allows your PC to use her full Reflexes score before other modifications, and does not alter the damage done by the attack.

Nonvital targets are those areas of the opponent that if hit will stun, wound, or injure, but are unlikely to result in a kill. Trying to knock someone out or wing him in the arm calls for a nonvital target. Your PC's Reflexes score is halved when making a nonvital attack, and the chance of body damage is reduced by 2.

Vital targets are just the opposite: vulnerable areas that could lead to sudden death if hit. On humans, for example, these include the area around the heart and the head. Attacks on vital areas are particularly difficult, and so the chance of hitting is only 10% of your PC's normal Reflexes score (rounded up). The chance for body damage, however, is increased by 3 on a vital attack.

The "Target Modifiers" table appears on page 18.

Ranged Combat. Ranged combat (attacking with a weapon that shoots, flies, or is thrown) has special rules. While many of these depend on the universe (and its technology), certain features are common to all.

In each Universe Book, missile weapons (if any) are listed with their ranges and damage. Ranges are divided into *short*, *medium*, and *long* categories (some universes may also have *extreme*), measured in meters. When shooting at targets beyond short range, your PC suffers a penalty on her chance to hit. The exact penalty depends on the universe, since weapon effectiveness changes with each technology.

Furthermore, every character has a sighting range, normally 50 yards. Characters can see beyond this distance, of course, but when firing at targets beyond the sighting range, only general targeting can be used.

Combat Modifiers

Few battles are straight-up matches where heroes and villains duke it out toe-to-toe. Most are moving affairs with unique situations: things to get in the way, things to hide behind, and armor to wear. These situations are handled by combat modifiers, which are given in the Universe Books. In general, things that modify combat include:

Movement. Movement affects ranged combat, making targets harder to hit, but has no effect on hand-to-hand (melee) combat.

Armor. Depending on the universe, characters may have some kind of armor, be it the leather and metal of fantasy or the spun-fiber body armor of s-f. Most armor reduces the amount of damage caused by a hit. However, a few types—particularly things such as magnetic force fields or slippery suits—may make the PC physically harder to hit. These types of armor modify the attacker's chance to hit.

Cover. The most common kind of protection is something to hide behind—preferably something solid, so your PC can't be hurt. Cover is

divided into *soft* and *hard* types. Soft cover is anything your PC can shoot through that still conceals the target: tall grass, bushes, curtains, leaves, even smoke are all types of soft cover. Soft cover reduces the attacker's chance to hit. Hard cover is anything solid that conceals the target: tree trunks, sandbags, rocks, and walls, for example. Hard cover has modifiers like soft cover, and may limit the target areas that can be chosen. What can't be seen, can't be shot.

Damage

Every weapon in a given universe, be it accelerated magnetic field rifle firing depleted uranium flechettes, enchanted saber, or fist, is rated for damage.

Damage is given as two numerals: a die range for the points of damage caused, and a lethality rating. For example, in *For Faerie, Queen, and Country*, the service revolver's damage is 2d6/5. It causes 2-12 points of damage per hit and has a lethality rating of 5. Whenever a hit is scored, the dice are rolled and that amount is subtracted from the target's stamina or body points.

Lethality Ratings: It is possible to seriously injure someone with anything, but it is a lot easier with some weapons than others. A hit from a club hurts, but most often only raises ugly bruises, while a shotgun blast tends to have far more fatal effects. The differences between weapons are reflected, in part, by their lethality ratings: the chance that any hit causes body damage instead of the usual stamina damage.

Each time you roll for a hit, you must note not only whether your PC hit or missed, but (if she did hit) what the 1s digit on the roll was. If this number is equal to or less than the lethality rating of the weapon (modified by the target area chosen), the damage caused by this hit is subtracted from the target's body points. Otherwise, all damage comes from the target's stamina points. Lethality ratings can never be less than 1 or greater than 10 (0 on the die).

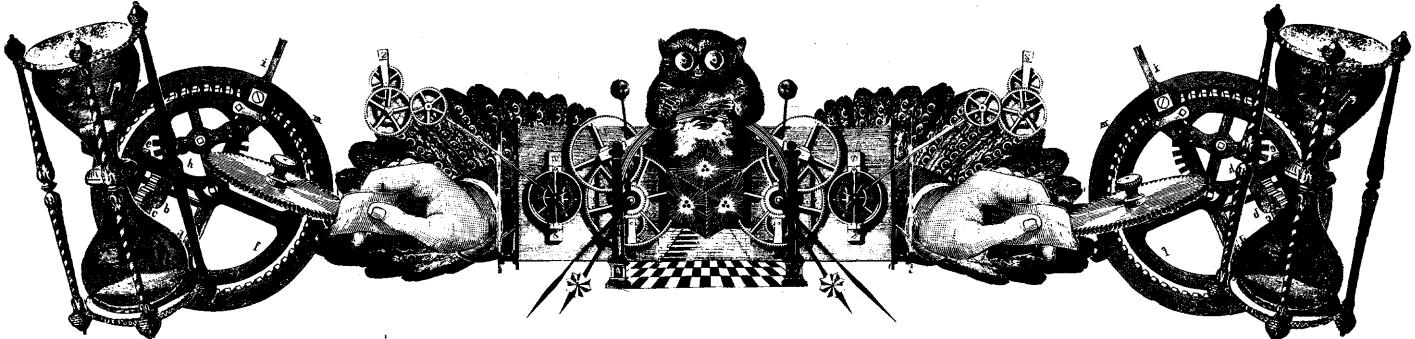
Experience

Part of every RPG is improving your character: increasing attribute scores and adding skills. This is done by earning experience points (*xps*) to be used by the character. Experience points are a simple way to measure all the intangible things your PC gains from surviving dangerous adventures, risking heroic perils, and "living" an everyday life through your role-playing. After all, it stands to reason that when your PC talks her way past a spaceport customs inspector, survives a dangerous shootout, or uses her skills, she improves. Her hand-eye coordination might get a little better, her confidence might grow. Experience points are a way to measure these slow improvements.

The Goals of the Game

Experience points are not the be-all and end-all of role-playing. If you hope to be a good player (or already are one), then your reasons for playing should go deeper than merely earning more experience points





and making your PC more powerful.

A role-playing game is a game, first and foremost, and games are meant to be fun.

This should be obvious, but too often it is easy to lose sight of this fact in the pursuit of more experience points for your PC. Good players don't focus on the powers and items their PCs possess, whom they have defeated, or what they might control. Naturally, they strive for these things, but they also act out their character's personality, get involved in the stories, and work with the GM and other players. For these players, it is perfectly possible to have an exciting, enjoyable game session without ever once earning a single experience point for their characters.

Place the following goals above the mere "earning" of experience points. If you do, rewards for you and your character will come automatically.

Have a good time playing.

Act the part of your character.

Don't let your good time ruin everyone else's fun.

Awarding and Earning Experience

It is not the place of this rules section to list everything a PC can do to earn experience points. In fact, because the AMAZING ENGINE™ game system has so many different universes, a single list is impossible. Your PC can't earn experience for fixing a computer when you're playing in a fantasy setting of faeries and boggarts.

Each universe has its own list of experience point awards, designed to suit the needs of that universe. In a setting where high-tech space marines battle hideous aliens, combat is important. Players can expect characters to be rewarded for showing tactical skill, surviving battles, and defeating enemies. At the other extreme, another universe casts the PCs as ambassadors and detectives in a fairy-filled England. Shooting an attendant of Queen Maeve's court or blowing up a fairy ring with a keg of gunpowder is not the goal of that universe. Instead, players are rewarded for talking their way through sticky situations, preventing wars and solving problems. The experience awards for the former setting will not work for the latter. Nonetheless, all share some general features.

Successful adventures. In any universe, a successful adventure warrants some experience points. "Success" depends on the universe and the adventure. Sometimes, it's enough to survive; in other cases, a specific foe must be defeated or a problem solved.

Using skills. People learn by doing. In the AMAZING ENGINE system, this is noted by rewarding characters with xps for using their skills in ways relevant to the adventure. "Relevant" means your PC can't just spend the day shooting at bottles to increase his Combat skill; bottles don't shoot back, after all. (If the skill were Target Shooting, it'd be a different story.) Using the skill has to involve some real chance of failure or risk for the character.

Role-playing. This is the object of the AMAZING ENGINE system, so good role-playing is rewarded with xps. This is a highly subjective GM call. It depends on the personality you have established for your

character, the GM, and the situation at the moment. Good role-playing also means keeping what you *as a player* know separate from what *your character* knows. As a player, you know that sticking your hand into a fire is a Bad Idea, but your PC, Oog the caveman, discoverer of fire, hasn't learned that lesson—yet.

Experience and Multiple Universes

In most RPGs, you play only a single character at a time, and so only have to track the xps earned by that character. In this system, however, situations are often different. The most common possibility is that you will play in one universe where your PC earns some xps, and then change to a different universe. What happens to all the xps your PC has earned to date? Few players want to give up all their advantages and start over. In this system, you don't have to.

Whenever your PC earns experience in an AMAZING ENGINE universe, *you must immediately assign the xps to either your current player character* (the one who earned the xps) *or to the player core from which* that character was created. Points assigned to the core are forever beyond the reach of your current player character. These points can only benefit characters created from this core in future sessions. Points assigned to your PC are available for immediate use, but cannot be given later to another PC in a different universe.

Within these two areas—player core and player character—you have four options for assigning experience points. With points assigned to the player character, you can *tax* the character's attributes, spending xps during play to temporarily increase attribute scores; or, you can use these xps to make permanent improvements to your existing character. With the points you give to the player core, you can buy extra dice for that core, thereby improving future characters created from it, or transfer xps to a new character in the same (or different) universe.

Taxing Attributes

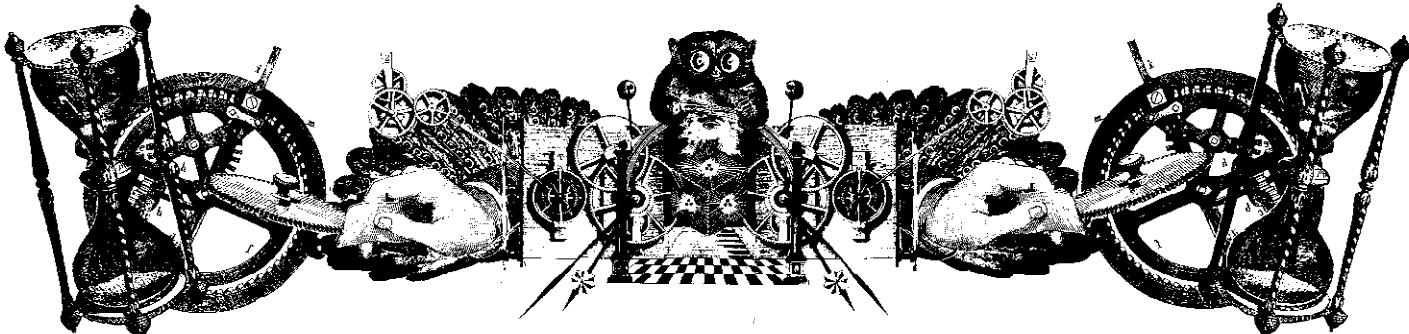
The most immediate use of experience points is spending them during the course of play to temporarily increase an attribute score. This is called taxing your PC—forcing her to think a little more or strain a little harder. Taxing can increase her chance of success with a skill: pour on that extra burst of speed in a chase, or make a heroic effort to lift a great weight, for example.

When you want to tax your character, you must tell the GM *before rolling any dice*. Once the dice are rolled, your chance has passed, so be ready to decide quickly. At the same time, you should tell the GM how many xps you want to spend in the effort.

There are three limitations on how many xps you can use to modify the character's attribute score.

1. Your PC must have unused xps to spend on the attempt. (This applies to all uses of xps. There is no such thing as "negative experience.")
2. Experience points are spent in increments of 5: 5, 10, 15, etc.
3. Experience points spent in a taxing attempt cannot exceed 50% of the original attribute score. This means that the modified score





cannot exceed 150% of the original. Numbers are rounded down, to the nearest multiple of 5. For examples, see "Pushing the Limits" under "Movement," and "Example: Taxing an Attribute," under "Tables, Charts, and Examples."

Experience points spent to improve an attribute check are subtracted from the PC's xp total, regardless of the check's success or failure.

Improving Your Character

A more permanent method of improving your PC is buying points to add to your character's attribute scores. Unlike modifying an attribute score (taxing), these purchases are permanent. They are also more costly. The cost of these improvements varies from universe to universe. In one, it may cost 3 xps to raise an attribute 1 point; in another, the same change might cost 10 xps.

There are two limitations on buying increased attribute scores.

1. No attribute score can be increased beyond 90.
2. Permanent improvements cannot be bought during the course of an adventure. They can only be purchased after your PC has had time to reflect on her accomplishments.

Increases bought in this way are permanent for your character. Erase the old attribute score and write down the new one, then subtract the xps spent from the character's total.

Players can also buy new skills for their characters, improving their PCs by increasing the range of their knowledge and ability. The xp costs for buying skills can vary widely from skill to skill and universe to universe. Costs and procedures are described in each Universe Book, as needed.

Improving the Player Core

For long-term planning, you can look beyond your immediate character and instead assign points to your player core. With these points, you can buy additional dice for your ability pools. The purchase of additional dice has no effect on current characters; it only helps those created from the improved core in future universes and game sessions.

Each die of improvement to an ability pool costs 100 xps. Since improvements to the player core have no effect on your current PC, this kind of purchase can be made at any time.

Although theoretically the number of dice you can buy for a single ability pool is limited to 10 (allowing you to assign 5 to both attributes, the maximum allowable), a specific AMAZING ENGINE™ universe may set different ability pool or attribute limits on characters in that universe. It is best to check with the GM before over-investing in an ability pool for your character.

Without special Universe Book modifications, it is possible (eventually) to purchase dice for each ability pool sufficient to negate the use of the 7 "free" dice. However, this requires many, many game sessions' worth of xps, which must be assigned to the player core and not the PC who earned the xps. In general, we suggest that player cores reaching this limit (and the PCs created from them) be retired permanently, and that players create new cores and new prime characters. This

eventuality is not covered within these rules. GMs are free to design their own rules to deal with this situation, when and if it occurs within their campaigns.

Transfer to New Characters

One unique feature of this game system is the opportunity to role-play in a variety of universes. In other RPGs, this means giving up any experience your character has earned. In essence, all the time you spent playing comes to naught when you start in a new world.

That is not the case in the AMAZING ENGINE system.

Each time you create a new character from an existing core, you can transfer xps from the core to the new character, with the following limitations:

1. The new character must come from the same core as the previous character (the one that earned the experience).
2. The two characters cannot be active in the same universe. A new PC from an existing core can appear in the same universe as a previous PC from the same core *only if the previous character is dead or permanently retired*.

Thus, in the MAGITECH™ game universe, your new PC could profit from the adventures of that marine sergeant from that old BUGHUNTER™ game. Treat the transfer like a withdrawal from a bank account. The points you assign to the new PC cannot be "redeposited" later on, but new xps can be earned by the new PC and assigned to the player core (or to the new player character, as you choose). See "Example: Assigning Experience Points," later in this section.

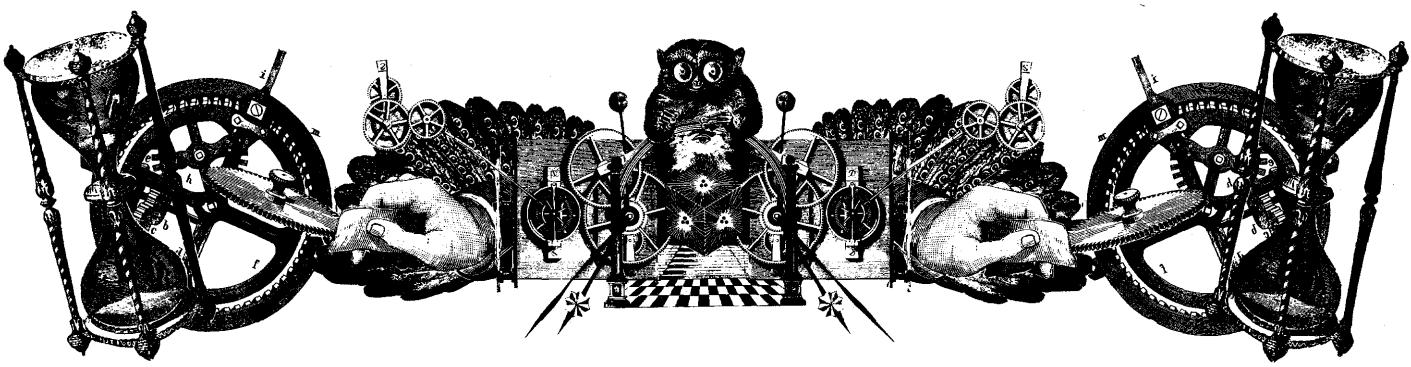
Experience and Character Death

Unpleasant as the thought is, your PCs can (and will) die. When this happens, any experience assigned to that player character is lost, assuming you haven't used it all trying to keep the PC alive. Experience points assigned to the player core are not lost. These can be used by future characters created from the same core.

Tables, Charts, and Examples

The remainder of the rules section contains a complete example of character generation; reference tables and charts for the player core, movement rates, and carrying capacity; and text examples of various game-play situations showing application of taxing, skill checks, and more. You can use this section in several ways: read it in its entirety now, before continuing with the rest of the book; read only the parts that interest you, saving the rest for when you really need them; or ignore it, and turn to it later when you've become hopelessly lost. Seriously, though, if you need clarification on any of the points covered in the previous pages, the answers are probably in this section.





Example: Character Generation

Wolfgang is ready to create his first character for an AMAZING ENGINE™ game, and so he spends a little time thinking about what he wants. Having just read an interesting story about thieves, Wolfgang decides he would like a confidence man, a smooth-talking, quick-fingered individual with a modest chance for magical skill.

Based on his ideal con man, Wolfgang must decide how to rank the four ability pools. Since he wants his PC to be a very smooth talker, somewhat light-fingered, with a smattering of mystical ability, he rates the pools like this:

Physique: 2 (+10 points)
 Intellect: 4 (+0 points)
 Spirit: 3 (+5 points)
 Influence: 1 (+15 points)

Remember, the pool rated 1 has the best chance for high scores; the pool rated 4 has the lowest chance.

Wolfgang now selects four attributes as his primary concerns. Since he really wants to have a personable character, he chooses Charm. To ensure his light-fingered abilities, his second choice is Reflexes. After pondering, Wolfgang realizes his character could end up short in street smarts, so he chooses Intuition, even though it is in his lowest-ranked ability pool (Intellect). For his fourth choice, he decides to take a chance and selects Position, so he can have a sophisticated con artist. He then rolls 4d10 for each attribute, with the following results:

Reflexes: 31
 Intuition: 28
 Charm: 17
 Position: 23

Wolfgang now fills out the remaining attribute scores by rolling 3d10 for each and noting the numbers. When he is finished, his sheet looks like this:

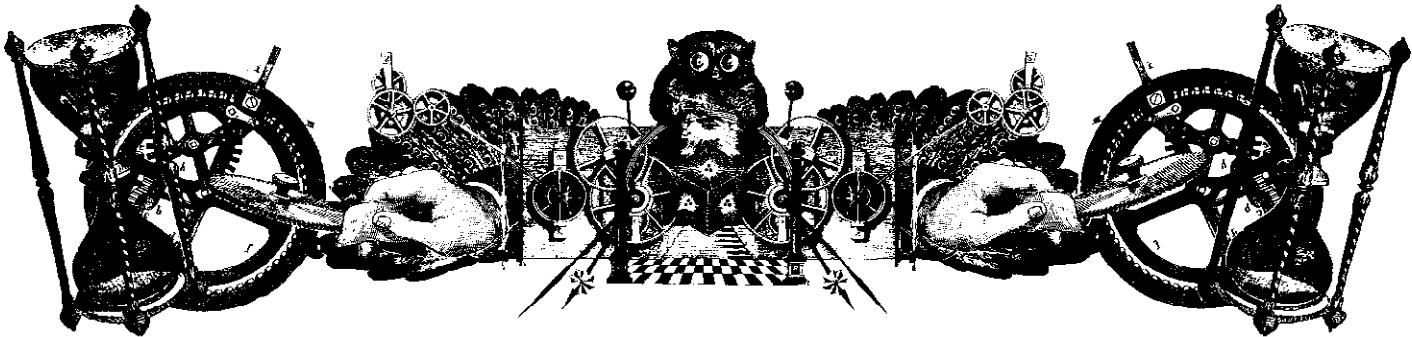
Physique	Intellect	Spirit	Influence
Rank: 2	Rank: 4	Rank: 3	Rank: 1
Dice:	Dice:	Dice:	Dice:
Fitness: 16	Learning: 23	Psyche: 21	Charm: 17
Reflexes: 31	Intuition: 28	Willpower: 7	Position: 23

Now, it's time to add the die modifiers according to the ability pools' ranking. Wolfgang starts with his first-ranked pool, Influence. He had bad luck rolling for Charm (and he really wants a personable character), so he adds all 15 points to Charm. In Physique, Fitness is a little low, so he splits the 10 available points between Fitness and Reflexes, 5 each. Under Spirit, the character's Willpower is dangerously low, so Wolfgang feels he has no choice but to add all 5 points to that score even though he would like a better Psyche. He rolled well for his Intellect attributes, which is fortunate since he cannot modify either score (it's the fourth-ranked pool, which gains no modifiers).

Physique	Intellect	Spirit	Influence
Rank: 2	Rank: 4	Rank: 3	Rank: 1
Dice:	Dice:	Dice:	Dice:
Fitness: 21	Learning: 23	Psyche: 21	Charm: 32
Reflexes: 36	Intuition: 28	Willpower: 12	Position: 23

Looking over his character's final attributes, Wolfgang decides the PC is nimble-fingered (high Reflexes) and smooth (good Charm), with a good sense for danger (from his good Intuition). His character is not the strongest or healthiest (only average Fitness), and he needs to work on his psychic abilities (only average Psyche). Finally, with a Willpower of 12, Wolfgang decides his con man is something of a craven fellow, who more often than not "runs away to live to fight another day."





Having created his PC's statistics, Wolfgang now finishes creating the player core by assigning the dice ratings to each ability pool.

Physique	Intellect	Spirit	Influence
Rank: 2	Rank: 4	Rank: 3	Rank: 1
Dice: 6	Dice: 6	Dice: 4	Dice: 6
Fitness: 21	Learning: 23	Psyche: 21	Charm: 32
Reflexes: 36	Intuition: 28	Willpower: 12	Position: 23
$(21+36)/10=5.7$	$(23+28)/10=5.1$	$(21+12)/10=3.3$	$(32+23)/10=5.5$

After running a fantasy campaign for some time, Wolfgang's GM decides to switch to a science-fiction universe. Since there is no magic in this s-f setting (and since he's getting tired of playing thieves and scoundrels), Wolf once more chooses a role he might like to play. Knowing from his player core that his PCs will tend to be strong in Physique and Influence, Wolf decides to try for a hard-bitten smuggler captain. Checking his player core's xp total, he sees that there are 150 points he can work with. Since his Spirit pool tends to be weak (just because of bad dice rolls), he decides to purchase 1 additional die for that pool. He crosses off 100 xps (the cost of 1 improvement die) from the player core's total, and adds 1 die to the dice rating for his core's Spirit pool. Then, he divides his pool dice according to the dice ratings, and then assigns his 7 "free" dice to Fitness (2), Willpower (3, because it was very low), and Position (2).

Physique	Intellect	Spirit	Influence
Rank: 2	Rank: 4	Rank: 3	Rank: 1
Dice: 6	Dice: 6	Dice: 5	Dice: 6
Fitness: 5 dice	Learning: 3 dice	Psyche: 3 dice	Charm: 4 dice
Reflexes: 3 dice	Intuition: 3 dice	Willpower: 5 dice	Position: 4 dice

After all the dice are assigned, this PC's Fitness and Willpower attributes have the maximum number of dice allowed (5). Wolf rolls and notes the totals for each attribute score, with the following results:

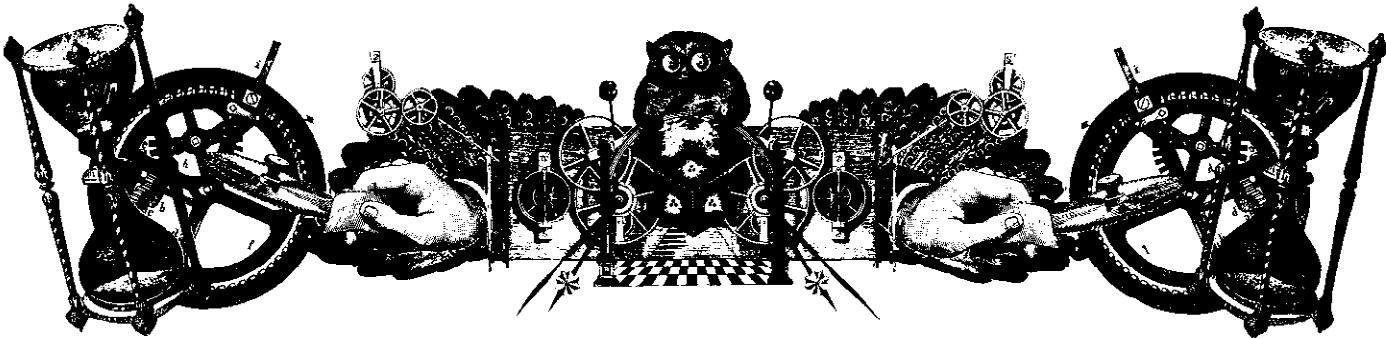
Fitness: 26	Learning: 18	Psyche: 23	Charm: 24
Reflexes: 13	Intuition: 29	Willpower: 17	Position: 25

Once again, he rolled incredibly well for Intuition and not so hot for Willpower. Looking at his new character, he starts with the first-ranked ability pool, Influence. For this universe, he wants an important character and so puts all 15 points toward Position. In the second-ranked Physique pool, he puts 4 points to Fitness and 6 to Reflexes, while for the third-ranked Spirit, he gives all 5 points to Willpower.

Fitness: 30	Learning: 18	Psyche: 23	Charm: 24
Reflexes: 19	Intuition: 29	Willpower: 22	Position: 40

Wolf decides to transfer the remaining 50 xps from the player core to this new character, making those points immediately available during play (for taxing attributes, just in case). Wolf might also choose to use some of those xps to purchase some new skills for this PC, after his first adventure is completed. He notes the 50 xps on the new character's sheet, and subtracts them from the player core's total.

With these adjustments, Wolfgang's new character is ready for play.



Movement Rates

Movement Type	Distance per:		Duration	Fitness Check
	Turn	Minute		
Walk	15 m.	90 m.	Indefinite	None
Run	Fitness	Fitness x 6	Minutes = Fitness	Yes
Sprint	Fitness x 2	Fitness x 12*	Turns = Fitness/10	Yes

* If character has sufficient duration.

Carrying Capacity

Kilos Equal to:	Effect on Movement:
Fitness score	No effect
Fitness score x 2	Sprinting and running halved
Fitness score x 3	No sprinting or running allowed, must rest after walking meters = Fitness score

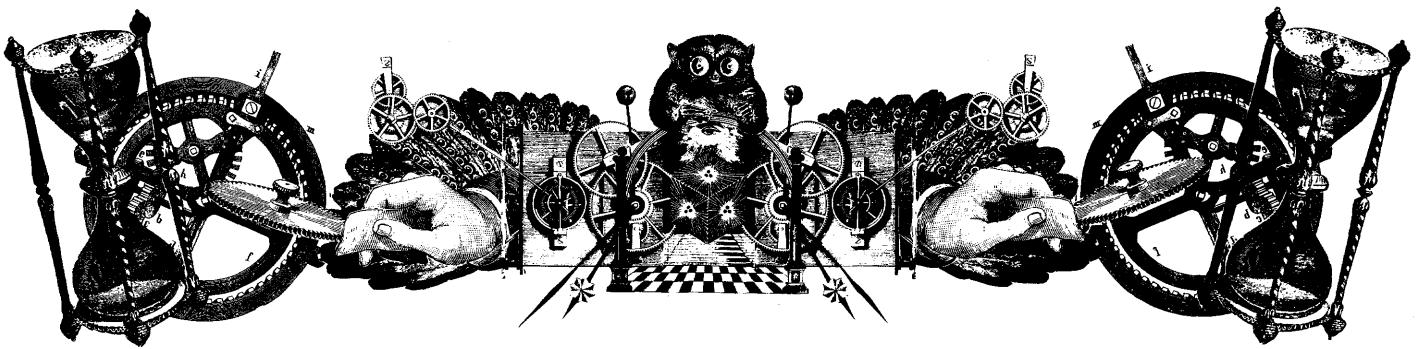
Target Modifiers

Target Area	Chance to Hit	Dam. Effect
General	Reflexes	None
Non-vital	50% Reflexes	-2 to type
Vital	10% Reflexes	+3 to type

Advantage Outcomes

Condition		NPC		
		Successful Psyche Check	Failed Psyche Check	9 5 - 1 0 0
P	Successful Psyche Check	No advantage	Player has advantage	Player has surprise
L	Failed Psyche Check	NPC has advantage	No advantage	No advantage
A	95-100	NPC has surprise	No advantage	No advantage
Y				
E				
R				





Example: Skill Checks

Karen's character, Leonardo, needs to make a hasty get away from the law. Flying Carpet skill, which Leo has, is Reflex-based. Karen knows Leo's reflexes score is 36.

Wasting no time, Leo jumps onto his Mach flying carpet, recites a quick incantation, and zips into traffic on Michigan Avenue.

No skill check required. Starting and flying the carpet is a common enough action, one Leo does every day, hence no skill check is needed.

As he weaves through the late rush hour traffic, Leo looks back. Chicago's finest are in hot pursuit. Leo's in trouble! He can't outrun a police special carpet, especially not in this traffic. His only hope is to lose them with some quick turns. A gap in the traffic appears just ahead, so the Big Shark commands his carpet to pour it on. He darts across the lanes and whips onto a side street faster than is safe.

Skill check required. Karen is having her character take a chance, the equivalent of skidding around a corner during a high-speed car chase. She rolls percentile dice and gets a 21, which is less than Leo's Reflexes score. The move succeeds, and Leo doesn't crush his carpet.

White-knuckled, Leo careens around the corner, narrowly missing an oncoming bus golem and the plate glass window of Besson's Department Store. Unfortunately, the cops make the turn too, and are now gaining on him. Still speeding, Leo banks his carpet again, this time aiming for an alley. Just as he begins the turn, a giant steps from a service entrance, blocking the opening! It's too late to change course, so the only thing Leo can do is try to shoot between the fellow's legs.

Modified skill check required. Taking the turn too fast already required a skill check, so the GM assigns a -10 penalty for the added trick of trying to steer between the giant's legs. This reduces Leo's Reflexes score to 26 for this skill check. Karen rolls 57 on percentile dice. The check fails; Leo doesn't make it.

Oh no! Startled, the giant instinctively moves to protect himself, closing the gap Leo was aiming for. Too late to stop, the carpet hits the brute right at his knees, and crumples like a limp rag. As Leo is flung from the crash, he hears the howls of the police as they, too, bank into the pileup.

Example: Skill Check with Penalty for Nonspecialization

Leo has a tip on a shipment of smuggled magical artifacts stored in a warehouse near the trainyards, just the evidence he needs to spring his client. All he has to do is break in and get a few pictures. That night at the back door, Leo figures he ought to check for burglar alarms before forcing his way in. Leo knows the basics of glyphs (Glyph Analysis skill), but is no expert in burglar alarms (Protection Glyph specialization). Checking the door for alarms is pretty basic for a specialist, but for Leo a skill check against his Learning score (which is only a 23,

with an additional -5 for nonspecialization) is required. The check is rolled, and the result is a 12: Success! Sure enough, the door is enchanted.

Now, Leo tries to deactivate the alarm. This requires a skill check for a specialist, and so is very difficult for Leo. The check is made with a -15 applied to the attribute score (-5 for nonspecialization, -10 for the action) for a total chance of success of 8 or less. Amazingly, Karen rolls a 04! Leo manages to temporarily dispel the alarm.

Example: Attempting an Unknown Skill

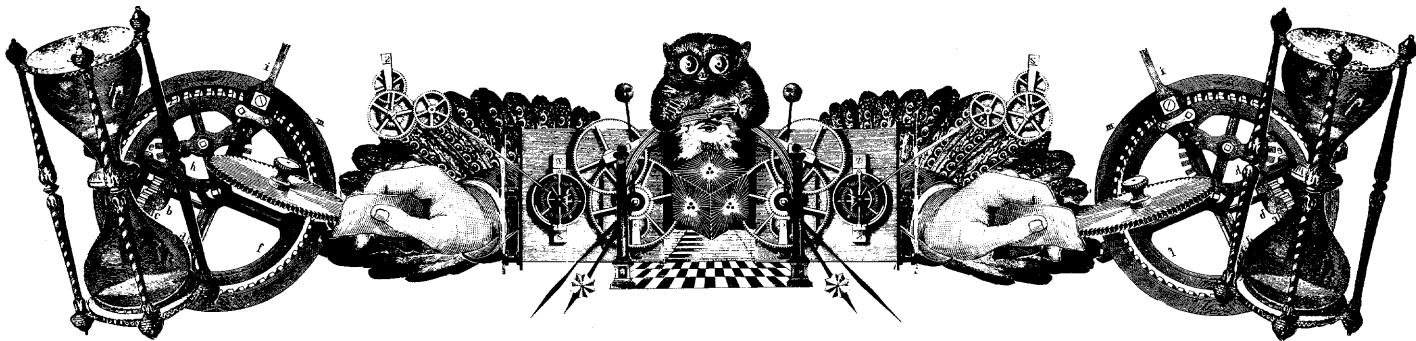
Once inside the warehouse, Leo begins searching through the crates. Suddenly, just as he finds a suspicious one labeled "Excalibur," a footstep scrapes behind him. Leo spins, pulling his gun as he does, to find himself facing a centaur thug. A quick hoof kick sends Leo sprawling, his gun clattering across the floor. A second blow just misses, shattering the crate next to his head and spilling the contents—the sword—half out of the box. In desperation, Leo grabs the sword and pulls it from the box. "Ain't the same as bullets, but you'll have to do." As he clumsily swings the sword up over his head, it begins to glow.

Karen never thought her character would need a sword, so Leo doesn't have Fencing skill. However, since Fencing is a nonLearning-based skill (one that uses Reflexes), Leo can attempt swordfighting—but at an 18, half his normal Reflexes score,

Example: Taxing an Attribute

In a campaign of *For Faerie, Queen, and Country*, Karen's character, Colonel Sir Jameson Pickering, K.C.M.G., ret., suddenly senses a wave of magical power while attending an important diplomatic ball. Frantically looking about, he sees the villainous sorceress, Countess Angevin, standing in the shadows on the portico. Their eyes meet and before Sir Jameson can warn anyone, a magical paralysis creeps over his limbs as the countess imposes her seductive will. The situation is dire, so Karen decides it's time to tax Sir Jameson's Willpower to break the spell. The normal attribute check to resist possession is equal to the Willpower score halved. Sir Jameson's Willpower is 46, halved to 23 for the check. Karen looks at the available xps assigned to Sir Jameson, and decides to spend the maximum (50% of the original attribute score, or 20 points) to bring the relevant attribute score back to 43 for this check only. The dice roll is a 32; with strain, Sir Jameson breaks the countess's gaze and makes his way into the drawing room for a cigar.





Example: Assigning Experience Points

Michele's character, Plt. Sgt. Adrian 2 Selinko, United Terra Reconnaissance and Peacekeeping Force, has just returned to the "booze barge" (as UTRPFers refer to their HQ on Earth's L-5 station) from a bug-hunting mission on a mining outpost at Barnard's Star. The GM awards experience for that mission, and Sgt. Selinko receives 75 xps for repulsing a swarm of chitinous predators. Michele must assign the xps immediately, so she adds 50 points to Adrian's xp total (the player character) and the remaining 25 to the Player Core XP line on her character sheet.

The 50 points assigned directly to Adrian can be used for taxing attributes during the course of an adventure, or for purchasing increased attribute scores after the adventure is completed. The 25 points assigned to the player core will never affect Adrian directly, but will benefit future characters created from the same core.

Example: Damage and Lethality Rating

WO1 Selinko watches in horror as the xenoforms outmaneuver her squad, three of the creatures lunging in for the kill.

The GM rolls three attacks, one for each stalker, and decides that all attacks will be at general target areas, as this is easiest. The stalkers have Reflexes of 62. The die rolls are 83, 17, and 23, so two of the creatures hit and one misses. Each attack causes 3d6 points of damage and has a lethality rating of 4. The first hit (17) causes 6 points of stamina damage, subtracted from the trooper's total of 25. The second attack does 8 points of body damage (not the standard stamina damage, because the 1s digit—a 3—was less than the lethality rating of 4) but the trooper only has 7 body points. The extra damage is ignored.

One of the soldiers reels back, cut, but not seriously, by a xenoform's slashing claws. The other trooper isn't so lucky, as a stalker strikes him dead in front of platoon leader Selinko.

"Eat this," she snarls while unloading her flechette clip into the creature's gaping maw.

AMAZING ENGINE™ Role-Playing System Player Core Sheet

Physique	Intellect	Spirit	Influence
Rank:	Rank:	Rank:	Rank:
Dice:	Dice:	Dice:	Dice:
Fitness:	Learning:	Psyche:	Charm:
Reflexes:	Intuition:	Willpower:	Position:

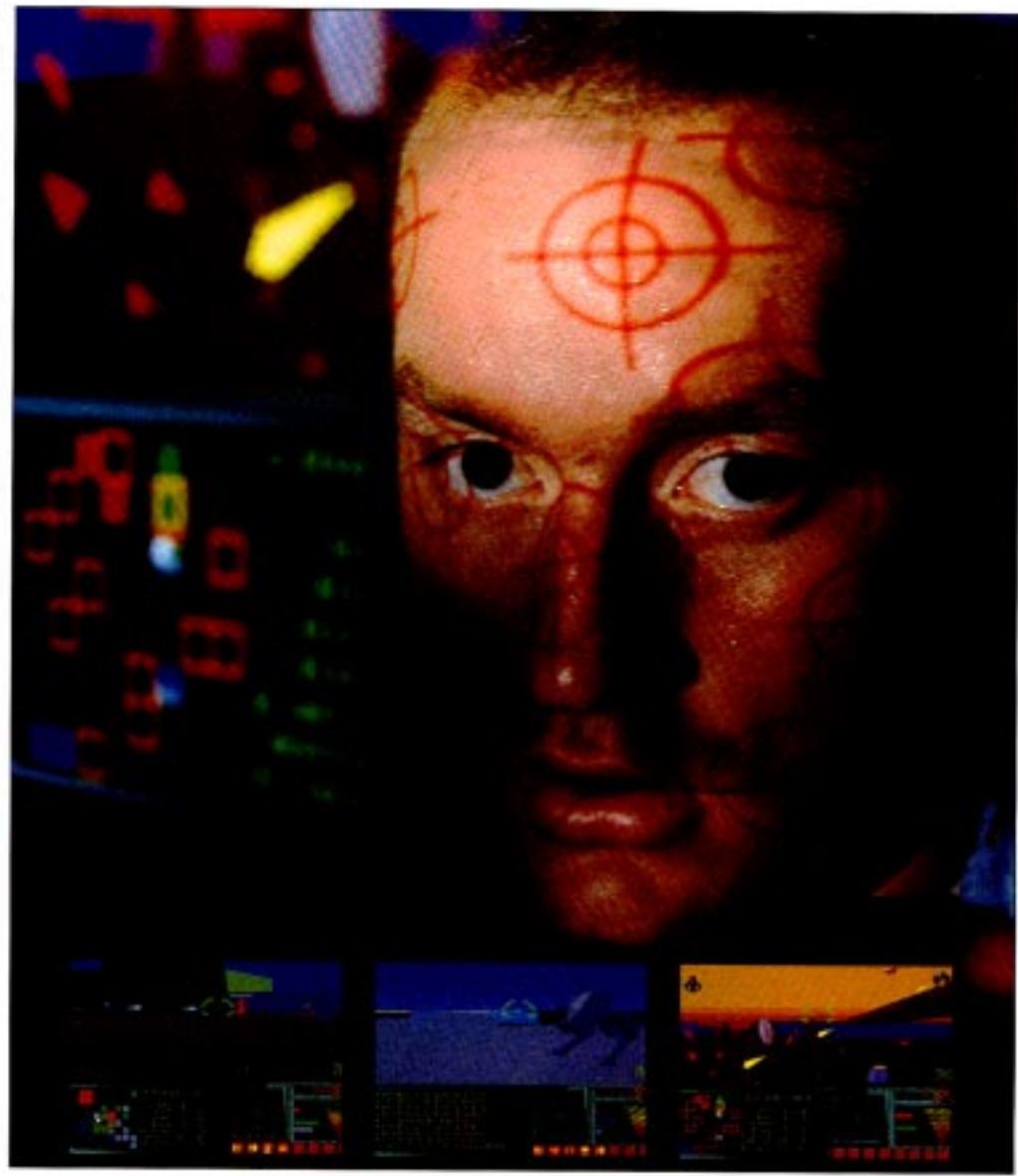
Player Core xps:

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Samuel Goldwyn

This month we have a guest reviewer for part of the column. The game *DOOM*, by id Software, has just been completed, and I could not review it myself because I worked on it. On the other hand, I felt that DRAGON® Magazine readers would be interested in the subject. Doug Kaufman, a game designer and writer who has been in the industry for years, kindly offered to review the game and has done so below. For the other games, you're stuck with me.

Note: some readers may recall the special *DOOM* "preview" that appeared in DRAGON issue #198, and wonder how I had the gall to preview a game that I worked on. My best defense is the truth—at the time I wrote that preview, I was not an employee of id Software.

Reviews

DOOM

IBM id Software
Programming: John Carmack, John Romero, Dave mylar
Art: Adrian Carmack, Kevin Cloud
Design: Sandy Petersen
Biz: Jay Wilbur
Support: Shawn Green

The latest game from id Software, *Doom*, is a first-person shoot-'em-up similar to *Castle Wolfenstein*. In fact, one might reasonably call it *Wolfenstein II*. The question for consumers, of course: is it worth buying if I've already played *Wolfenstein*? What if I didn't like *Wolfenstein*?

If you're already a *Wolfenstein* fan, this is a short review for you. Stop reading and run out and buy *Doom*—you absolutely will not be disappointed. It's not just a rehash—it has new graphics, new weapons, more sophisticated battle tactics, better secret doors, radiation suits, and chainsaws. Yes, chainsaws. Like I said: run, don't walk, to get *Doom*. Did I mention up to four-player network play, either cooperative or player vs. player death match?

If you're still reading this review, you must not have liked *Wolfenstein*, or perhaps you're one of the few computer gamers across the country who has never seen *Wolfenstein*. Is *Doom* for you?

I'd give it a qualified yes. If fast-moving arcade shoot-'em-ups aren't for you, *Doom* may not be what you're looking for, but if you didn't like *Wolfenstein* for a specific reason, here are some of the improvements to be found in *Doom*:

EYE OF THE MONITOR

©1993 by Sandy Petersen



DOOM (id Software)

Graphics: The graphics in *Wolfenstein* were actually somewhat cleaner, but far more cartoonesque. The graphics in *Doom* are darker, grittier, and more realistic. *Doom* also has one vastly exciting mood-setter: light. There are dim rooms, dark rooms, and most exciting of all, rooms

with flashing lights. There is nothing quite like the thrill one receives while creeping through darkness that is suddenly illuminated by flickering ultraviolet—with a monstrosity suddenly visible at the other end of the room!

In addition to the lighting effects, *Doom* has many more wall textures, ceilings, and a neat bobbing-up-and-down effect as you run (which causes seasickness in a few wimpy souls, so be warned). It also has several additional weapons (more about this later), and the fist-punch and shotgun fire-and-pump animations are really cool.

Gameplay: The improvements to gameplay, at least in Episode One (I played all four levels of episode one for this review,

Computer games' ratings

X	Not recommended
**	Poor
***	Fair
****	Good

as well as a two-player network game), are sketchy. With more weapons, there is greater scope for tactical planning on the player's part: the shotgun is powerful and has a slightly spread fire-zone, good for infighting against lots of enemies; the chaingun is deadlier, but uses up a lot of ammo. (There are different ammo types for each weapon, so logistics plays a part in planning.) The rocket launcher can take out several enemies at once, but *do not* use it up close. All these choices would be for naught if the designers didn't provide a variety of situations, but they've done well in that respect. There are narrow corridors, big rooms full of enemies, single enemies that are more powerful than you, enemies with long-range weapons, enemies with powerful close-range weapons, etc., scattered throughout each level.

Another improvement in gameplay is secret doors: in *Wolfenstein* it was a major pain in the butt to check every single wall for secret doors, but you had to because you never knew where one might be found. There are hints in *Doom*, which helps narrow things down tremendously. I do feel, though, that the doors are not as evident as the designers believe: the tell-tale graphic differences are hard to spot because of the nature of the engine; as you get closer to a wall, its colors ripple somewhat, and this often leads you to believe there's something there when there isn't. Secret doors are still a pain, but maybe that's the way it should be.

Probably the best improvement to gameplay is the tactical map: hit the Tab key and you get a birds-eye view of the level you're on. This is very useful for seeing areas you haven't finished exploring yet, potential sites for secret doors, and just figuring out where in the blazes you are. This feature alone tipped the scales for me: I found *Wolfenstein* too frustrating to play because I constantly got lost. With *Doom* it's not a problem.

Network play: Another outstanding new feature is the potential for up to four players to network together. If *Wolfenstein* was too hard or too easy for you, try playing *Doom* with some buddies, or against some buddies. Yow! It gives a feeling similar to that of the movie *Aliens*, where the Marine team is maneuvering together down the dark corridors and into the dark lair of evil. Playing a deathmatch against "live" opponents is the biggest adrenalin rush available on computers today.

Doom is a terrific showcase of fast-moving, first-person sprite manipulation. It gives a real feel of being a lone man running through darkened corridors, with armed enemies all around and only your trusty shotgun between you and certain death. If you like *Photon* or *Laser Tag*, you'll want to play *Doom*.

As a computer game, though, it lacks a certain depth. You run through the corridors, shooting everything you see. After a while, you either die or you kill everything



DOOM (id Software)

on that level and then look around a bit for secret doors before moving on to the next level. Admittedly, your own skills and brains make a big difference between life and death, but the fact is that the game is pretty repetitious. If you found specific problems with *Wolfenstein*, you might find them fixed in *Doom*, but if you just didn't care for *Wolfenstein* as a concept, you won't find enough new in *Doom* to keep you going.

A final note: the first episode of *Doom* is shareware, available on most bulletin-board systems and net services. You can judge for yourself just how compelling and exciting it is for you, and send away for two additional levels for \$40. Good luck and good hunting!

Game tips (Episode One)

1. Hangar: Once you enter the exit room, don't exit immediately. You've just activated a secret-go back out and into the slime room. The raised platform that once held an imp is now opened and you can walk inside to obtain a sorely-needed shotgun.

2. Nuclear Plant: Walk around the central structure right ahead of you when you start. On one wall the textures don't quite match up. Go up and push on them to expose a little room holding some goodies and a switch. Push on the switch to open a door elsewhere. Now, when you walk up the stairs to get the key card, you'll see an opening to the outside, where you can get the chaingun, among other stuff.

3. Phobos Lab: In order to get the yellow key card, you must cause a walkway to rise up from some slime. Step out on that walkway and look out over the slime. You'll see a brown section of wall amidst all the green panels. Jump into the slime and run to the brown wall. It's a secret door opening to the rocket launcher.



DOOM (id Software)

(Episode Two)

1. Deimos Anomaly: After crossing the moat of blood, you can see a button on one wall. Pushing it raises a short wall with a button on each side. One side opens a secret door next to the teleporter. The other opens a secret teleporter way back where you obtained the blue skull card. Go back up and through that teleporter to get the plasma gun.

2. Containment Area: The final hall full of skull-lined crushing ceilings conceals a secret. The third crushing ceiling hides a secret entrance to your left. Rush in there while the ceiling is going up, and you'll find a chainsaw.

3. Fortress of Mystery: Some players believe this level is impossible to conquer. That just isn't so. To win, you have to get the Hell Barons and Cacodemons to fight one another. While they're fighting, keep racing around, staying out of their way. (Good luck.) When enough of them are dead (usually the Hell Barons win but not always), you can start pitching in, using the hefty heap of equipment available in the Hell Baron room.

(Episode Three)

1. Hell Keep: The next-to-last room, covered with black sooty walls, holds a secret door hiding a rocket launcher. Push against the walls until you find it. This

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IBM 256-color VGA Displays



rocket launcher is also available in Limbo, in the same spot.

2. Unholy Cathedral: The weird glyphs set into the walls often signal the presence of a nearby secret door. Check it out.

3. Limbo: When you reach the end of the pseudo-first level, the walls lower and you are faced with a gigantic Cyber-Demon firing rockets. Your only hope is to run around behind him, where you'll find an invulnerability sphere. You'll have 30 seconds of invulnerability to blast him with your rockets.

SAM AND MAX: HIT THE ROAD ****

IBM and compatibles LucasArts
Design: Sean Clark, Mike Stemmle, Steve Purcell, Collette Michaud
Programming: Sean Clark, Mike Stemmle, Livia Mackin, Jonathan Ackley
Background art: Peter Chan
Animation: Lela Dowling, Jesse Clark, Collette Michaud, Steve Purcell, Larry Ahern

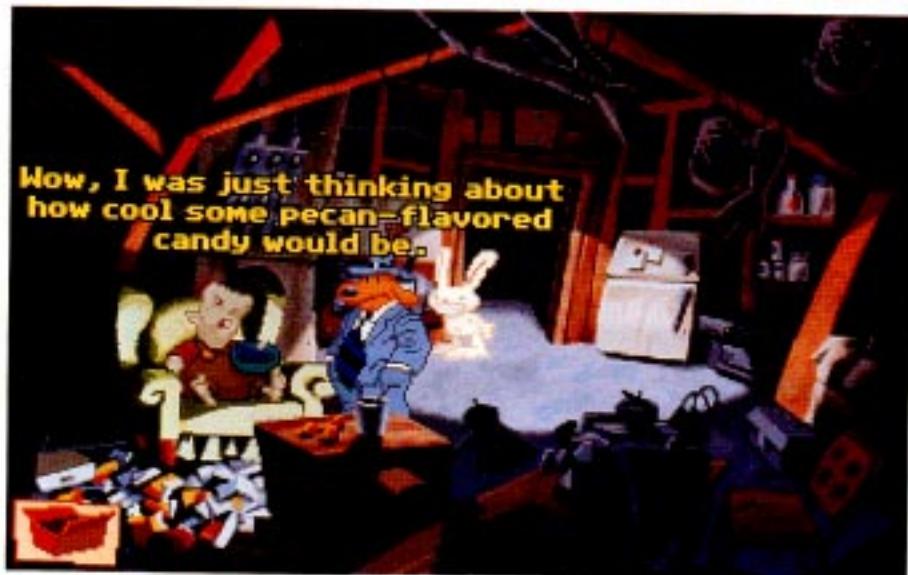
Comics fans among you may be familiar with the intrepid Sam and Max: Freelance Police. The artist and creator, Steve Purcell, at one time illustrated role-playing games (including many supplements Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game, for instance), and it's nice to see him hitting the big time.

If you don't have a sound card, *Sam and Max* remains silent, in common with many games nowadays. A number of companies can no longer be bothered to provide support for the pathetic IBM sound chip, and it looks like LucasArts is one of them. Well, I guess it's not much of a loss, but it would have been nice if they'd made at least a little effort in that direction. "Beeptronics" is still better than total silence.

Sam and Max is an adventure game, much like LucasArts' earlier *Day of the Tentacle*. You play the part of Sam. Max accompanies you on your ride through America, and you must keep him in consideration, though he is not actually under your direct control. Sometimes you can use Max to accomplish tasks. Sometimes Max takes action on his own. When you're standing around thinking, Max wanders about the screen, making faces at the pigeons or examining suspicious puddles. I was very impressed by the way in which Max has been integrated into the game without just making him a puppet of the player, and I recommend the study of this approach to any game designer working on a game involving character interaction.

As with other graphic adventures, you win by solving all the puzzles the game holds. Also as in other graphic adventures, the game is not particularly replayable—once a puzzle has been solved, you can't go back and play it again. The puzzles are as good as in any game I've seen, and there seems to be plenty of them.

In my version of *Sam and Max*, bugs were rampant. If I clicked the wrong



Sam and Max (LucasArts)

button, or did something in the wrong order, the screen palette sometimes went haywire, or I became incapable of selecting certain objects. It was also possible to "short-circuit" the conversations, causing Sam to be saying one thing, while his contact was responding to something completely different. At first, it may seem like both characters are simply engaging in non-sequiturs, but it's just another bug. The game never actually crashed on me, but I don't think it was ready for release. If you run into this kind of trouble, save your game, quit back into DOS, and reload. The troubles will be gone. At least, until you click the wrong button again.

Your cursor is one of several possible shapes, ranging from a pair of walking fingers to a talking mouth. To perform an action, turn your cursor into the appropriate shape, then click on the desired object. If you grab an object, the cursor takes on that object's shape, allowing it to be used to affect other objects. To change your cursor, you either can right click on the

mouse to cycle through all the choices (not the most efficient system in the world) or you can click on the open box in the corner of the screen, which changes the screen into a big view of the box, containing the possible cursor choices plus all your objects. This also is not particularly efficient, and while I liked the full-screen effect of *Sam and Max*, sometimes I felt that having a status bar at the bottom of the screen would have made for a better interface. Especially since when I tried to perform actions in the lower-left hand corner of the screen I usually selected the open box by mistake.

When you hold your cursor over an object that it can activate, it changes appropriately. For instance, the Look cursor resembles a closed eye. When you hold it over an object that you can Look at, the eye opens, signaling the possibility.

The art in *Sam and Max* looks just like the comics. If anything, it's too good—I

Continued on page 69

AMAZING

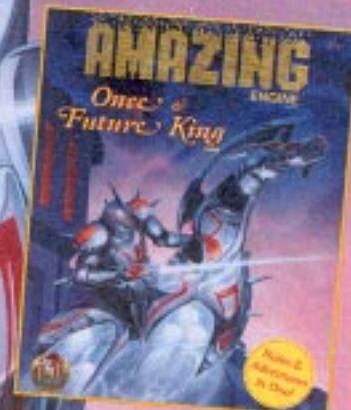
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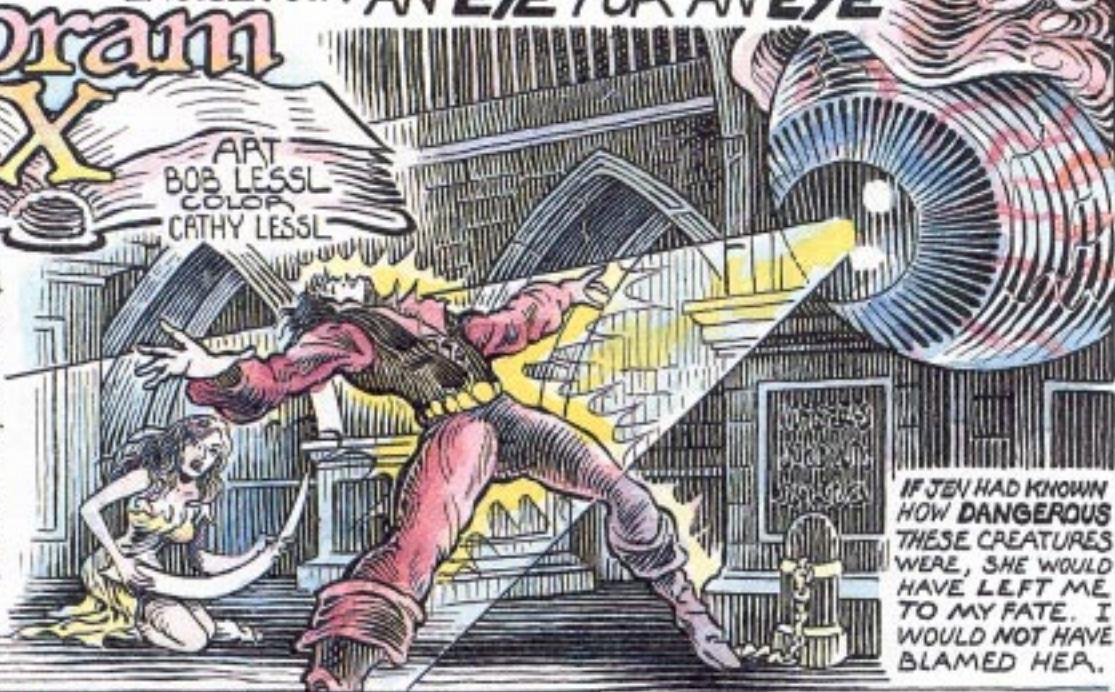
EPISODE FOUR: AN *EYE* FOR AN *EYE*

STORY
JEFF GRUBB

ART
BOB LESSL
COLOR
CATHY LESSL

THE STORY SO FAR:

THEY ARE CALLED ORBS. THEIR GAZE CRYSTALLIZES OPPONENTS FOR LATER RECOVERY AND TORTURE BY THEIR MASTERS. SOMETIMES YEARS LATER. AND YOU'RE CONSCIOUS ALL THE WAY THROUGH IT. I WAS NOT HAPPY WITH THE PROSPECT. I WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO ARGUE AT THAT MOMENT, HOWEVER...



OF COURSE, IT WAS THE LAST THING THE ORB EXPECTED AS WELL.



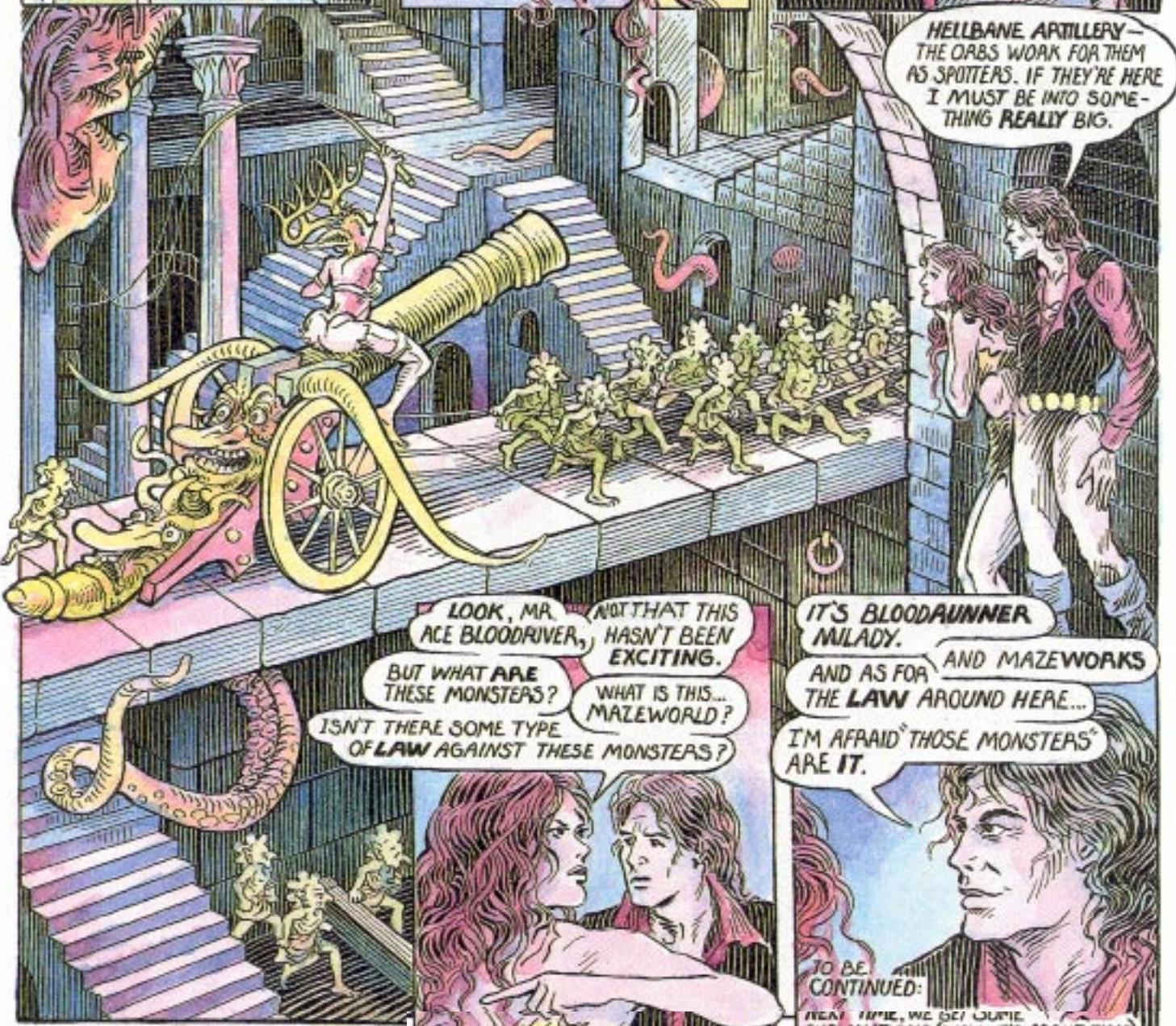
WITH THE ORB'S DESTRUCTION, ITS BANEFUL EFFECT WORE OFF QUICKLY,

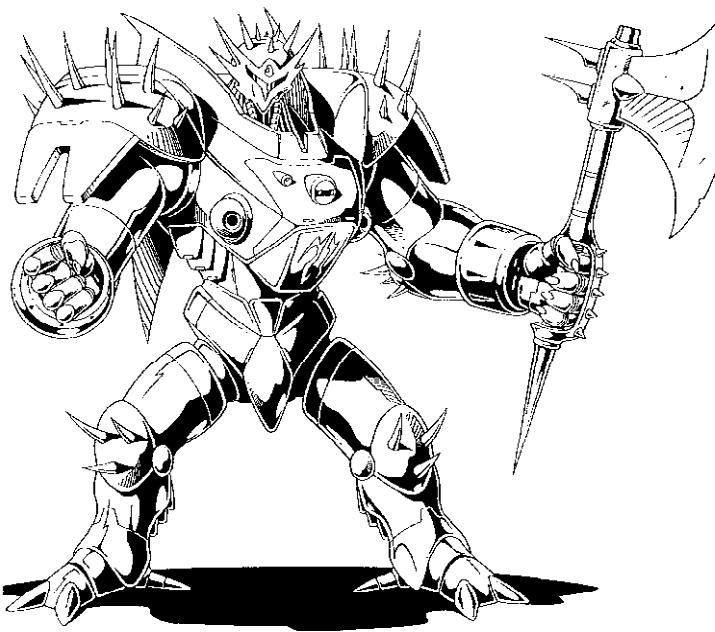
GASP!
GASP!

BY ALL
THE SAINTS...

JUST LOOK
AT THIS
MESS!

NICE TO
KNOW SHE
STILL HAD HER
PRIORITIES
STRAIGHT.





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- Over 40 new designs for robots, power armor, cyborgs and vehicles, plus weapons, accessories, and equipment!
- Cyborgs and cybernetic implants.
- Over a dozen new Occupational Character Classes.
- The armies of the New German Republic (NGR).
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- Artwork by Kevin Long, Newton Ewell and Kevin Siembieda, plus 11 pages of comic strip by Long & Siembieda!
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- S.D.C. and mega-damage character stats, rules and applications. This means Pantheons of the Megaverse can be used in Rifts, Heroes Unlimited, the Palladium (fantasy) RPG or even Beyond the Supernatural and Ninjas & Superspies.
- Interior art by Newton Ewell, Wayne Breaux, Tom Miller, Vince Martin, Roger Petersen and Kevin Siembieda. Cover by John Zelezniak.
- Written by C.J. Carella with additional material by Siembieda.
- 180+ pages — \$19.95 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling.
- Available at stores everywhere by the end of March.

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 and understand your comments. We will print your complete address if you request it.

Role-playing games and their players have repeatedly come under scrutiny by some individuals. The disposition gamers take toward this scrutiny has tended to be defensive. I wonder, though, how much defensiveness is good? I ask that question because I have noticed both the "Letters" and "Forum" sections of DRAGON® Magazine slowly but surely getting more bitter toward those who openly disdain the games.

I first noticed this attitude in Eddie Wolfs letter [*"Ugly stereotypes"*] in issue #193, after not having access to DRAGON Magazine for a couple of years. Although there is much criticism of role-playing games by people, it has been my experience that many people are open-minded about gaming.

For instance, I recently attended a leadership retreat for the student government of Utah State University. At that retreat, we were divided into small groups of eight, and then we were asked to describe our personal lives to our groups. When I told my group that I played the AD&D® game, they were not critical. Instead, they asked questions for two hours, and some in my group even expressed interest in playing!

I wonder if there are other gamers who have had positive experiences like this. If so, I'd seriously like to read about it here in the "Forum".

Seth Seyfried
Logan UT

I suspect most gamers are as sick and tired of the "Role-playing, not Roll (Rule) playing" cliche as most Americans are of the Atlanta Brave's Tomahawk Chop.

Keeping with the baseball metaphor, let's expose the illogic of that cliche. The game is called "Baseball," therefore only those aspects that deal with bases and balls are important. Anything else is unimportant.

Thus the "pickle" is important (bases and ball are both involved), but hitting (ball only) or stealing (bases only) are insignificant, and of course other things (trades, deciding when to bring in a relief pitcher, sacrificing, etc.) utterly dispensable.

Experience tells us otherwise. Baseball is more than bases and balls, and by similar logic and experience, we know that role-playing is not the alpha and omega of the game.

I think the role-playing promoters protest their innocence too much. If anything, gaming suffers from an over-emphasis on play-acting at a cost to activities such as achieving the adventure's objective, out-smarting the GM, beating the crud out of the bad guys, etc. In other words, the things gamers who have no interest in speaking in an accent all day long do to have fun.

You remember fun, don't you? This is what five PCs in a group of seven don't have when the other two characters, Lord Alan of Ismaret and Captain Sir Allen Trewlaney-Smyth spend a good half hour of real time arguing as to the proper way to spell their first names!

"But it's in character!" both players protest.

The correct solution is to award the bums their xp for "role-playing". Then dock them double that amount as a delay-of-game penalty. The more time they waste while being in character, the greater the penalty. They delayed the game with excess play-acting. You gave them well-deserved justice.

If role-playing is so superior to other aspects of adventure gaming, then the following is undeniably true.

Situation: A modern-day espionage game. Setting: A Halloween-costume party where an enemy agent is trying to get vital information from a traitor. The PC's job is to catch both agents in the act.

The PC team consists of a number of "standard" espionage types, however, each player has her own style and this is how they'll be identified. We have a play-actor, a tactician, and a combat machine.

The play-actor spends more than two hours of real time getting the costume ready, talking to various NPC clothiers and hairstylists the GM had to whip up as needed.

The tactician and combat machine, who had already covered this part of the adventure by stating "I get into costume and go to the party," wait until the play-actor's activities catch up with them in game time.

Eventually, the play-actor is costumed

and reaches the party. In the remaining game time, the tactician assembles clues to identify the traitor and enemy agent, and once made, the combat machine goes into action, eventually capturing both agents.

Under the "role-playing is supreme" ideology, the play-actor is superior to both the tactician and the combat machine PCs. The fact is, however, that the play-actor is a self-indulgent fop whose excessive zeal for personal details about the character's activities steals valuable playing time from the rest of the group and spoils the fun of the GM and other players.

The trouble is that most games are geared to reward role-playing just because it is role-playing. Excessive role-playing is a major problem in many games, yet most rulebooks fail to so much as recognize the problem, let alone advise GMs and players about dealing with it.

You, as a GM, have some basic goal in mind that the PCs should accomplish. A year or so from now, after regular game sessions, you expect your game world to have undergone some specific changes caused by the PCs. If the player whose constant yammering in an accent has hindered any of those expected game developments from occurring, you have an excessive role-playing problem in your campaign.

Joe Kucherfield
Hacienda Heights CA

I have been a gamer for approximately seven years, and yet in all my experiences with role-playing games I have never experienced anything quite like what I'm going to relate to you. A new phenomenon in my area is power gaming. We all have heard about a DM running an impossibly high-level campaign. Yet, I have never seen it on such a wide scale until now. It seems that one of the local gaming stores is running a high-level campaign with no semblance of balance at all.

In this campaign, each character starts off with 8,000,000 experience points. Characters start off with all statistics being $18 + 1d6$ and can go as high as 60. Characters can be anything from dragons to giants. One such character was a 20th-level wizard/20th-level specialty priest of Isis, who was also a 2,400-year-old greater vampire from the RAVENLOFT® setting. Characters do approximately 200 points of damage with each successful attack. The aforementioned character also has a magical sword, but not just any magical sword, not even just a nice, normal, "wimpy" +5

vorpel weapon. No, he has a +7 long sword that on any successful hit instantly drains 15 levels from the victim. He also has a cloak +4 that can summon a tarrasque once a day, a solar twice a day, and can summon his god once a week. These characters are summoning multiple tarrasques at a time. Yet this is not what I have gripes with, because I feel that anyone can play the game how they want. The freedom that you have when you're role-playing is one of the major contributing factors to the success of the industry today. I do have gripes with the way these gamers say other people's games are "wimpy" and that regular players couldn't handle a game of that "magnitude". This isn't true at all. We just choose not to play such chaotic slashfests. In the campaigns that I run, I emphasize role-playing, problem solving, combat, and character development. I try to keep it all balanced. I have played in a campaign with a person from this group acting as the DM, and in a single night my character went from 1st to 5th level. Another night I had one of my statistics go from an 18 to a 24, for what I feel to be no reason at all. Yet all we do is attack, get attacked, win treasure, gain levels, rest, get healed, get attacked, win treasure, etc. Does anyone see a pattern?

The first night I had a headache and a

cramp in my arm from rolling so many dice. The games that I have enjoyed most were nothing like this. This is just one example. I have heard stories of this for some time. Maybe it is just a phenomenon that is occurring in my area, but somehow I doubt it. I mean, is this the future of role-playing games? I sincerely hope not. Whatever happened to normal campaigns where you start at 1st level and work your way up at a slow, controlled pace? Normal characters became heroes not because of their magic or their statistics, but because of the way they play and what they accomplish through their hard work and struggles.

Unsigned
Nassau County NY

Can you stand just one more letter on the issue of women and gaming? In issues #196 and #197 there were some pretty negative things said about TSR and their attitude and portrayal of women, and as a woman I would like to say something in defense of TSR.

I was first attracted to the world of the AD&D game because it is uniquely accepting of women. When I was introduced to the game by a friend who just happens to be a woman, I was delighted to see women described and depicted as warriors,

priests, wizards, and rogues. In the pictures of the *Player's Handbook*, women were shown wearing armor and shields and bearing swords. I was excited that I could play a female character, and that female characters were not restricted in the roles they could choose. I think that TSR, Inc., should be commended for their attention to the feelings of women as gamers. Every book contains illustrations, examples, and episodes in which women are represented equally.

It is true that much of the art in TSR material depicts women in skimpy, revealing outfits that are not only ridiculously unfit for battle but also very dehumanizing and degrading. Many men don't understand how that kind of art can make women feel. Perhaps if we explain it—instead of getting mad—men will understand why we make such a big issue out of some of TSR's art. I don't think any man involved in TSR products wants women to feel alienated or insulted. Every time I have played the AD&D game with men or been in a gaming store I have felt accepted and encouraged. TSR is to be praised for welcoming women to its games.

Lucy Kinborough
Milwaukee WI



Eye of the Monitor

Continued from page 59

often found myself trying to select or activate little scenery details that apparently were just decorative, not meant to produce action. At the Fish World exhibit, for instance, there are at least six huge green fish visible, but only two of them produce any response when selected. Another problem is that it is not always easy to select a desired object. Sometimes your cursor seemingly activates when held over one object, but is really reacting to another, nearby, object.

It is also hard to tell when you can walk off the side of the screen or not. Sometimes the only way to find out is to have Sam wander around bumping into all the screen's sides physically, which is a bit tedious.

The game's humor is dry and hilarious. When Sam tells Max he's looking pert, Max says, "I'm a coffee achiever, Sam." It goes on and on. The animation is tremendous, and the situations themselves are in the Sam and Max tradition of inane Americana, ranging from the Worlds Biggest Ball o' String to Bumpusville ("where taxidermy of all nations sing together in peace"). Anyone who's traveled more than a few hundred miles across the American countryside knows of these ridiculous "landmarks" that dot our fair nation.

In summary, the virtues of this game outweigh its vices. I recommend it.

PHANTASIE I, PHANTASIE III, and QUESTRON II

IBM and compatibles Wizardworks
Originally released by SSI, Inc.

Many years ago, before SSI was in possession of the AD&D® computer-game license, it produced a few fantasy games under the alarming misspelling of *Phantasie*. Now Wizardworks has re-released these along with a similar game, *Questron*.

The games date from years back, and it shows. They are in CGA four-color art, with pathetic animation, and no sound support. On the other hand, the plots and adventures are just as much fun as they ever were, and the package containing the three games is incredibly cheap. (I bought mine for a mere \$9.95.)

In my case, I was nostalgic for the good old days when I first had a computer, and *Phantasie* was one of the more advanced games available. It's a little pathetic to see it in the shops now, in all its shabbiness sitting next to the potent competition of *Might and Magic*, *Eye of the Beholder*, or *Shadowcaster*, but on the other hand, it was a bit refreshing to see a blast from my past. So often old computer games, both fun and not so fun, vanish into nothingness and are never heard of again.

MARIO ALL-STARS

SuperNintendo NEC

* * *

Psychologically, this is similar to the *Phantasie* re-release just discussed. It consists of the original *Super Mario*, *Super Mario II*, and *Super Mario III* games as

released for the regular Nintendo, but now available for the SuperNintendo.

The programming has been carefully crafted so that the characters act exactly the same on the SuperNintendo as they once acted on the Nintendo. Even some of the old programs' glitches are there. I could find only two exceptions to this. First, the infamous World "-1" can no longer be accessed (in *Super Mario*). Second, a new type of suit is available in *Super Mario III*—the "turtle" suit. It enables you to toss hammers at your foes.

There is one big improvement over the old games. The new cartridge provides four saved games for each title. Bravo! Plus, even the saved games have a bonus feature. A saved game lists the level you've reached, but you can load any level you've beaten. If you're at level 4, you can start at 4, 3, 2, or 1, at your choice. I rather liked this trick.

Another change is in the art and sound. All these have been brought up to SuperNintendo standards (with scrolling backgrounds, for instance). In some cases, this conflicts with old habits. If you kept track of where invisible blocks were by looking at the backgrounds, this strategy is no longer valid as the backgrounds are move. The new art and sound are big improvements, however.

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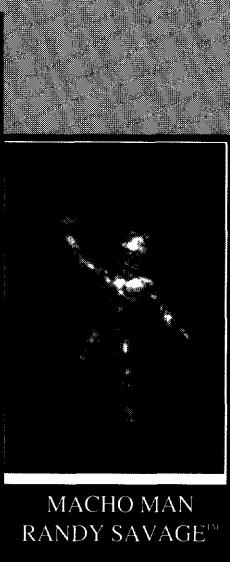
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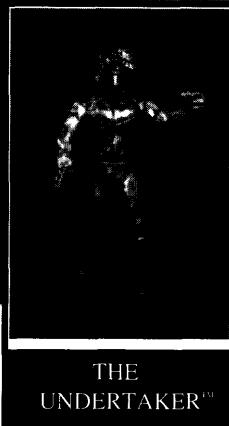
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A colorful Collaboration

The cover: How they did it

Artwork by Timothy Bradstreet & Fred Fields

A reference photo. (Photo by Tim Bradstreet)



Photo by the lovely Sandra

(the model), and Fred Fields.

Fred had never done it. Timothy had done it lots of times. After years of talking about it, they finally took the plunge. This month's cover is the result of artists Fred Fields and Timothy Bradstreet's combined creative talents.

"Fred's very illustrative. I came from a strong comics background," Tim Bradstreet explained on why they decided to pool their talents. Tim's own experience has ranged from role-playing games to comic books. He's currently finishing a new *Aliens* comic, "Music of the Spears." "It's fun to see what you're going to get."

For Fred Fields, who used to do ad agency work and is now a staff artist at TSR, it was a chance to learn some new techniques and "do something without a sword in it." He also pointed out, "There's a common thread in our styles."

So how do two artists, one in Wisconsin and the other in Illinois, work together on one painting? It's actually easier than it sounds. The hardest part was actually getting together at all. After several years talking about it at places like the annual GEN CON® Game Fairs and World Science-Fiction conventions, the two knew they wanted to collaborate—perhaps on a graphic-novel cover—but the chance never came. Then Fred remembered DRAGON Magazine and its science-fantasy issue. The choice worked for both of them.

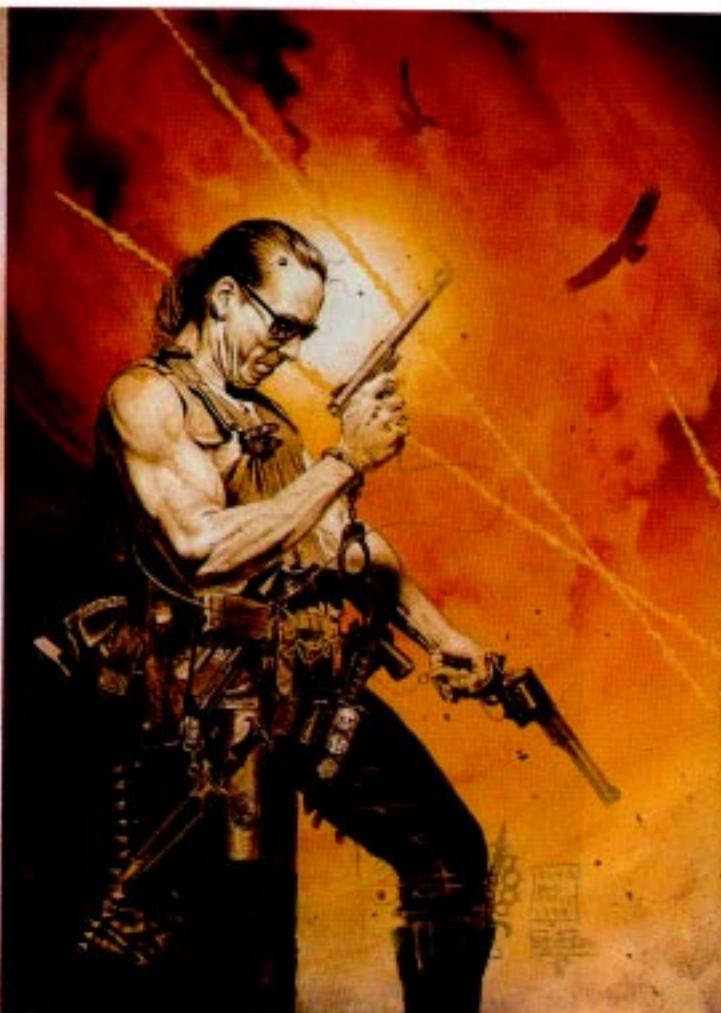
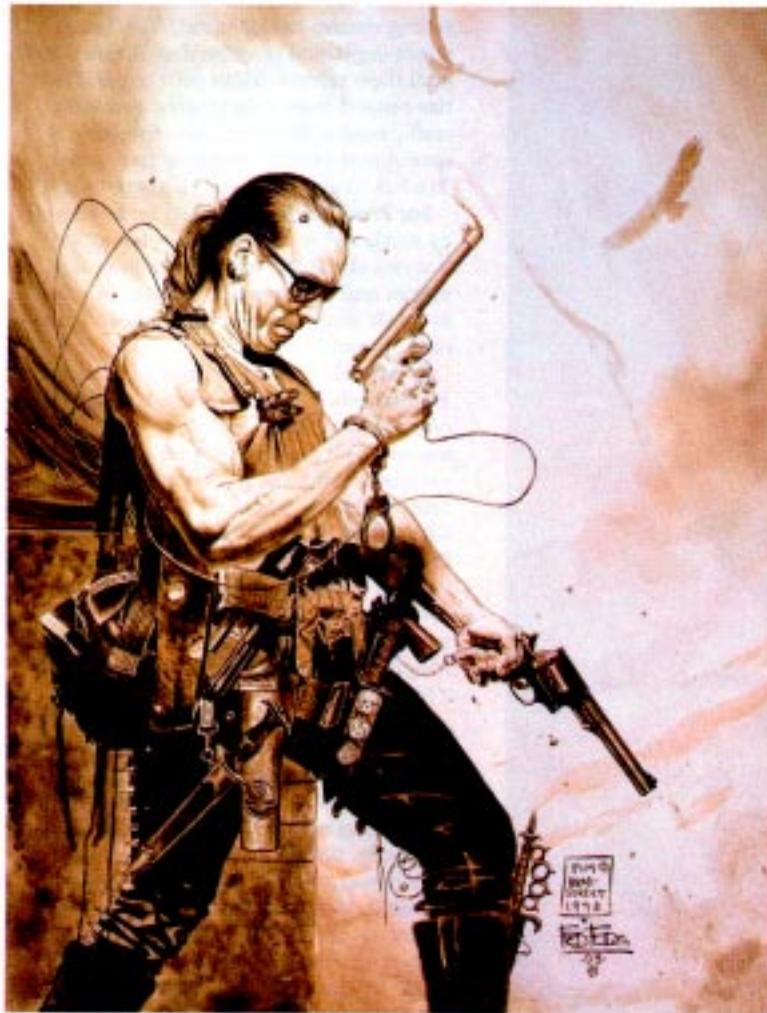
When it came time to actually get working, Tim was responsible for the first steps. He did a photo shoot with models and gear right at hand. The photograph is the base, showing light and position. "People move, not pose, and it has to have action and emotion. I played role-playing games in high school and felt I could do better art than what was being published then. I wanted to draw people realistically." In Tim's pictures it's important for the audience to identify with what's going



After transferring Tim's drawing onto illustration board, Fred does a complete rendering in burnt umber washes.



The background is dropped in (from back to front), and the brick wall is blocked in.



on. "I try to tell a story in just one picture!"

"The object is to get people to believe in the fantasy, to suspend their disbelief," added Fred.

A lot of photos were taken, but only one was chosen for the cover. From it, Tim prepared a black-and-white portrait, which was a lot more than just reworking the photograph. "What to add? What gets them going?" It's things like these that Bradstreet thinks about as he works.

The result was the package Fred received. There was the drawing, but it also included details such as tattoos—"modern primitive stuff"—and the skull on the holster. "I tried not to alter things," Fred noted as he worked up the layers of color that make the picture, "but I developed details, like the background and where the figure was! Color added more than just oranges and reds, too. It created things that didn't show in black and white, like the bruise and the blood. Things that were just designs-like the skull on the holster—transformed as Fred added his own interpretations of what he saw.

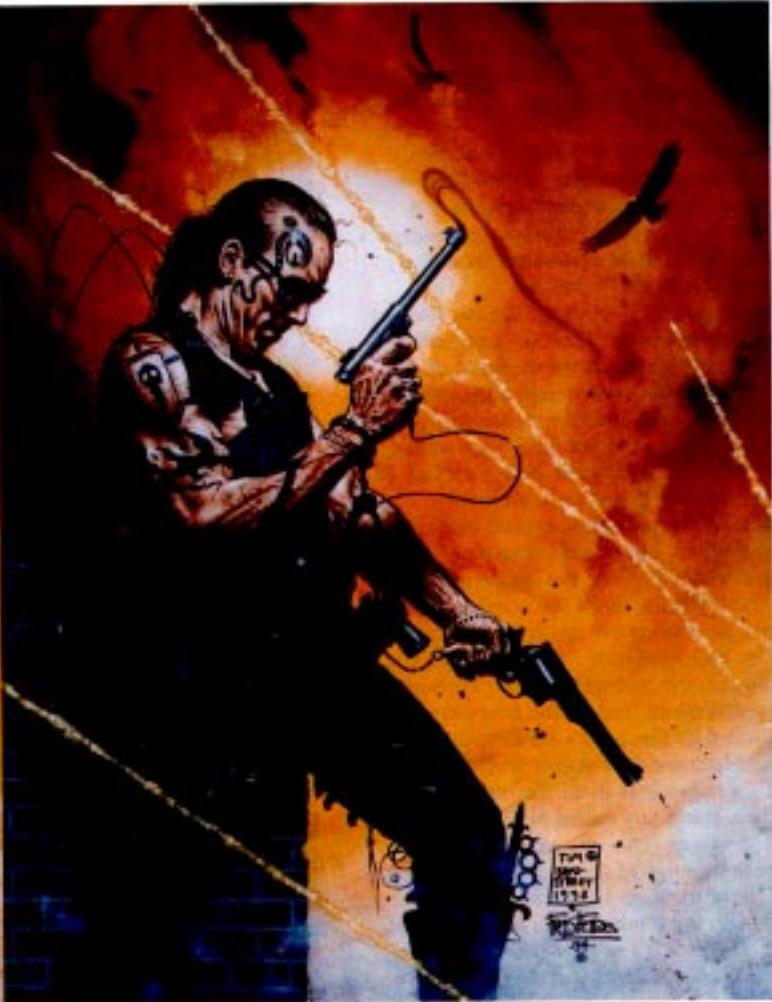
So what's the picture about? Tim and Fred won't say for sure, but they both ask just who was on the other end of those handcuffs?

The clothing, gear, and one final tracer bullet are next.

The brick wall now dry, Fred added the mortar, tint, shadows, and graffiti.



The packet Time sent: sketch, "rough" tattoo designs, letter, and many photos.



I

*From the Notebooks
of Fallendor the Mage:*

t has happened again.

No peace this night

or for a fortnight past. I have been cursed, robbed of my rest by a maddening vision—the *Codex of infinite Planes!* It has been lost since before my time, the time of my father the time of all my known ancestors.

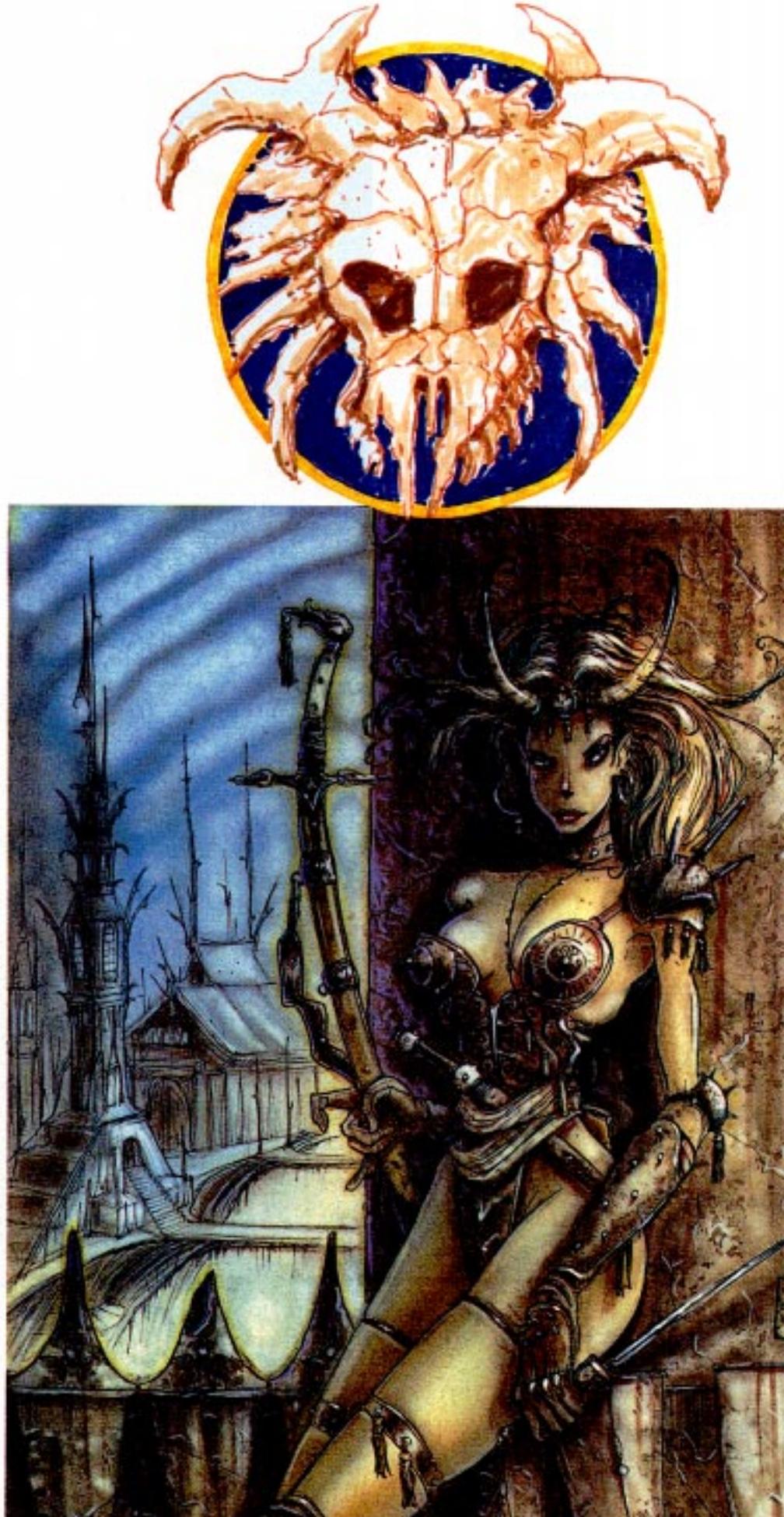
Yet every night in my dreams, I see the cursed book. It hovers beyond the veil of reality, a dream that has more substance than reality. I try to touch the pages, but every motion forward propels the book away. Frustration fills me and I begin to run. Every night I run faster toward it, but every night I am no nearer to my goal. In the morning, I awaken with new visions filling my mind.

I began recording these visions in my notebook as I remember them. They are not the random scenes of dreams but messages, encrypted in a code of images. I am certain they are passages from the *Codex of Infinite Planes*.

I have a theory about the *Codex*. I do not think it exists yet, at least not as a material thing. It exists only in the world of sleep. There it reveals itself, a page each night, and every morning I dutifully transcribe its pages into the world of flesh. I am no more than another of the great books scribes, like the Archmage Tzunk before me.

At first the passages seemed random and meaningless, but now I sense a pattern. The *Codex's* magic is the magic of words. As the dreamer reads the entries in the book, he creates the destination where the *Codex* will send him. When the image is complete, the traveler arrives. Perhaps if someone could find all the fragments recorded by the book's scribes, the *Codex* would become real in this world.

If there is a link in all the messages I record, it is a city called Sigil, the Heart and the Cage. This city exists, I know, at the very center of the Outer Planes. It is the place through which all things pass. For now, my image of it is only fragmentary. Perhaps if I review the entries relating to Sigil, tonight I will dream of the city itself.



THE PLANE TRUTH PART I: CODIFYING SIGIL

by David "Zeb" Cook

Artwork by Dana Knutson & Tony DiTerlizzi

Aleax of Sigil, The: An engine of discipline, the aleax is the formless spawn of divinity. The creature has no thought or no will, only the raw clay of its shell and the spark of life. The creature becomes whole only by an act of mortal denial to the gods. Then the aleax wakes each morning in a new land, its hands and feet clumsy strangers. Its face is the face of one who rejects it. With each day, its memories are new; the smile of a grandchild, the taste of sweat, the cold slash of winter wind, and the shrill of the teakettle in the morning. Perhaps wanting to cling to its borrowed memories, the aleax seeks out and kills its mortal father. This seems like the sting of an ungrateful child, but the aleax has no choice. Its family is a ring of traps. The mortal parent gives it form but denies the child; the divine parent accepts the child but refuses it form. Unable to accept this, the aleax chooses to return itself each day to oblivion.

In the great city of Sigil, there is an aleax cut off from its god. It is an idiot and a

great threat to the Faction of the Athar. Helplessly the creature wanders the streets searching for a form. It hears the denials and renunciations of all gods and cannot choose one from the lot. Its hand is one man's, its face another. In this block it remembers the taste of oranges from Elysium, in the next the scouring fires of Gehenna. It talks in all voices, it speaks all words. In its ramblings are concealed the great secrets and hidden thoughts of all it has become. Driven mad by its too-full existence, the aleax seeks only oblivion.

The inhabitants of Sigil are as singular as the city itself.

Dictionaries of Pain, The: This tome is not the only dictionary found on the planes, and not all dictionaries classify words. There are dictionaries of smells where a scent evokes the memories of other scents. There is Tbron's dictionary of memory, whose pages hold nothing beyond what the reader brings.

In Sigil, the baatezu Ganeesh holds another type of dictionary, one of the Diction-

naries of Pain. In its pages are listed all the shadings of anguish, categorized by the play of the nerves under the skin, and defined the music of their cries. Ganeesh composes poems from the entries therein. Some of the poems are meant to be read, since reading them is enough to cause anguish. Others are performed in secret conclaves of Sigil's Lower Ward.

Just as there is an entry in the *Codex* for the Dictionaries of Pain, there is an entry in the Dictionaries of Pain for this book, the *Codex of the Infinite Planes*. In the alphabet of nerves, the entry for the *Codex* can be found between the sharp sting of discovery and the salted wounds of failure.

Doomguard, The: The Doomguard is one of the *factions* of Sigil. It exists only to bring the end, the oblivion that overwhelms everything. Their goal of destruction applies to themselves, too, for the entropy of the multiverse that they desire must include themselves. Nonetheless, they actively recruit and expand, swelling their ranks while striving to destroy all else. It is said that entropy comes when everything is reduced to a single state, so perhaps this applies to the community of Sigil, too.

The Doomguard has heard of the *aleax of Sigil* and are frustrated by it. They would dearly grant it oblivion, but its lifeforce is sheltered by the gods. All the Doomguard can do is stalk it helplessly, hurling themselves at it like the goat that charges the tiger.

Factions: Life without belonging is not life. Every being must have a position to compare itself to all other beings. In the core city of Sigil, to be is to belong to a faction. In a lesser city, these factions would squabble for the control of water, light, or gold, but Sigil is the heart of all cities. It cannot strive for commodities, its factions struggle for the only real property—belief. What is believed is what creates the reality of the planes.

There are many realities in Sigil for there are many factions. There is the Athar over whom the aleax have no power. They forswear the might of the gods. The Godsmen, who hold that all

beings could become divine, build their proofs in the Great Foundry. Using words like these, the Fated take their reality from others, wearing the dreams of their enemies as their own. The Sensates shape reality in eye and hand, fashioning the world according to their experiences.

The Bleak Cabal denies its philosophy has any meaning, for cause and meaning are pointless to them. *The Doomguard* constantly tears down the houses of its own thought, searching for path to entropy. There are the Mercykillers whose justice is like ice to fire. In the alleys of the Hive are the Xaositects and the Revolutionary League, who live their lives in content disorder.

On the far side of Sigil's ring, the Harmonium hunts the realities that are not its own. In its wake are splintered worlds, never to be whole again. The Guvnors probe the machineries of reality. The Ciphers watch them without comment. Their truth is hidden in the deep mines of the soul. The Dustmen merge the reality of life and death. They have abandoned belief in the line between these two things.

Of all these factions, the Free League are the saddest in their claims. They delude themselves with the vision of independence, never accepting that they are bound to each other in their belief of free will.

Only the *Lady of Pain* stands free of the factions, bound in by cages of her own.

Geography of Sigil: These were the dreams of the Guvnors' factotum:

"Come to learn about the planes, berk? Well, if that's true, then this is the right place. There ain't nobody who knows more about the planes than the folks who live here. So it might be wise to sit down and listen to what a bloods got to say."

"First off, welcome to the real world—more real than most know. It pays to have a geography lesson before getting to far into this, so pay attention. The dark of it's simple—there's three realms in all the multiverse: the Prime Material Plane, the Inner Planes, and the Outer Planes. The Prime Material's got a lot of little worlds floating in it, bubbled inside their crystal spheres. The Inner's a place of raw surging elements and no place for most cutters to live. It's here—the Outer Planes—where the real secret of the planes is going to be found."

"Of course, for a clueless sod, the Great Roads an overwhelming place. There's too much of the planes for a berk to absorb. That's why it's best to learn the way to Sigil, the City of Doors."

"Sigil floats over the great spike at the center of the Outlands, the plane that itself is the center of the ring of Outer Planes. A basher can't get to it by walking. There ain't no roads or gates to her, at least not in the sense most primes understand. Sigil's doors are *portals* that can lead from anywhere to the Cage's streets and maybe back again. Even beyond that, Sigil's no ordinary place. It curves and arches 'round itself 'til the sky is filled

with roofed houses on other streets. Devas and tanar'ri build side by side, each according to its taste."

"So let a clueless basher take some advice from a planar—get to Sigil and get a kip there. Sigil's the heart of it all!"

PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting: In another reality, there exists a game and for that game there are imagined worlds. One of these is the PLANESCAPE campaign set. In it are three books that describe worlds that never were. Some of the players of this game imagine themselves as people who never were—humans, dwarves, half-elves, goat-centaur bairaur, githzerai, and tieflings, the smoketinged children of corrupted creatures. They pretend strange philosophies and invest their creations with powers beyond in their own prosaic lives. They explore their imaginary worlds with the maps that come with the box, maps that chart landscapes created for their pleasure.

In this game world there is a city called Sigil, impossible in their own reality. The city is a ring that floats over a spire whose height is beyond measuring. Sigil is the home for their imaginary people, their heroes. From it, their characters travel by magical doorways to distant towns and strange lands. Back to Sigil their heroes return to celebrate their imagined victories. In their journeys they meet other creatures no less fantastic than themselves. They create races to fill the spaces they have imagined—modrons, servants of Set, marrenoloth, and vortexes—and write descriptions of them into the box.

The easy question would be, of course, who dreams who? Is this world the creation of those who imagine it in play, or are they mere fictions of this realm? But the hard question is this. Of the two worlds, one is truthful, while the other one lies, so who created the honest world?

Portals: "I, Prespos, citizen of Iriaebor the Overland City, explorer-mage, occasional ambassador from the court of Bron, son of the former alderman Teramgot and his legal wife Elysa—may the gods guard their souls—have journeyed to planes beyond our own; all true are my words, from my departure from this plane to my journeys into the other dimensions of the planes and my return again. May Oghma curse me if my words are untrue!"

"I have always been a scholarly wizard, though I admit to an uncontrollable wanderlust that lures me to far reaches of our globe. Although some consider my scholarly journeys reckless, I am not a foolish man. On my explorations I have every desire to return to Iriaebor alive and not as ashes in some jar."

"On the day of departure I prepared for the worst. My will was complete and the servants paid through the end of the year. A scroll gave the means for departure—I had invested a small fortune to make the sheet. I uttered the words and sure enough, a shimmering gate appeared. Bravely, wand in hand, I stepped through.

"Straight into the center of an open market! There I stood, like a gaping farmboy, in a doorway between the mounded fruits of a melon-dealer and the battered brass of a tinker. I first thought the spell erred, teleporting me to a market fair somewhere in Calimshan. A quick glance to the sky corrected that belief. There was no sky. Overhead I looked at the jagged tops of buildings. The city was both above and below us and strung out like an arc from north to south and east to west."

"I have since learned this city was Sigil, the city of doors. And well named it is. Where I had spent my fortune and time preparing a single scroll, the citizens here can travel throughout the planes simply by stepping through a door. If the right item is held, even the most harmless-seeming arch crackles with the flame of magical power to reveal the vista of a distant land. The citizens call these *portals* and make regular use of them. In my time there I did too, passing through to other planes. But I will leave those stories for another day!"

The Lady of Pain: She is the guardian of Sigil surrounded by her silent staff, the dabus. One sees her as she floats above the ground, too rare a thing to touch common earth. Voiceless, she drifts past him and into the Maze of the city, dispensing her blessings on no one. All that is left in her passing is the aura of serene fear.

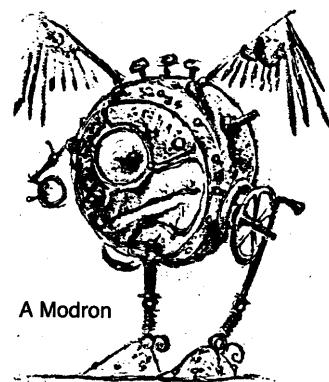
This is my dream, Fallendor's dream, recorded in the pages of the *Codex*. This is the part where a mage's life intersects the life of his dreams. He falls in love with a single glimpse of the Lady of Pain but he cannot acknowledge that love. Her warmth would bring destruction. Still, he is unable to forget her. He researches the *Codex* more and more, searching for the clues to a *portal* that will lead him to Sigil. He records his dreams, compiles them, and draws maps of their routes. From these he searches for the final entry that will lead him to his goal.

At last he dreams the magistrate standing in an empty house, reading the papers Fallendor has left behind.

The document ends here. To date, no sign of Fallendor has been found.

Magistrate Lach-Verger

Ω



Xaositect Headquarters, The Hive



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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 takes a close, but careful look at *prismatic* effects and other magic in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game, and considers other problems facing referees.

Can the caster of a *prismatic sphere* or *prismatic wall* cast spells out of the *sphere* or *wall*?

One could argue that because the caster can freely pass through a *prismatic* effect, her spells ought to be able to pass, too. The AD&D game, however, generally does not allow characters to launch attacks through absolute protections like *prismatic spheres* or *walls*. Even a partial *prismatic sphere* or *wall* stops spells if the indigo and violet layers are in place. Note that if these two layers are absent (which might be the case when a character creates a *prismatic wall* a layer at a time with a *wand of conjuration*) spell effects can pass freely through the *sphere* or *wall* in both directions.

What happens if a creature with magic resistance successfully resists a *time stop* spell? How many rounds of actions does the creature get while the *time stop* caster is taking his 1-3 rounds of free actions? If the creature is free to act for 1-3 rounds, it gains from a hostile spell. If the creature only gets one round of action, the caster might be free to attack it for one or two rounds, which doesn't grant the creature much benefit from its successful resistance roll.

Actually, neither of these two situations would arise. *Time stop* is an in-place effect (see PH, page 102 or DMG, page 67); if a magic-resistance roll succeeds, the *time stop* collapses, perhaps with a thunderclap, puff of smoke, or other dramatic effect.

How are a holy sword's magic resistance and *dispel magic* abilities supposed to work? According to the PH, the circle of power has a 30' diameter, but the DMG says the radius is five feet. The PH says the *dispel* ability works on hostile magic. Does this mean that friendly magic is unaffected? Is the *dispel* ability continuous while the sword is held? Can any magic pass through the radius?

Though there has yet to be any official rulings, the current thought at TSR, Inc., is as follows: The *dispel magic* and magic resistance powers have a five-foot radius. The magic resistance is continuous while the sword is unsheathed and held (by a paladin). *Dispel magic* is not continuous and must be invoked by the paladin holding the sword. Doing this counts as an action and the *dispel* affects all magic in the radius, hostile or not. Because the *dispel* is instantaneous, it usually cannot stop magic from passing though the radius—this power is most effective against in-place effects.

The magic-resistance power functions according to the rules for magic resistance in the PH and DMG. Note that magic resistance comes into play only when magic can affect the protected creature. A spell that is just passing through is not affected. For example, a *magic missile* targeted at a creature 20' behind the paladin works normally. If the same spell is targeted at the paladin or at any other creature within five feet of the paladin, the magic resistance comes into play. Note that in some cases a spell can be blocked by default. For example, a blast from *fireball* affects anything within its area of effect. If a holy sword's magic-resistance roll succeeds against the blast, then the blast is completely excluded from the five-foot magic-resistance radius. If the blast is rushing down a corridor at the paladin the magic resistance radius will completely block the blast if the corridor is small enough. This does not mean that a holy sword blocks all *fireballs* and similar effects. If, for example, a *fireball*'s glowing missile is set to detonate outside the magic-resistance radius, the missile can explode normally, but if the magic-resistance roll succeeds, anything within the radius is protected from the blast.

What happens when a druid is part of a *combine* spell? Can the druid make or contribute to undead-turning attempts even though druids cannot turn undead?

A *combine* spell gives a power boost to the central priest in the group using the spell. It does not grant the central priest powers or spells that would not normally be available to him. So, a druid who is the central priest in a *combine* spell cannot turn undead. The central priest in a *combine* spell can draw power from the supporting circle to enhance undead-turning or any spell that has level-based variables, such as range, damage, and duration. The spell description does not mention any special requirements for members of the circle except that they must be priests, so I'm inclined to suggest that the type of the priests in the circle does not matter. The central priest draws raw power from the circle and uses that power to enhance his own abilities. Note that while the spell description mentions only undead turning, the DM might allow any level-based granted power to be enhanced with a *combine* spell, provided that the power has details that vary with level. Remember that the central priest always must be the most powerful priest in the group and that *combine* does not grant powers that the central priest cannot normally use. A group of low-level druids, for example, cannot use *combine* to boost the central druid to seventh level so he can *shape-change*. Likewise, if a power is usable only a limited number of times each day, *combine* does not allow the central priest to exceed that limit.

DRAGON® issue #185 included (on page 18) a list of creatures from other AD&D game worlds that are suitable for use on Athas. Which of these have psionic abilities?

None of these creatures are known for psionic abilities. However, if the DM decides to include these creatures among the species native to Athas, I'd recommend giving wild talents to goblyns, alaghi, desert centaurs, and grimlocks.

Where can I find deck plans for ships not included in the original SPELLJAMMER® boxed set and the War Captain's Companion?

The following products each have one or more sets of deck plans: SJQ1 *Heart of the Enemy* (TSR product #9347), SJS1 *Goblin's Return* (TSR product #9343), SJA2 *Skull and Crossbows* (TSR product #9286), SJA3 *Crystal Spheres* (TSR product #9299), SJA4 *Under the Dark Fist* (TSR product #9325), and SJR1 *Lost Ships* (TSR product #9280).

According to Table 48 in the DMG (page 48) rogues gain 2 XP for each gold piece worth of treasure they steal. Recently, the PCs in my game infiltrated the home of the local dictator and the party's thief made off with a ring that ultimately turned out to be worth 5,000 gp (after rolling for its value on the art objects table). The thief also took other treasures from the house. Do I have to give this character 10,000 XP?

A DM never *has* to give a PC any experience at all, but it's usually a good idea to do so if you want your players to come back for another game. Individual experience-point awards always are given at the DM's discretion. Some guidelines for determining when an individual award is appropriate are given on page 48, right below Table 34: Was there a reason for the character to take the action? Was there a significant risk to the character? If the answer to either question is yes, some sort of award is merited. Was the action detrimental or abusive to the other PCs? If the

answer is yes, an award is not merited. If you decide to make the award, you also must decide how much experience to award; two points of experience for each gold piece worth of treasure is only a guideline. If you think it's too much, by all means reduce it. If the character in question is high level and 10,000 XP represents only a fraction of the experience requirement for the next level, you probably should award it all, especially if the character did her pilfering in a heroic manner that did not leave the rest of the PCs in the lurch. If the character is low level and 10,000 XP represents most or all the experience requirement for the next level you should give only a fraction of the 10,000 XP. You also should reduce the award of the thief who abandoned her companions in the face of danger; for example, if the thief sneaked off to rifle the bedroom while the other PCs were locked in a deadly combat with the dictator's pet owlbear, the award should be reduced or eliminated altogether. Note that if the dictator is one of the PCs' major foes, the theft might increase the story award for the group as a whole, especially if the loss interfered with some devious scheme the villain had planned.

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 Indian pantheon in *Legends & Lore*:

Brahman: Wizard spells (as an ascetic) from two schools of magic only.

Indra: Major: Chaos, War; Minor: Time.

Varuna: Major: Law; Minor: Thought, Wards.

Mitra: Major: Law; Minor: Thought, Travelers.

Yama: Major: Law; Minor: Thought, Time.

Agni: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, Travelers.

Surya: Major: Law; Minor: Time, Wards.

Savitri: Major: Time; Minor: Travelers, Wards.

Soma: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, Thought.

Ushas: Major: Law; Minor: Time, Wards.

Siva: Major: Time; Minor: Numbers, Thought.

Kali: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, Thought.

Brihaspati: Major: Thought; Minor: Law, Wards.

Rudra: Major: Time; Minor: Numbers, Thought.

Puchan: Major: Travelers; Minor: Time, Wards.

Ratri: Major: None; Minor: Chaos, Time.

Vayu: Major: None; Minor: Time, Wards.

Tvashtri: Major: None; Minor: Numbers, Thought.

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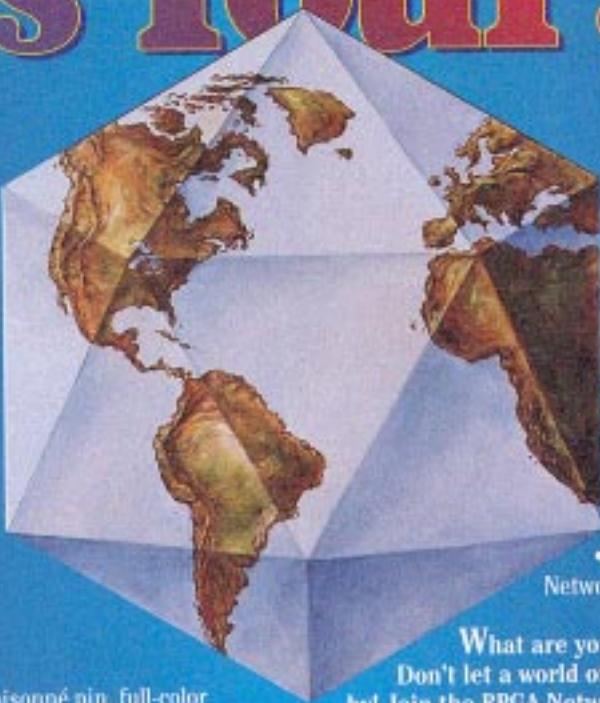
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Role-playing Review

New frontiers in space-age gaming

©1994 by Rick Swan



Role-playing games' ratings

X	Not Recommended
*	Poor, but may be useful
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	The Best

We're tackling science-fiction games this month, which gives me an excuse to dip into the mailbag and share a few related letters.

Chris Crammond of Godfrey, Ill., wonders how to get West End Games' STAR WARS* game off the ground. With First Edition STAR WARS gone the way of the homing pigeon, I'd suggest you start fresh with the Second Edition (reviewed in DRAGON® issue #199), then take a look at the *Movie Trilogy Sourcebook*, reviewed in this month's "Short & sweet" section.

Speaking of the STAR WARS game, Dale Meier of Holstein, Iowa, takes issue with my praise for the Second Edition, objecting to the absence of an index, the decreased cybernetics and computer rules, and the scarcity of game-mastering tips. Further: "A large amount of things transfer over very easily and all West End Games would have to do is take the time to research all First Edition materials and print up a conversion book. . . ." Well, maybe. Considering the expanded focus (covering adventures after the fall of the Empire) and reworked mechanics, I think a new edition was justified, and West End came up with a great one. Still, I'm sympathetic. Whenever publishers issue revised editions, they risk the good will of fans who've invested the time and effort needed to master the previous versions.

Back in issue #194, I suggested that the MECHWARRIOR* role-playing game makes a good first supplement for the BATTLETECH* game. "I disagree with this move somewhat," writes Mr. Meier. "If you strictly want to study the tactics and hardware of the BATTLETECH game, I'd recommend buying the *BATTLETECH Compendium* and *Citytech*." Fair enough. You might also check out FASA's new BATTLESPACE* game, reviewed this month.

Finally, thanks to Steffan DelPiano of South River, N.J., Herman Liebson of Watertown, N.Y., and Chris Perry of Corning, Calif., for their thoughtful letters of support, which modesty prevents me from quoting. (No kidding, Herman, am I really one of the reasons you resubscribed?) Also, to all those who've asked how to get their games published, two words: Beats me.

SHATTERZONE* game
Three 96-page books, 112 playing cards, 16-page *SHATTERZONE Quarterly* newsletter, two 10-sided dice, boxed
West End Games \$30
Design: Ed Stark and Greg Farshtey
Additional material: Shane Hensley and Dave Wetzel
Development: Daniel Scott Palter, Richard Hawran, and Ron Seiden
Editing: Ed Stark and Greg Farshtey
Illustrations: Marshal Andrews III, Jamie Lombardo, Ron Hill, John Paul Lona, David Plunket, Phillip Tan, Pete Venters, Mike Vilardi, and Karl Waller
Cover: Nick Smith

Crosshairs

64-page softcover book * * *
West End Games \$12
Design: Shane Lacy Hensley
Editing and development: Ed Stark
Illustrations: Jamie Lombardo, Ron Hill, and Karl Waller
Cover: Stephen Crane

Here's a role-playing game (RPG) that should've been packaged with a bottle of aspirin. SHATTERZONE boasts a fascinating setting and some interesting concepts, but navigating the rulebook is about as much fun as staring into a light bulb.

First, the good news. The SHATTERZONE setting, detailed in the handsome *Universe Guide*, combines high-tech grit with fairy-tale whimsy to create a role-playing arena of remarkable invention. It's sort of a punkier *Star Wars*, where wholesome droids and noble Jedi Knights have been displaced by self-indulgent zoners and seedy shatrats. The universe consists of four environments, linked by a common history but distinguished by wildly diverse cultures and terrain. Beyond the Core Worlds region, the center of civilization and the probable homeland of beginning PCs, lie the Near Colonies, a string of independent settlements populated by renegades and backstabbers. Fortune hunters flock to the undeveloped planets of the Inner Frontier, while settlers with a death wish may opt for homesteads in the grim Outer Frontier. The Shatterzone, separating the Inner and Outer Frontiers, resembles an asteroid field of incompatible "light" and "dark" matter; collisions cause serious trouble.

On the other side of the Shatterzone lurks a race of creeps called the Armagons (as in Armageddon), who relate to humans like termites relate to soft wood. Spacefarers also may shake hands with the Glahn, blue-skinned pragmatists that come in three sexes, or they might meet a Yithran scout, a cross between a tree stump, an ice box, and a bowling ball. To keep the rabble in line, a police organization called the Fleet enforces laws with the compassion of Nazi stormtroopers. A list of slang terms ensures that a PC knows what an Ishantran ambassador means when he calls him a "scattertan" (spaceltalk for "butt-head"). Laws vary from planet to planet, depending on local custom and the whims of administrators; kidnapping may be legal on Planet X, while trespassing may send the perpetrator to the gas chamber. Although the game skimps on adventure hooks, referees should have little trouble designing solid scenarios from a background this rich.

The game's best mechanic is the deck of cards used to augment plots and boost abilities (as in West End's TORG* game). Each player receives a hand of cards at the outset of an adventure, discarding them at key moments to influence various aspects

of the game. Enhancement Cards enable a PC to increase the success chance of skill rolls, cause an opponent's action to fail, or coax a clue from the referee. Subplot Cards affect the storyline with Mistaken Identities (a nonplayer character becomes convinced that a PC is somebody else) and Romances (the PC meets the love of his life). Cards also may be used to determine initiative and resolve critical actions. Useful, versatile tools, the cards are as fun as they are ingenious.

If only the rules were as appealing as the cards. Alas, they are a disappointing bunch, a minefield of charts and numbers. The character-creation system gets things off to a rocky start. A player begins with any archetype she can dream up, preferably one that can be summarized in two words, such as Corporate Mercenary, Fleet Scout, or Nitpicking Critic. A PC has eight basic Attributes—Agility, Dexterity, Endurance, Strength, Intellect, Mind, Confidence, and Charisma—which is two too many; if there's a difference between Agility and Dexterity, or Intellect and Mind, it's mighty thin.

Those who choose not to roll on the Attribute and Skill Points Table distribute 20 Skill Points and 65 Attribute Points pretty much any way they like. Skills derive from Attributes; Agility-related skills include Acrobatics and Beast Riding. Intelligence skills include Camouflage and Computer Ops. Though the 60-plus skills cover a lot of territory, the jumble of qualifiers make them tiresome to use. Skills may be *trained* or *untrained*, identified as *macro* (requiring the selection of a *facet*), or cross-referenced to a table; the Computer Ops Chart lists 11 variables. (There's a difference between accessing "unusual" information and "very hard to find" information.) Some skills are too strong, such as Damage Increase and Psionic Manipulation. Some are useless; how often will a PC use Prestidigitation (stage magic)? Some are baffling; we already have a score for Strength, so why do we need a skill for Lifting?

Resolving an action requires the referee to check the applicable skill and determine a Difficulty Number. The player rolls two 10-sided dice and checks the result on the Bonus Chart for a modifier, which he adds to the roll. If the roll exceeds the Difficulty Number, the action succeeds. If that were it, we'd be home free, but we're just getting started. Consider, for example, the "Up" rule: a skilled character may reroll a die that comes up on 10, which in turn can trigger a string of rolls; if a rerolled 10 produces another 10, he rolls yet again. In certain situations, a PC may attempt to "push" his Strength by rolling on the General Push Results Table. The value by which a roll exceeds the modified Difficulty Number is given in Result Points, read on the Interaction and Combat Results Table. Want to try for extra actions? Check

the Multi-Action Table for the Difficulty Number Modifier and Toughness Increase. Damaged? Maybe you've been "KO'ed" (if you have a "K" but not an "O," you recover in 10 minutes) or "knocked down" (+4 modifier to all Difficulty Numbers). If you've just received your fourth Wound, modify your skill attempts by +4 DN and take two Shock Points per activity round. If this is your fifth wound, you suffer an automatic KO and -8 to your activity, and you take one Shock Point every round until the total equals your Endurance rating.

For the most part, the system seems to work—I never got around to the Advanced Combat chapter—but it comes with a price. The more charts to check and dice to toss, the more the focus shifts from storytelling. I wonder if that's what the designers had in mind.

The Value System typifies SHATTERZONE's number lust. The game defines "value" as a universal rating that approximates any type of measurement. According to the Value Chart, a value of 14 has a measurement of 600, which could be 600 seconds, 600 meters, or 600 kilograms. The values increase geometrically, which in theory makes it easier for players to work with large numbers; a value of 15 has a measurement of 1,000 but a value of 20 has a measurement of 10,000. While Mayfair's DC HEROES* game made effec-

tive use of a similar system, here it's confusing and aggravatingly imprecise. In a science-fiction campaign, it matters to me if an enemy ship is 400,000 or 600,000 meters away; in SHATTERZONE, this translates to a value difference of 1. Consider this example from the *Players' Guide*: "You've been told that your character has 15 minutes before a certain poisonous gas takes effect . . . The game master rules that the character can try something at least one time every round. There are ten seconds in a round, but how many rounds in fifteen minutes?" You can figure the result my way or their way. My way: Multiply 6 (number of rounds per minute) by 15, for a total of 90. Their way: "... find the value for 15 on the Value Chart. That's 6. Then add the conversion (+91) to the value for a total value of 15 (9 + 6). Reading that as a measurement gives you 1,000 seconds. Divide that by 10 seconds, and you see that your character has one hundred tries." Doesn't he also have the wrong answer?

Of the first batch of supplements, *Crosshairs* is the stand-out. Set on Teraxiter, a bleak planet of industrial waste and corporate corruption, the book describes the history, environs, and populace in evocative language. Visitors who don't succumb to scrape-rot, a repulsive skin infection, may find themselves up to their elbows in

carnivorous leeches and mutant rats. Random encounters include the discovery of hover cars with skeletal riders, a battle over a slimy corpse, and the rescue of a cybernetic hound.

Evaluation: In the introduction, the designers encourage the reader to ditch as many rules as he likes. So I did. Guess what? I ended up with a pretty good game. Flushing the cumbersome damage system and the (shudder) Value Chart frees players to concentrate on the setting, and that's where SHATTERZONE shines. As for those determined to master the game on its own terms, note that the three-star rating reflects an average: two for the system, four for the background. If the rulebook leaves you lost in space, don't say you weren't warned.

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* * *

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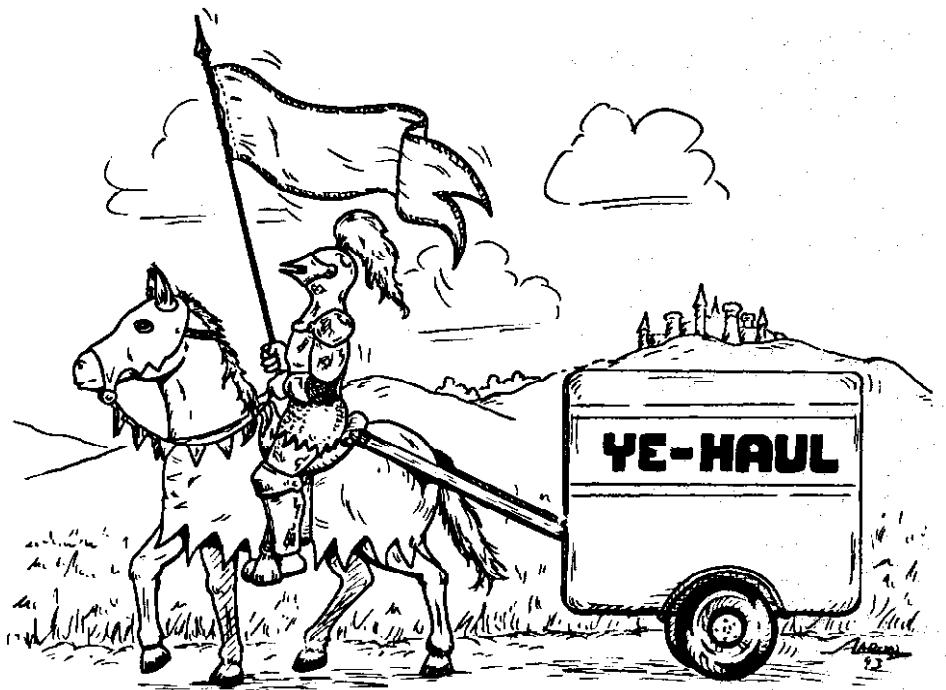
Editing and development: Jon Pickens
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* * *

Poor Buck. His comic book fizzled. His XXVc™ game never caught fire. His novels disappeared into a black hole. In this entry-level RPG, which uses the 1930s comic strip as a springboard for campy SF adventures, he may have found his niche.

The simplest RPG that TSR has ever published—making the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game a brainbuster by comparison—BUCK ROGERS explains the fundamentals in about a dozen pages. Four abilities—Strength, Aim, Brains, and Health—define the characters. Instead of numerical ratings, abilities receive one of four Ranks. The player assigns the Best rank to his preferred ability, the OK rank to his least favorite, and Good and Better to the remaining two.

Each ability comes with a list of associated skills; Strength encompasses Brawling and Sword, Health covers Constitution and Endurance. A player chooses two skills for his Best ability, and one skill each for his remaining abilities, for a total of five.



By Aaron Williams

Despite the generous number of skills, beginners might find some of the designations puzzling. Why, for instance, is Dexterity a skill and Aim an ability, and not vice versa? Why was it necessary to list Endurance and Hardy Individual as separate skills? Why is "a resistance to toxins and poisons" called Constitution? Why not just call it Poison Resistance?

A PC receives three Action Points (APs) to spend each turn on movement, combat, and other actions; as shown on the Action Point Cost Table, opening a door costs one AP, breaking it down costs three. Characters move on a square grid, expending one AP per square in clear terrain. To resolve an action, the player rolls a number of 6-sided dice corresponding to the rank of the pertinent ability; the Best ability uses five dice, the OK ability only two. If the PC has an appropriate skill (say, Brawling in a hand-to-hand combat encounter), he rolls an extra die. He also earns an extra die if a 6 turns up on his original roll, he has a tool or weapon that increases the likelihood of success, or he expends Experience Chips (awarded at the end of an adventure). In no case, however, can a player roll more than eight dice at once. If the roll equals or exceeds the success number, the action succeeds.

Characters attempting to punch each other out make Strength checks, with the highest roll indicating a successful smack. If the smacked character's Health check fails to exceed the smacker's Strength number (10 for OK, 25 for Best), he falls unconscious for 1-6 rounds. For a melee attack, the attacker makes a Strength check, augmented by extra dice as indicated for specific weapons. Some weapons, like brass knuckles and blackjack, knock out opponents who fail their Health checks, while others, like axes and swords, kill them outright. Therein lies a problem: a PC can theoretically absorb an endless number of blows from brass knuckles, but a single swat from a mace can send him to meet his maker. A hit-point system would've remedied this, even if it made the rules a bit more complicated.

The World of the 25th Century booklet details the campaign universe in breathless prose: "[Buck] left the abandoned mine to find his old world in ruins. He also found a group of Bad Blood raiders ambushing a female soldier who was flying without a plane!" Panels from the original comics accompany tidy biographies of the Cyclone Kid, Lariat Luke, and other notable characters. In informative sidebars scattered through the text, the amiable Doctor Huer ponders such knotty questions as "How does a disintegrator beam know when to stop destroying matter?" and "Did the Raiders reflect the centralizing Mongol invaders?". Your reaction to Buck's world depends on your tolerance for compressed liquid air guns and Tiger Men from Mars. I found it charming, but you may find it hopelessly quaint.

The Adventures Book presents the best

introductory scenario I've seen in ages, wittily plotted and brilliantly staged. The PCs awaken in a mysterious cave to discover a bizarre new world of flying airships and Mongol death rays, as events steer them toward a tense showdown with a surprise villain. Designer Jeff Grubb takes the referee by the hand and guides him effortlessly through the encounters, setting the scenes with vivid descriptions and outlining the options step by step. If a novice referee hasn't learned how to run an adventure after reading this, he probably ought to stick with checkers.

Though a solid effort, the *War Against the Han* supplement, comprising the *Campaigns vs. the Han* and *World at War* booklets, suffers in comparison to the boxed set. A short scenario in the *Campaigns* volume picks up where the *Adventures Book* leaves off, with the PCs ordered to investigate rumors of a new Mongol super-weapon under development in the Grand Canyon. The rest of the book describes how to design campaigns by using die-rolls to determine settings, supporting casts, and other plot elements. For me, constructing a memorable adventure from random elements is harder than writing a plot from scratch, and I suspect that many novices will feel the same way. A few chapters of plot hooks would've been more helpful or, better yet, a longer version of the Grand Canyon scenario. The second book, *The World at War*, provides brief but intriguing peeks at new characters and key locales.

Evaluation: BUCK ROGERS fills the bill for beginning players—a coherent, smooth-playing RPG that can be learned in a half-hour. Sophisticated players, however, may be disappointed, particularly those looking for a rehash of GDW's late, lamented SPACE: 1889* game, which this definitely is not. BUCK ROGERS characters fight grizzly bears and bad guys named Agent X, and if that makes you wince, better stick with the STAR WARS game. Given its antique approach to science-fiction, will the game find an audience? I hope so. I'd hate to see Buck out of work again.

BATTLESPACE* game * * * *

One 152-page book, one 16-page record sheet book, two 34" x 22" mapsheets, four counter sheets, 32 plastic bases, two 6-sided dice, boxed

FASA Corporation \$25

Design: Chris Hartford

Additional material: L. Ross Babcock III, Sam Lewis, Jordan Weisman, and Clare Hess

Development: Scott Jenkins

Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Joel Biske, Earl Geier, Jeff Laubenstein, Larry MacDougall, Allen Nunis, and Gary Thomas Washington

Cover: Peter Scanlon and Mike Neilsen

FASA's face-lift of the BATTLETECH line proceeds apace with this stylish board game of ship-to-ship combat. Don't be misled by the meticulous campaign background and modest role-playing rules. BATTLESPACE is about blowing things up.

As in the BATTLETECH game, BATTLESPACE players track the status of their units on detailed record sheets, each representing a particular type of fighter, dropship, or warship. Rows of boxes correspond to areas of armor plating, such as the nose, aft, and fuselage; as the unit takes damage, the player marks off the indicted number of boxes. Other areas of the sheet are used to record weapon statistics, velocity data, and bay contents. Thanks to clean graphics and a clever design, the sheets enable players to take in an amazing amount of information at a glance.

Play begins with the deployment of vehicle counters on a hex map of deep space. After rolling for initiative, players move their units by expending Thrust Points, changing velocity and facing within a set of rigid guidelines. As units are assumed to be in constant motion and must advance a number of hexes equal to their current velocity, movement is a tricky proposition. For the most part, the BATTLESPACE game sidesteps the fine points of simulating three-dimensional movement on a two-dimensional surface, but the rules are seasoned with enough physics to give players a sense of what it's like to maneuver in the vacuum of space.

The autocannons, pulse lasers, and point-defense weapons that make up the game's arsenals are powerful enough to scorch planets. To make an attack, a player readies his weapon of choice, checks for range, and rolls two 6-sided dice. If the roll exceeds the to-hit number (dependent on the distance of the target), the attack succeeds. Damage that isn't absorbed by the target's armor may result in a critical hit, ranging from the inconsequential Navigation Lights Failure to the deadly Hull Collapse. Owing to the myriad of variables and modifiers, a few glitches are probably inevitable. I didn't find any that bothered me. (Well, maybe one; the Clan fighters seem to have an edge over their Inner Sphere counterparts, particularly in larger configurations.)

The rest of the rulebook offers a mixed bag of options and background notes. Though well-reasoned, the advanced rules go overboard with complications; space/atmosphere interface penalties require too many calculations, and enemy vessel boardings are too much work. I learned more than I ever wanted to know about the history of naval warfare. I would've swapped half the rulebook for some plastic miniatures, like those that came in the BATTLETECH box.

Evaluation: The designer suggests that players need the BATTLETECH Compendium and the MECHWARRIOR* game role-playing rules to play BATTLESPACE, but I

disagree. Those who just want to zap spaceships with laser guns don't need the other supplements; for that matter, they can probably get along without the BATTLETECH game. The BATTLESPACE set contains all the hallmarks of a classic board game; it's easy to learn, difficult to master, and maddeningly addictive. There are few pleasures as satisfying as blowing an Inner Sphere dropship to smithereens.

Short and sweet

TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA* game, by Frank Chadwick and Dave Nilsen with Loren K. Wiseman (original game concept by Marc Miller). GDW, Inc., \$25. *Survival Margin*, by David Nilsen. GDW, Inc., \$10. No discussion of science-fiction gaming would be complete without a mention of the TRAVELLER* game, the first and arguably the finest interstellar RPG. This overdue revision ties up the civil war featured in the previous incarnation (the MEGATRAVELLER* game) and unleashes a new threat called Virus, an electronic life form responsible for "... planetary power grids melted into slag . . . starships falling from the sky, crushing cities." THE NEW ERA game also showcases improved rules for character creation and skill acquisition, and brings the basic systems in line with GDW's TWILIGHT. 2000* and DARK CONSPIRACY* games. With its flawless integration of mechanics and background, TRAVELLER remains a landmark design and a timeless classic. Veteran players in particular should investigate *Survival Margin*, which brings the mythos up to date in an amusing series of bulletins from the "Traveller News Service" and also supplies conversion notes for refurbishing characters from the original TRAVELLER and MEGATRAVELLER games.

METASCAPE: GUILD SPACE* game, by Blake Mobley, Anthony Pryor, and David Webb. The Game Lords, Ltd., \$40. Saying that this new space-opera SFRPG is somewhat ambitious is like saying that Donald Trump is somewhat well-to-do. To give you an idea of the scope, ponder these figures:

Number of character attributes: 23.

Number of alien species described in the *Setting Guide*: 53.

Number of pages devoted to reading dice-rolls: 9.

Not for wimps or the mathematically challenged, GUILD SPACE tracks the exploits of the House of Dha, a secret military unit that serves the Guild, an alien alliance established some 3,000 years in the future. The sprawling rules, covering everything from brain-damaged characters to worm-hole travel, defy summary. Here's a taste, from the definition of the Dexterity Attribute: "Dexterity determines the ranged class damage adjustment (found on the weapon class table). The adj is based upon Dex category: HB = -1d, L = 0d, M = +1d, H = +2d, etc." The clear writing and liberal examples of play make even the most complicated mechan-

ics easy to understand, if not to execute; I spent a weekend wrestling with all this, and I feel like I barely got started. Still, there's much to admire, such as the flexible combat system that allows individuals and vehicles to use the same rules, and the "Sorce," a power enhancement that gives characters access to magic-like effects such as *ghost walk* and *shockblast*. The lavish packaging, including five books and a handful of metal miniatures, is generous to a fault. Impressive? You bet. Demanding? Absolutely. Playable? If you're willing to work. (For information: The Game Lords, Ltd., P.O. Box PP, Meeker CO 81641-0948.)

The Movie Trilogy Sourcebook, by Grant Boucher and Michael Stern. West End Games, \$25. Continuing their overhaul of the STAR WARS game, West End offers this useful compendium of material derived from the three *Star Wars* films, all compatible with the Second Edition rules. As much a scrapbook as a game supplement, the book features scads of photos from the films, as well as a fascinating selection of poster reproductions (including a look at the rare one-sheet for the deceptively titled *Revenge of the Jedi*). Most of this will be redundant for veterans of the First Edition game, but newcomers interested in a rematch with Darth Vader should find it indispensable.

MACROSS II* game, by Kevin Siembieda. Palladium Books, \$12. *Sourcebook One: The U.N. Spacy*, by Kevin Siembieda. Palladium Books, \$10. Though billed as an RPG, the role-playing elements take a back seat to the game's main thrust; namely, giant robots smashing each other to bits. These aren't just *any* giant robots, but super-powered, jet-propelled, mega-lasered monstrosities that make the competition look like wind-up dolls. Derived from the Japanese animated television series, the MACROSS II game excels in its descriptions of high-tech death machines like the Zentaran Battle Pod and the Valkyrie II VF-2SS with SAP Augmentation System. Complicated but manageable rules cover burst attacks, laser targeting, and guided missiles. There's not much for the player-characters to do aside from piloting the robots, making the role-playing rules largely irrelevant, but that's okay. I doubt that many will be playing this game to savor the nuances of interpersonal relationships. The *U.N. Spacy* sourcebook details a new batch of mecha, even more devastating than those in the MACROSS II book; the striking graphics and exacting statistics make it a good buy for hardcore players.

The Astromundi Cluster by Sam Wilt. TSR, Inc., \$20. Intended to jump-start sleepy SPELLJAMMER® campaigns, this lavish boxed set describes a unique crystal sphere comprised of free-floating asteroids. The sphere's weak barriers encourage free passage be-

tween the Prime Material plane and the Inner Planes, resulting in a bizarre and potentially explosive mix of creatures. The *Celestial Almanac* lists dozens of provocative locales, from the outcast colony of Chakarak to the orchard-laden Boyarny, while the *Astromigator's Guide* provides stats for the Doombat and other new ships. Two gripes: (1) Some of the names are more silly than sinister, like the mist-covered bodies called Gasteroids, and the shadowy lands known as the Grim Regions. (Are they anywhere near the Scary Places?); (2) With 192 pages at his disposal, couldn't the designer have found room for at least *one* fully-developed adventure?

STARFIRE* game, by David M. Weber (original version by Stephen V. Cole). Task Force Games, \$25. *First Contact*, by Timothy D. Olsen and Mark Costello. Task Force Games, \$10. This game of tactical space combat is similar in intent to the BATTLESPACE game, but the die-cut counters, Combat Results Tables, and no-nonsense rulebook (96 dense pages) put it closer in spirit to military simulations like the SQUAD LEADER* game. The basic turn sequence-initiative, movement, and combat-serves as a skeleton on which to hang a multitude of options, from planetary defense centers to antimatter warheads. Rule highlights include a Warp Point system for instantaneous travel, and an innovative game scale that allows players to smoothly shift between four different units of time and distance. For studious players willing to sift through a mountain of material, the STARFIRE game could easily become a hobby in itself. *First Contact*, the expansion set, introduces the Vestrii and the Tangri, potential adversaries of immense power; interesting, but non-essential.

War Against the Chtorr by C.J. Carella. Steve Jackson Games, \$17. Intelligent worms the size of mini-vans invade the Earth in this first-rate supplement for the GURPS* game. Based on the David Gerrold novels, *War Against the Chtorr* serves up all the raw material a malevolent referee needs to wipe out the human race. When the PCs think they've got a handle on the worms, see how they fare against nerve-burners, jellypigs, and pipe-cleaner bugs. Are you squirming yet?

A former newspaper editor and publisher, Rick Swan is the author of The Complete Guide to Role-playing Games, published by St. Martins Press. You can write to him at 2620 30th St., Des Moines IA 50310. If you'd like a response, enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.



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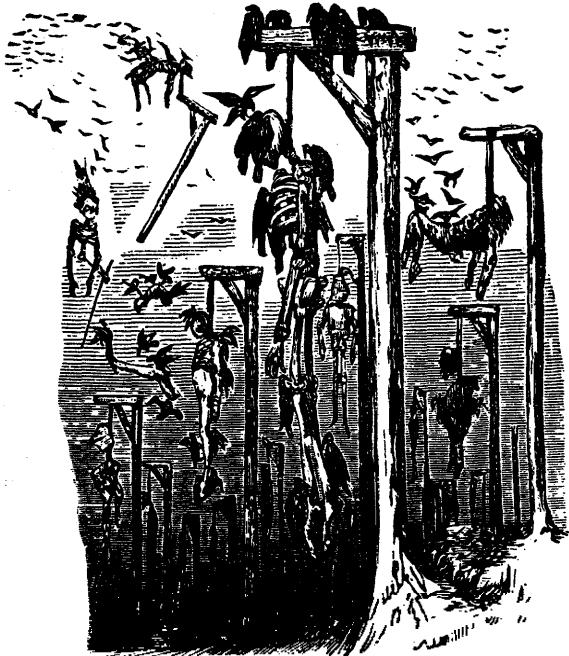
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Lead story: Farewell to the DC HEROES* game

Mayfair Games has released its staff for role-playing games. The editors and designers for the CHILL*, DC HEROES, ROLE-AIDS*, and UNDERGROUND* games have gotten their walking papers, and future game material will be written entirely by freelancers. The DC HEROES license is not being renewed. The CHILL game will be "sporadically supported." Mayfair will focus its efforts on its board games, especially train games.

Good news, bad news

Larry Elmore is a staff illustrator for TSR, Inc., again in 1994. He's completed a number of DRAGONLANCE® novel covers, and also will paint the *Rogues of Lankmar* cover and assorted other pieces. TSR also has hired artist Paul Jaquays as a staff artist. Artist Gerald Brom (best known for his DARK SUN® product covers) has left TSR to pursue independent projects. We wish him the best of luck.

Noteworthy

West End Games will release the BLOODSHADOWS* game, a 1930s dark-fantasy pulp, game in April. Greg Farshtey, author of *Hell's Feast*, the first release in the BLOODSHADOWS setting, says, "Imagine Humphrey Bogart meeting horrific monsters, and the monsters are the PCs." The BLOODSHADOWS game will use West End's new "MasterBook" system (similar to Steve Jackson Games' GURPS* line, but with more support for each setting). Already well-known for their STAR WARS* game, West End also may be pursuing another major license, though it won't confirm or deny the rumors (wink, wink, nudge). We'll give more details as we pry them out of the unwilling.

Freelance designer Jonathan Tweet has joined the staff at Wizards of the Coast. WotC also has picked up all rights (and back stock) to a game that Tweet co-designed, the ARS MAGICA* game formerly from White Wolf.

Sandy Petersen, designer of Chaosium's classic CALL OF CTHULHU* game and DRAGON® Magazine's very own computer-game reviewer, has taken a position with Id Software, a software house in Texas. He'll continue to review the world of computer games for us in between coding, caffeinating, and compiling.

Irish author Willie Walsh is returning to the pages of DUNGEON® Adventures after a year-long absence. Watch for him in issue #47.

Chaosium may be pursuing a *Mists of Avalon* license from Marion Zimmer Bradley for their PENDRAGON* game. Charlie Krank confirmed the rumor, but then Krank said, "We confirm all rumors."

Avalon Hill veteran designer Ken Rolston is on the design team for White Wolf's *Wraith* game (for their Storyteller system), due out at this year's GEN CON® Game Fair. Also from White Wolf comes news that Ken Cliffe has succeeded Stewart Wieck as editor of *White Wolf Magazine*. Stewart moves to WW's book department.

Books into print

Lynn Abbey has completed her first novel for TSR, a DARK SUN® tale called *Brazen Gambit*. Chet Williamson, past winner of the World Fantasy Award, has turned in *Mordenheim*, a RAVENLOFT® novel.

The Executive Editor of TSR's Book Dep't., Brian Thomsen, recently has signed Roland Green to write three DRAGONLANCE novels; Green is the author of the *Starcruiser* Shenandoah series for Roc and the co-author of the Janissaries series with Jerry Pournelle.

Off the wire

SSI, Inc., has delayed the AL-QADIM™: *The Genie's Curse* computer game to a summer 1994 release. The game uses an entirely new engine with a highly interactive story structure, plenty of mysteries, and lots of dialogue. This new engine comes from Daniel Greenberg, a game designer for TSR, White Wolf, Mayfair, and others. His new engine will be part of future SSI releases. *The Genie's Curse* is a visually lush, one-character quest with graphics beyond the standard set by the DARK SUN™: *Shattered Lands* game. ☐

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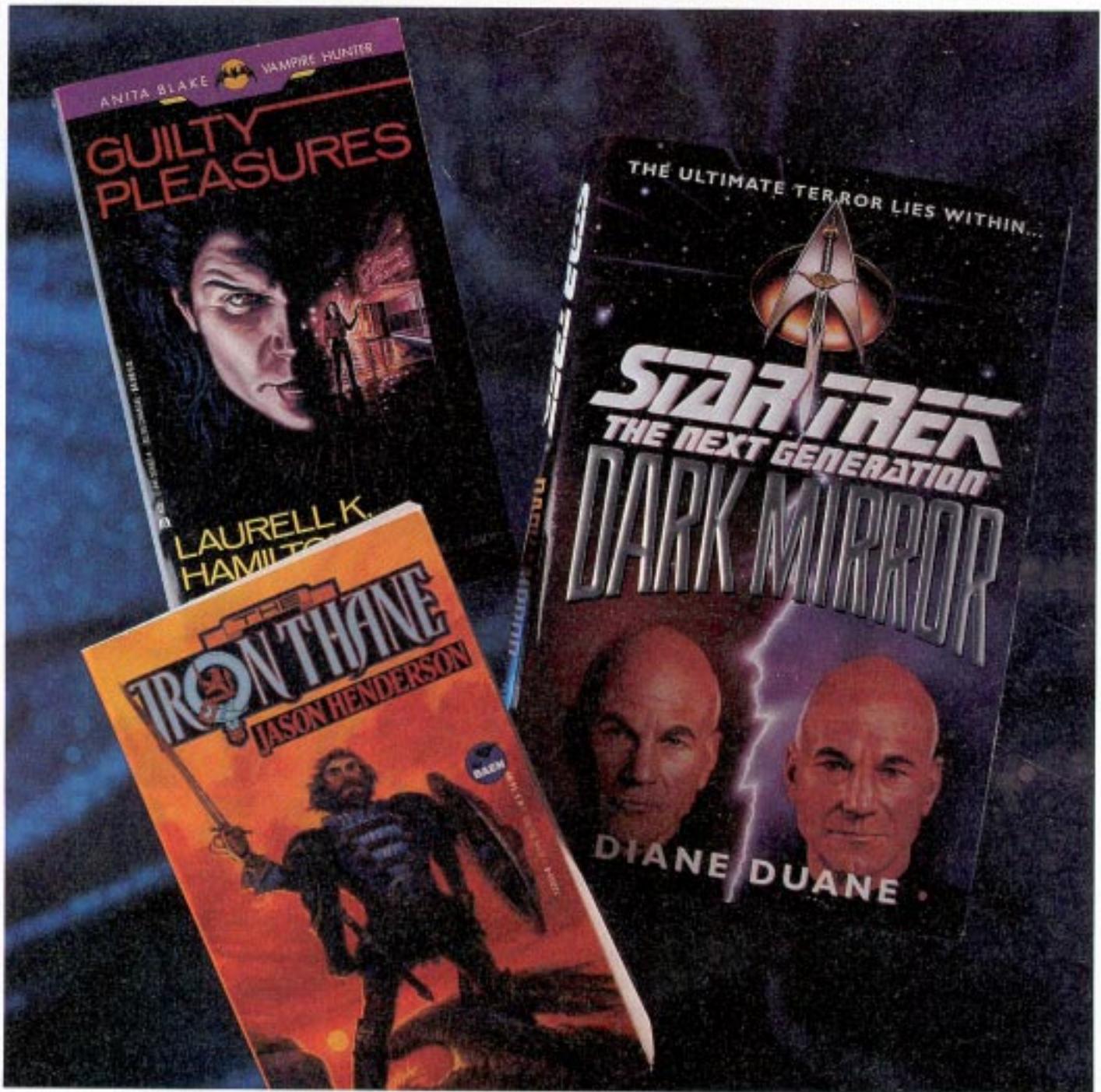


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THE IRON THANE

Jason Henderson

Baen 0-671-72203-4 \$4.99

The term "Shakespearean fantasy" usually calls up images of the elegant faerie court ruled by Oberon and Titania, or the otherworldly island landscape of *The Tempest* where Prospero's magic is supreme. While the inspiration for *The Iron Thane* is clearly drawn from Shakespeare, its mood is neither elegant nor misty-eyed. Instead, Jason Henderson picks up where *Macbeth* left off, creating a hard-edged sword-and-sorcery yarn that manages to be grim yet not gloomy.

The title character is MacDuff, lately the Thane of Fife and MacBeth's executioner. Despite his military prowess, however, MacDuff isn't a happy man. He's lost his family, his lands are no longer a home, and his king doesn't trust him. The outcast thane is fully prepared to leave Scotland entirely—until trouble of a different kind gathers around him. The shadowy Erl-King, ruler of the dark peoples of Faerie, is hatching a plot to destroy every living being in Scotland, mortal and magical alike, and only MacDuff can persuade the many threatened peoples to join forces and turn back the danger.

Henderson's narrative is an interesting blend of history, literature, and myth. His debt to Shakespeare encompasses Oberon's court as well as the prophetic witches of *MacBeth*, but he also draws significantly on more traditional Celtic and faerie lore. There are several elvish races in Henderson's world, each with a distinctive temperament, appearance, and agenda. The novel also takes care to tie itself loosely to real-world history, and details of military strategy and combat are vividly supplied. In this last respect, fans of the late Robert Adams' work may find the book especially welcome.

The diversity of background material isn't without its costs. The tone of the writing wavers from time to time, zooming in to commune with MacDuff's thoughts, jumping to a no-holds-barred battle scene, then adopting a faintly scholarly voice to provide some bit of historical data. Then there are the witches themselves, an intriguing trio both like and very unlike the familiar hags of Shakespeare's Scottish play.

Flawed or not, though, *The Iron Thane* is nothing if not distinctive. For all that Jason Henderson's novel is spun off from one of literature's best-known plays, it's a tale that sets modest goals for itself and generally achieves them. Unlike too many "mighty warrior" yarns, this book doesn't require readers to check their brains at the door.

THE CASE OF THE TOXIC SPELL DUMP

Harry Turtledove

Baen 0-671-72196-8 \$5.99

In science-fiction circles, Harry Turtledove has acquired a reputation as one of the genres leading purveyors of alternate history. The history of *The Case of The Toxic Spell Dump* is more alternate than most, even for Turtledove. In David Fisher's version of southern California, traffic jams are full of magic carpets, dozens of probably real gods are competing for worshippers, the C.I.A. has real spooks on its payroll, and major corporations have to store dangerous magical leftovers in high-security waste installations.

This last is making David's job seriously complicated; he's an investigator for the E.P.A., and something unidentifiable is leaking out of one of the area's most secure storage sites. While no one can tell what kind of energy is escaping, its effects are demonstrable—the magical radiation is causing newborns in the neighborhood to be born without souls.

Turtledove strikes a tricky balance between making the novel a tough-minded mystery yarn, a carefully imagined science-fictional treatment of a magical world, and a cheerfully amusing comic fantasy. On one hand, it's hard not to chuckle at high-tech research outfits with names like Slow Djinn Fizz and technologies like virtuous (rather than virtual) reality, or a world in which Ayatollah Khomeini migrated to L.A. to become a severe-minded federal judge. On the other, Turtledove has taken great care to make the magic plausibly rational and the unfolding mystical mystery dangerously suspenseful. Nowhere is this clearer than in the grand finale, where the sorcerous pyrotechnics are both epic in scale and eminently logical.

Last but not least, the alternate-historical

elements also display Turtledove's close attention to detail. Only the most attentive readers will catch all the subtle left turns made from our own past, but the clues are there for those who watch for them. "Boston, Oregon," for instance, is not a mistake, but a legitimate twist to real history.

In short, *The Case of the Toxic Spell Dump* is a novel that amply demonstrates the rewards of solid craftsmanship.

For all that it may look like a wild and crazy, even silly send-up of bureaucracy and political correctness, this is a book with as much research and storytelling skill poured into it as you'll find in a lot of realistic hard science fiction. That's a unique virtue for a comic fantasy, and one that more than pays off Turtledove's efforts.

UNDER THE EYE OF GOD

David Gerrold

Bantam 0-553-29010-X \$5.99

In a technical sense, there's little or nothing wrong with this latest book from veteran SF novelist and television writer Gerrold. But in practice, *Under the Eye of God* is a book that's markedly less than the sum of its parts, because those parts manage to work against each other to produce a volume that's frustratingly hard to enjoy.

The setting is the first major example of the problem. The Paleolithic Cluster is the Milky Ways version of nineteenth-century Australia—a remote corner of the stellar map that's home to all manner of unsavory outcasts from the rest of the civilized galaxy. The Cluster's political masters are the tyrannical Phaestor, or Vampires, a genetically augmented species whose members make Klingons look like so many pet hamsters. The Vampires' military enforcers are the Moktar Dragons, who are to the Jurassic velociraptor what the Vampires are to ordinary humanity. For anyone other than Vampires and Dragons, life in the Cluster is mercifully short at best and insanely dangerous at worst.

The Cluster's rough-and-ready atmosphere might well be entertaining if Gerrold's story revolved around a couple of well-drawn protagonists with whom readers could identify. The focus, however, just isn't there. Instead, Gerrold presents an ensemble piece in which it's a challenge to work out who's got the lead roles and who's a supporting player. (The metaphor

is apt, as *Under the Eye of God* is the first of two books derived from a TV project of Gerrold's called *Trackers* which apparently didn't fly.) As a result, no individual character gets enough "screen time" to establish both a sympathetic personality and any sort of control over the storyline. It's a pity, because there are a couple of promising individuals in the cast, notably a merchant star-captain who proves too honorable for her own good.

Gerrold's prose style in this volume is similarly mismatched to his story. Where the freewheeling, action-intensive plot would seem to call for crisp, undistracted narration, what's offered is an uneven mix of adventure storytelling and rambling historical asides, many of the latter contained in long footnotes in uncomfortably tiny print.

The net effect is to badly slow the story's pace, giving it a jerky stop-and-go quality. It's an approach that might work for a thoughtful, idea-driven novel, but *Under the Eye of God* is too much an action-adventure yarn for the technique to work successfully. Just as game referees can't expect their players to sit still for ten-minute descriptions of the life histories of their opponents, readers are all too likely to find their attention wandering during the footnotes. Where gamers usually can pull their referee's attention back to the adventure, Gerrold's readers are liable to

simply put down the book and go on to something else.

Which is a shame, because *Under the Eye of God* has the seeds of an entertaining interstellar adventure. With a tighter rein on his cast and his tendency to stuff the entire history of the *Trackers* universe into the book's pages, Gerrold might have had another winner on his hands.

GUILTY PLEASURES

Laurell K. Hamilton

Ace 0-441-30483-4 \$4.99

If you've been rolling your eyes at the number of romantic, sympathetic vampires populating the fantasy racks in recent years, you'll be pleased to know that Anita Blake agrees with you. As the back cover of *Guilty Pleasures* indicates, her motto is "I don't date vampires; I kill them."

In the near-future world author Laurell Hamilton describes, Anita's attitude is eminently justifiable. Hamilton's vampires are some of the most dangerous—and most seductive—undead you're ever likely to read about, predators who thrive on human blood and passion, promising pleasure while luring mortals into slavery and death.

But while Anita operates more or less within the law, working for an agency that specializes in supernatural pest control, there's someone else out there who's kill-

ing vampires with entirely too much efficiency. That prompts one of Washington, D.C.'s most powerful nosferatu to seek out Anita in an attempt to catch the assassin, and leads to a complicated game of shifting alliances and undead intrigues that promises to get impressively bloody before all the demons are laid to rest.

The premise recalls Barbara Hambly's Victorian vampire novel *Those Who Hunt the Night*, but where Hambly's milieu overlaid its vampiric lore with a veneer of elegant civility, Hamilton's novel is hard-edged, gritty, and downright nasty at times. Anita is a tough, streetwise investigator, and neither she nor her undead allies and enemies pull any punches as they go about the business of tracking the killer. That makes *Guilty Pleasures* a violent, sometimes seamy adventure that younger or more squeamish readers may find too vivid for their taste, but the firefights and blood are integral to the story, and Anita Blake is a complicated, entirely believable protagonist and narrator.

Likewise, Hamilton's working-out of vampiric hierarchy and powers, as well as the abilities of various other power-wielders alive and undead, is detailed and ingenious. Vampires in this world don't exist in a vacuum; human law has been bent to account for their existence, and the supernatural powers that drive them have manifested in other ways as well. Players of White Wolf's *Vampire* game line should find a great deal to like in this vision of the nosferatu.

This is Laurell Hamilton's third novel, following the high fantasy *Nightseer* and a *Star Trek* adventure. While the tone of *Guilty Pleasures* is rough and ready, the book is easily Hamilton's most polished work to date. That's ample demonstration not only that her writing talents are maturing impressively, but that she's also one of the most versatile recent arrivals in the SF/fantasy genre.

DARK MIRROR

Diane Duane

Pocket 0-671-73377-2 \$22.00

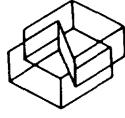
Dark Mirror may well be one of the most-anticipated novels in the history of *Star Trek* fiction. Besides marking Diane Duane's return to the milieu after a long absence, the book makes a return visit to the universe of one of the original television series' most startling episodes: "Mirror, Mirror". Readers' expectations of the novel are therefore likely to be very high indeed—but Duane proves more than equal to meeting the challenge.

That's all the more impressive given the difficult character work demanded by the mirror-universe plot. Duane not only must get properly inside the skulls of Picard, Troi, LaForge, and the rest of the *U.S.S. Enterprise* crew, but also come up with credibly nasty takes on their opposite numbers aboard the *I.S.S. Enterprise-D*. She succeeds admirably on both counts, and manages at the same time to make excellent dramatic use of everyone in the cast. Even minor

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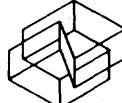
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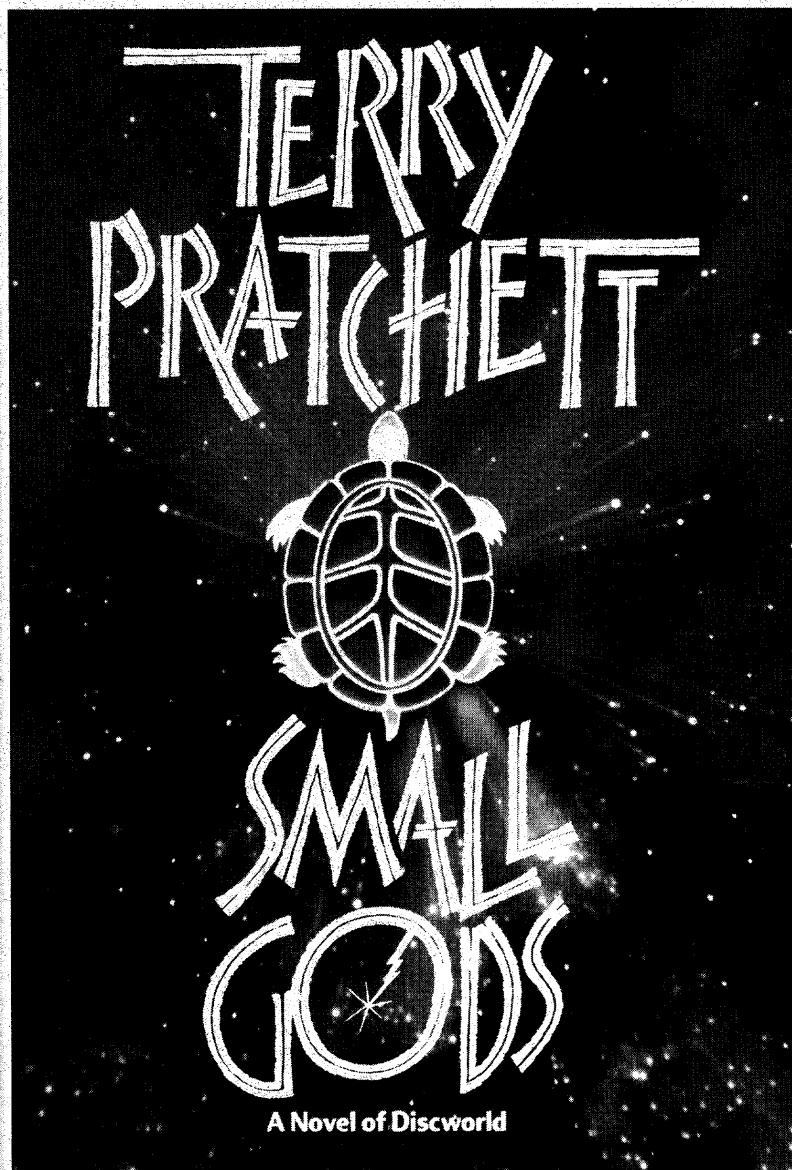
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TERRY PRATCHETT

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The great god Om is having a rotten day...

It seems he's an ordinary tortoise. He can't inflict the tiniest curse or strike his enemies with bolts of lightning, or even hide from a hungry eagle. And worst of all, his only believer is the Novice Brutha, a pathetically gentle creature who refuses to hurt anybody...



HarperCollins Publishers

players such as the perennially jumpy Lt. Barclay get good parts, and the characterizations of mirror-Troi and mirror-Wesley are especially memorable.

The novel's premise is straightforward enough; while on a quiet mission in a remote area of space, "our", Enterprise-D abruptly finds itself pulled into the mirror-universe by its Imperial counterpart. The transfer is only the beginning, as it's quickly apparent that the *I.S.S. Enterprise-D* and its masters are planning to launch a major offensive against the Federation.

Luckily, the two ships don't immediately rush to a confrontation, giving the Federation Enterprise time to orchestrate an intelligence-gathering foray onto enemy ground. In order to truly stop the Empire's plans, the original Enterprise also has to figure out how to get home.

Duane has always been good at managing high-stakes plots and making her characters react believably in crisis situations. That remains true here, but while she doesn't abandon the air of relentless optimism that marks most of her work, *Dark Mirror* serves to extend her dramatic range noticeably. Unlike the villains in most of Duane's fiction, those in charge of the mirror-Enterprise are past all redemption, committed to darkness with a completeness that's downright chilling. This is new territory for Duane, but she navigates it with crisp efficiency.

Duane also drives home the nastiness of the mirror-universe in a shrewd but ambitious sequence that glances back at its literature as seen from the mirror-Picard's bookshelf. Rewriting Shakespeare is a risky business, but Duane's extract from an alternate *Merchant of Venice* is frighteningly apt and entirely successful at making its point. Even in its darkest moments, there's a dimension to the novel not often found in *Star Trek* fiction.

Suffice to say that *Dark Mirror* is a spectacular success, a story that takes the television series and lends it a depth and power unmatched in a lot of "real" SF novels. It is a *Star Trek* story with a soul, and those aren't easily come by in any media. Duane—and her readers—have every reason to be pleased with this novel.

A WIZARD'S DOZEN

Michael Stearns, ed.

Harcourt Brace 0-15-200965-5

In one sense, the supply of short fantasy and SF stories has never been greater. There are colorful magazines full of them, and nearly every month sees a new theme anthology or two on the racks, featuring stories about cats or vampires or Presidents or what have you.

This is all very well, but what has remained rare are new fairy tales, particularly fairy tales aimed at younger readers. These are the stories one hears read aloud at bedtime, the ones remembered and reread out of dog-eared and well-loved books even after one has grown up—the

ones that send young minds in search of novel-length fantasies and epic role-playing campaigns in the first place.

A Wizard's Dozen bids fair to change that. Working under the eye of veteran writer, anthologist, and editor Jane Yolen, Michael Stearns has assembled a memorable if occasionally rough-edged group of tales connected only by their desire to introduce young imaginations to the worlds of magic.

There is mischievous humor here, in Patricia Wrede's tale of a wizard-caliph who knows how to cast entirely too many curses and in Will Shetterly's story of the aptly-named Princess Who Kicked Butt. There is good gray darkness in a Debra Doyle-James Macdonald chronicle of a granddaughter of queens, and in an unexpectedly sober story of warring kingdoms from Bruce Coville. There are tales that mix moods, as in Tappan King's account of a visit to Faerie by modem and Dan Bennett's wry yarn about a prince, a series of prophecies, and a great many single-minded orders of knights, monks, and the like.

That covers roughly half of the book's thirteen stories, with other worthy contributions coming from Alan P. Smale, Jane Yolen, Vivian Vande Velde, and Betty Levin. Joy Oestreicher's and Charles de Lint's tales are the only marginal pieces in the volume; in each case the ending feels slightly off-kilter. But Sherwood Smith's "Faith" more than balances the scale, taking the reader from the utterly ordinary to a moment of pure magic in a scene that makes a perfect ending for the book as well as the story.

Well-established residents of the gaming world will find *A Wizard's Dozen* a pleasant reminder of the sense of wonder that first drew them toward fantasy. It really is a book meant to be shared, and those who understand it best will be the ones who buy copies to give away as well as to read.

Recurring roles

I expect I don't really need to tell regular DRAGON® Magazine readers to check out a new novel in TSR's Harpers series, but Elaine Cunningham's *Elfsong* (TSR, \$4.95) is a special case. A sequel to her earlier *Elfshadow*, it confirms the author's skilled hand at crafting distinctive characters and intricate thriller plots. Extensive action in and around Waterdeep makes this an essential read for those who adventure therein, and the only disappointment is that Arilyn Moonblade's appearance is limited to a cameo role. Hand *Elfsong* to the next person you meet who claims that TSR doesn't publish quality fiction set in its "house universes"; this one is a winner regardless of its label.

Sequel are also the order of the day for Will Shetterly and Teresa Edgerton. Shetterly's is *Nevernever* (Harcourt Brace, \$16.95), the second "Bordertown" novel narrated by Ron the Wolfboy. Bordertown has long since transcended the "punk

elves" label; Shetterly takes the maverick cynicism of young street culture and mixes it with rough-edged magic and a wisdom that's surprising in the best sense. There's no better (and perhaps no other) storyteller that the more rebellious of tomorrow's adults are likely to both read and learn from.

In a much more intimate mold, *The Grail and the Ring* (Ace, \$4.99) returns to Teresa Edgerton's land of Celydonn to continue the now widely separated adventures of Prince Tryffin and his young bride Gwenlliant, begun in *The Castle of the Silver Wheel*. At once familiar and fresh, Edgerton's world draws respectfully on the patterns of Celtic lore but weaves them in distinctive ways. One almost might describe these novels as retellings of newly created ancient myths.

Spider Robinson's Callahan's Place is a far more modern myth, and though the bar itself no longer exists, its regulars survive in *The Callahan Ibuch* (Ace, \$18.95). This is something of a mixed blessing; Robinson is as full of nuclear-grade puns and sharply outrageous logic as ever (a brilliant skewering of *Citizen Kane* merits mention), but the series is starting to recycle its ideas rather than building on them.

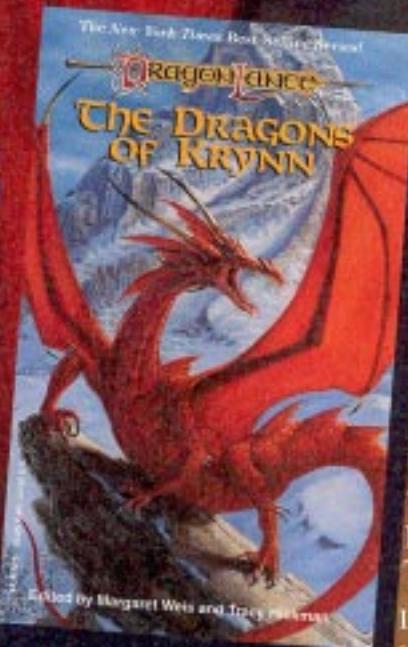
A non-series novel marks Rick Cook's reappearance after a modest hiatus. *Mall Purchase Night* (Baen, \$4.99) is played a touch straighter and more soberly than Cook's Wiz Zumwalt books, but there's still wry humor in security guard Andy Westin's encounters with otherworldly powers who are prowling the corridors of one of California's largest shopping centers. This is good, because the novel's running subplots get more attention than what passes for the main storyline. It's an amiable read, but Cook has done better work.

By contrast, *Minerva wakes* (Baen, \$4.99) finds Holly Lisle stretching her storytelling muscles admirably, with a clever chronicle of the magic that overlies and underlies the world we know. Three intersecting plots mix breakneck action and very strange landscapes with a lively sense of imagination, and Lisle strikes a good balance between the potentially incompatible tones. An especially well-designed cover completes the package, and whoever wrote the cover copy (*never mess with the mommy*) deserves a bonus for compliance with truth-in-advertising laws.

Last but definitely not least this month comes a new tale of subtle magic, energetic youth, and classic history from Judith Tarr. *Her Majesty's Elephant* (Harcourt Brace, \$16.95) takes us back to the court of Charlemagne, where two gifts—one the title creature and the other a shard of the True Cross—lead two young members of the Imperial court from obscurity into the dangerous edges of political intrigue. Tarr has a rare gift for making worlds of the past both authentic and accessible, and it's in full force here.



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he attempt on Al's life came before breakfast, which really pissed him off.

The first clue came from Spencer, Al's chief normal. The peaceful old servant had been with Al for half a century, taking care of his employer with untroubled regularity during all

of Al's tenure as the world's ruling mage.

Al was lounging in bed, the usual steaming cup of coffee and morning paper resting on the night table where Spencer had placed them. Spencer was transpiring the broad windows to let in the clean light of the December morning. The quality of daylight changed, and Spencer suddenly put a trembling palm to his wrinkled brow, letting out a low, soft moan. Though only seconds this side of a dream-filled sleep, Al came fully awake and was up and moving to his servant's side.

The old man blinked at his employer's touch, and Al felt the residual thrum of magical energy as the aged normal captured the incoming attack and drained it off like an arcane lightning rod.

Al's mind leapt out into the ethereal web of magic that permeated the world. He sought and found the strand that still vibrated with the assault that Spencer, as a normal, had drawn off. Al backtracked along the singing string, flying along twisted pathways and through complex intersections until he found the source of the disturbance.

It was a young face that looked back at him from across the intervening non-space, all smooth skin and intense eyes shimmering with newborn power. So young, Al thought. Had he ever been so young himself? The youth could not see him, protected as Al was by scores of normals, hundreds of intricate wards, and a talent so global in scope that it was nearly indistinguishable from the aura that filled the magical non-world.

The young mage's hawkish eyes peered along the same argentine web that Al had just traveled, looking for a clue as to how his attack had fared. While the silver strand still hummed with the momentary coursing of power, Al reached up to his personal magic door. From beyond it, he pulled an amount of power sufficient to destroy his assailant. He forged the power into a spearing thrust that would spit the impetuous attacker like a trussed chicken. He wanted to drive it in skillfully, leaving his would-be assassin a few moments to realize who it was had killed him. Al prepared to deliver the spell.

And hesitated.

How many more times would he have to answer such a challenge? How long would it be before he failed to meet such a threat to his control of the world? How long before a talent arose that would best him?

Questions tumbled through his mind, fast as thought, but it was long enough to give the young mage time to discover Al and shield himself. The blow that should have sundered the boy's mind only maimed, and Al had to draw again from beyond his magic door before he could finish the presumptuous youth.

The young eyes flashed in an ethereal nova and closed. The mental presence exploded and the web sang like a 12-string guitar: open, metallic and vaguely dissonant. Al left the shattered remnant and returned to his bedroom.

Spencer's Peace

by Kurt Giambastiani

Illustrations by Martin Cannon

The world was still shifting with the arcane overflow as he looked around him, but that was to be expected when magic was so conspicuously tossed about. The excesses had to go somewhere.

It was no longer December outside. It seemed more like spring, though no time had passed. The room, too, had been altered; half-drawn vertical blinds now shaded the window in lieu of polarized glass, and the stuccoed ceiling, formerly fine-grained mahogany, seemed perhaps a bit lower. Al wondered how much of history had changed to accommodate the world's physical modifications. Being able to see the shifts in reality was the part of being a mage that he found the most unsettling.

Spencer still stood before Al. To the servant's mind, he had only just opened his eyes at his master's touch. He did not, could not, notice the change in the season or the room or the scores of other things that had been altered by the arcane fusillade. Spencer, like all normals, had changed as the world had changed, absorbing his share of the mutating forces.

"Are you okay?" Al asked him.

"Yes, Master Alfred. Fine, thank you."

So it's Master Alfred now, he thought. "Are you sure you're all right?" Alfred asked again.

Spencer nodded and they stood there a moment longer in silence, magister and normal. Then Spencer calmly finished opening the blinds.

Such peace, Alfred thought. *Such unflappable trust*. The threat was gone. Spencer did not remember it ever having existed. *There must be such peace in not remembering. What I would give to know that peace, even for a moment.*

Alfred turned his gaze to the window and the isolated valley beyond. *Interesting*, he thought, *that such a minor talent should strike a blow so far within my defenses*. He remembered the young mage's searching gaze. *He struck what he could not see*. Alfred suddenly realized that he had retaliated too quickly, too harshly. There were questions now that could not be answered. The whole of the web still trembled with the violence of Alfred's retribution, and all tracks had been effectively erased.

Alfred opened the sliding glass door and walked out onto the balcony that had not existed a minute and a half ago. He scanned the sweeping lines of rolling green that tumbled down from the walls of his mountain chalet to the town that still lay cradled in the valley's heart. Trees that a few moments past were silent stretching skeletons locked in crystalline ice and new-fallen snow now rustled with verdant growth. Birds chased one another through the muttering branches. The air that should have chilled his exhalation into swirling wisps of gray vapor now greeted him with freshness and the aroma of lilacs in bloom. Shiny cars and flatbed trucks traveled the road over the nearby pass and down into the town. Overhead, an airplane flew.

Alfred frowned at the sound of the flying machine, but not because he did not know what it was. His discomfort centered on the fact that it was not the familiar boomerang of a jet that he heard. It was the throaty roar of four Pratt & Whitney propeller engines, a sound he hadn't heard in a score of years.

A tremendous amount of arcane energy had been expended, more than the tiny amount for which his puling

attacker could account. Alfred's unease increased.

The second attack came that afternoon, lightning-fast and broadly played. Alfred was looking out across the grounds from the veranda and saw two of his garden workers drop, stone-dead. Many others swayed in their tracks. The table at which he was working shifted and writhed under the layer of parchments and tomes he had laid upon it as magical energy was reflected by his personal wards.

Alfred grew angry.

"Goddam sonofabitch!" he roared, kicking his now three-legged chair to the side as he rose. "Twice in one day!"

Never had there been two attempts in a single day. There weren't that many talents. It didn't take too many mages to run the world, each controlling his or her own corner, making life for the normals safe while the normals made life comfortable for their mage.

Of course, whenever a youth found the hidden path to a magic door, that personal well from which to draw the powers of magic, then there was usually trouble. The new talent would have to carve out a territory, and that territory had to come from someone.

Occasionally, too, one talent would strike another in an attempt to acquire control, secrets, or even just prestige. Lately, for Alfred, that's all that they had been after.

Prestige.

Alfred had been the leading talent for decades, longer than any before him. As a result, the world had settled down. It had assumed a consistent rhythm, taken on a history, and begun ticking happily along. He had introduced order among the chaos of magical talents.

And that had been his mistake.

He had imposed a hierarchy upon the world of magic. He had given form to their ambitions. He had given them something to climb.

And made himself their target.

At first the attacks had come once a year, simple attempts to wrest from him the perceived glory of his position as counselor and governor. He had beaten these attacks off as easily as he had crushed the youth before breakfast, and with a fraction of the moral concern.

Then the frequency had increased. Every eight months. Every six. Challenges issued with all the proper pomp and protocol required by the mages' unofficial code of honor. The web rang with arrogant boasts.

When these too were thwarted, the challenges began to come without warning: surprise attacks that brought dishonor upon the contenders, highlighting their desperation. Lately, it had become a bi-monthly trial, and Alfred had felt the ubiquitous hand of murder resting lightly on his throat. A continuous companion during the recent years, it had weighed upon him heavily.

But twice in one day! Never had Alfred had to contend with such a coincidence. The idea that two talents would independently select the same day for their suicidal attempt was not only far fetched, it was ludicrous. The community of the arcane was too small. Alfred knew the mages who were the real threats to his life, and he knew that none of them were contemplating making good those

threats. This morning's attack had been from a complete unknown, as would prove this current attempt.

It was no coincidence. It was a conspiracy.

All these thoughts raced through Alfred's mind before the chair he had upset had hit the tiles. He reached to his magic door and coaxed a variety of powers to him. Then he sent his mind in search of his attacker.

Just as with that morning, he found the youthful talent by flowing backward along the line of attack. She was dark and lovely, but glimmered with barely enough power to rule over a local parish, much less a world. Even if she were successful in her assassination, she could not hold the position any longer than the boy he had dispatched before morning coffee. What could she be thinking?

Alfred intended to find out.

Instead of an attack, he surrounded her with his power. He saw her face go stark white with fear as she found herself bound to the greatest mage the world had ever seen. But he did not crush her. He pulled her to him.

Across the non-existent vistas of the magical net, Alfred dragged her, her mind screaming in terror, to his keep in the mountains. It was safer, he knew, to bring her bodily rather than to try to control her at a distance. This way he could concentrate on her and not be worried about her conspirators attacking his vulnerable mind as it crossed the distance between them.

Her psychic scream was echoed by her physical one as she materialized on the veranda, dark pupils surrounded by bluish whites, rictus-mouthing face haloed by a nimbus of dark curls. She was beautiful, Alfred could see, and a fourth of his age, and he wondered if that, too, was part of the plan. Finally, she stood before him, swaying slightly in the brilliant sunshine, the air still pierced by her throat-rending shout.

Alfred was about to speak when he felt the pressure of her impending attack. Magic filled the air, more magic than he thought she could muster. She had either tamped down her power purposefully, to draw him in, or she had simply been drained by her initial attack. Either way, Alfred had only a moment of thought to raise a protective shield.

Her attack was wily and subtle, pressuring Past and Future in upon him with a final thrust coming through across the nebulous line of Now. His protection held, deflecting and mutating the energy it received.

The world shifted around them as the attack was blunted. The mountains were suddenly barren, the air hot and humid, the sky dark and foreboding. Streaks of fire, meteoric lances, flashed through the darkened day, exploding in deadly marigolds within the ruined city that now rose from the valley floor. Time swept beneath the two mages, carrying them forward and backward, up and down the line of possible history.

Alfred felt a score or more of his normals die as the tremendous shock of the highly spectrumped attack over-powered their ability to diffuse it. His mind reached out to Spencer just as he too fell. Alfred felt his servant's passionate devotion to the master tear at his heart as the old man was ripped, burned, and crushed by the tumultuous crash of power.

Alfred thrust back across the three intervening paces at

the young mage. She should have died, charred like a steak on the bare, smoldering tiles, but she did not. Though she was staggered, her defenses held and Alfred felt the remainder of his normals die. She shifted her stance to keep her balance and her foot came down in knee-high grass. The chalet was no more, the city in the vale was now only a village. Around them were only air, tree-clad mountains and swaying billows of wild green wheat.

They regarded one another then, each momentarily spent by the pulling and playing of magical power, disoriented by the tremendous shifts in reality. Alfred's frustration and fury rose in his throat. Grief and wasteful loss tormented him. Finally his anguish found a voice.

"Leave me alone!" He took three strides and pushed his face up to hers. "Just leave me alone!" he shouted again.

She did not respond. She did not even react. She stood, proud, disdainful, awaiting his fury. Alfred swung his arm, the back of his clenched fist striking her cheek, knocking her down. She glared up at him in silence.

Alfred's fury melted away. Suddenly he no longer cared. His defenses down, part of him wished that she would deliver a killing blow, but he knew that she did not have the power left to do it. He turned his back on her and took a step up the slope through the whispering grass. And stopped.

Before him, lined up along the rise where late his chalet had stood, were a score or more of young men and women. Without even trying, Alfred could see that each was a talent-a minor one, but a talent nonetheless. From among them, a woman spoke.

"We have come to depose you." Her voice was lovely, and Alfred hated it. "You have had the world too long. It's our turn now."

Alfred closed his eyes, thinking of a life without such threats, a life without having to struggle to survive. He remembered Spencer and the look of calm that had crossed the old man's face as he had changed along with his world.

"Leave me alone."

"We cannot," said the voice from the gathering on the hilltop. One of the youthful mages stepped forward, a light-haired woman about Alfred's height, broad of shoulder and with an intensity in her eye that told Alfred that she was the strongest talent, the leader, the real threat to his safety. Still, though, he could not truly bring himself to care. He was tired of the struggle. He wanted peace.

"Just leave me alone," he said again, and was not surprised to feel a coolness on his cheek as the breeze touched his futile tears. "I no longer wish to rule." Before him, the woman shook her head.

"You would always be a threat to our control. We have learned to join our talents and, combined, we can defeat anyone. Anyone but you. You are too strong. We may have beaten you now, but next time? Next time, we may not. We do not want to be continually looking over our shoulders, waiting for your next move."

Her words rolled around in Alfred's mind, chiming as they touched upon similar feelings of his own. He thought of his own years spent in fear, waiting for the next blow.

He thought of the elaborate layers of trap and deception placed throughout the magical web to misguide and lure, always so he would have that extra moment of time to react. He thought of the people with which he surrounded himself, normals all, bulwarks against the attacking tide.

And he began to laugh.

He began to laugh at this woman, these young mages, who thought that he was their only threat. Blind youth, self-deluding naivete, unable to see what their future would really look like. Blind to the future of constant threats, of seeing their own techniques duplicated by those more powerful than they, of struggling for control as their coalition broke apart on ambition's anvil. Their grasp on the reins of the world would be tenuous at best and as substantial as the web of the non-world at worst.

He laughed and laughed, and the woman looked at him as if he were mad. *Perhaps I am*, he thought. And again, he thought of Spencer. This consort of mages was going to kill him no matter what he did. Peace would not be afforded him. He would always be a target. Well, then, he would let them do it, but he was determined to know what Spencer knew, even for the briefest flash. He was determined to go out as a normal.

He sent his mind to take one last look around the world. The skies were clear. No jets, no aeroplanes, no balloons or space shuttles. Just clear, fresh sky. The land had been changed, too. The concrete swaths of freeways, were gone, and the cities had vanished.

Instead, simple dirt roads wound lazily through countryside, linking small, pestilence-ridden towns. Ox-carts and horses carried goods and normals along the roads, and Alfred saw their minds were filled with superstition and ignorance of the physical world. In his valley, peasants struggled in plowed fields that surrounded a stone keep. Men on horseback traversed the road that climbed toward them. He could hear the creaking of their saddles and the low murmur of their voices as they conversed.

He laughed again. These self-assured mages, their individual talents flickering in his presence like candles in a gale, would have a hard time governing this world. He wondered how much the valley would change in the battles that would come before power was stabilized.

Then he reached up to his magical door, which was as it had been since he had found it a lifetime before: open, wide, inviting. He could not remember hearing or reading about any mage having done what he was about to attempt. Well, he thought, *I've always been somewhat of a maverick.*

He closed his door.

The web shattered with the sound of a billion agonies. All around the world, minds cried out and were cut off in the same instant. The valley was filled with the inhuman screams of two dozen mages. Alfred fell.



Alfred opened his eyes and rolled onto his back. The grass that surrounded him rocked back and forth in the breeze, and the smell of crushed greenery was strong in the blinding sunlight.

With a groan, he put a hand to his head and tried to sense his magic door. He could not. Neither could he sense the web, nor anything else other than what his five mundane senses told him. He had done it. He was a normal.

He sat up and looked around. Down the slope lay the woman who had attacked him. Quickly looking upslope, he saw the crumpled forms of the other mages as well. Slowly, they began to move.

The fair-haired woman was the first to sit up. Hand to her brow, she grimaced in painful concentration. Then her head snapped up and Alfred saw a look of sheer terror on her countenance.

"What have you done!" she shrieked. She crawled over to one of her comrades and shook him awake. She said something to him that Alfred did not hear and, after a pause, the young man cried out in honest grief.

One by one she roused her band and spoke to them. Some began to cry, others sat stunned, a few began to hurl curses toward Alfred. Finally the woman turned back to Alfred.

"What have you done?"

"I've closed my door," he told her plainly.

"You fool!" she shouted. "You've destroyed them all!" She moved toward Alfred, murderous fury in her face.

Alfred stood before her rage, stunned by her words. All of the doors? Or was there only one?

"Is there a problem, M'lord?" came a question from behind him. He turned to see a group of *normals*—No, he corrected. *Men, like myself*—riding up the slope toward them. They were roughly dressed and carrying swords. Alfred recognized them as the men from the roadway.

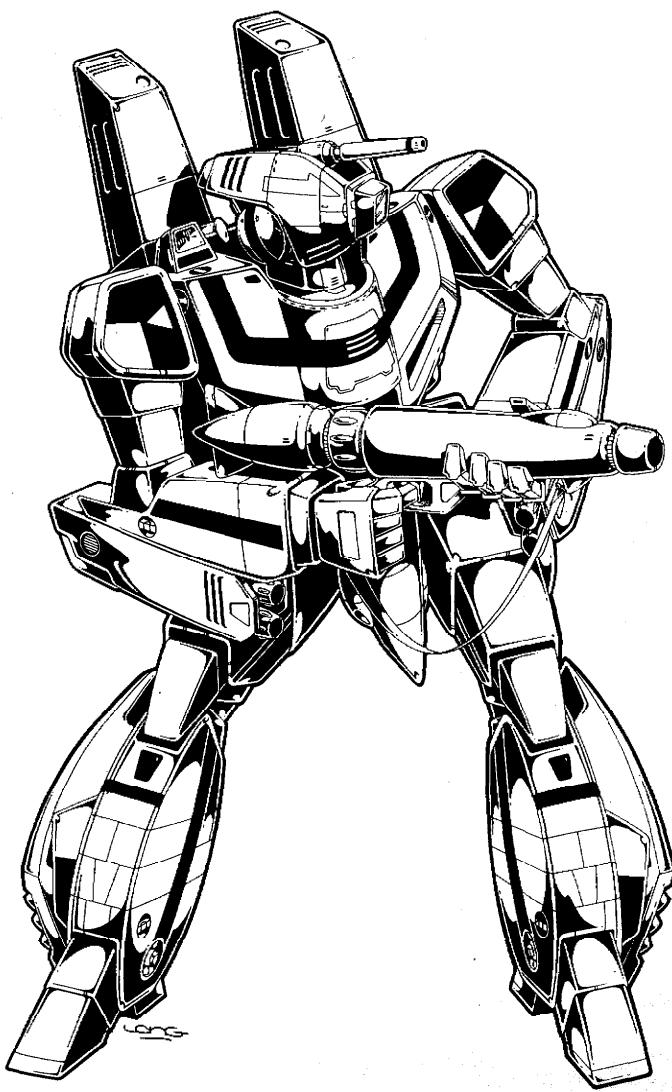
"We've been looking for you, Lord Aelfred," said the man who had spoken. "We heard your shout. Is all well?"

Aelfred smiled. *Still governing*, he sighed to himself. Spencer's peace continued to elude him.

He looked back at the group of former talents as he was helped into the swordsman's recently vacated saddle. Their stunned and befuddled faces betrayed their confusion and helplessness. Had he really destroyed the door, or had he just hidden it for a while?

He decided it would be a long, quiet wait before he found out. He turned with the men and rode down the hill toward the small castle, where friendly smoke from cook-fires rose slowly into the lazy air. Ω





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In response to the tremendous number of requests for new Robotech RPG supplements, Palladium is planning a series of new sourcebooks filled with new information, optional rules, villains and adventures. The first is scheduled for an April release and is described below. Two other 64 page books are in the planning stages and are likely to include Mars base, space stations, clones and other good stuff. We'll keep you posted.

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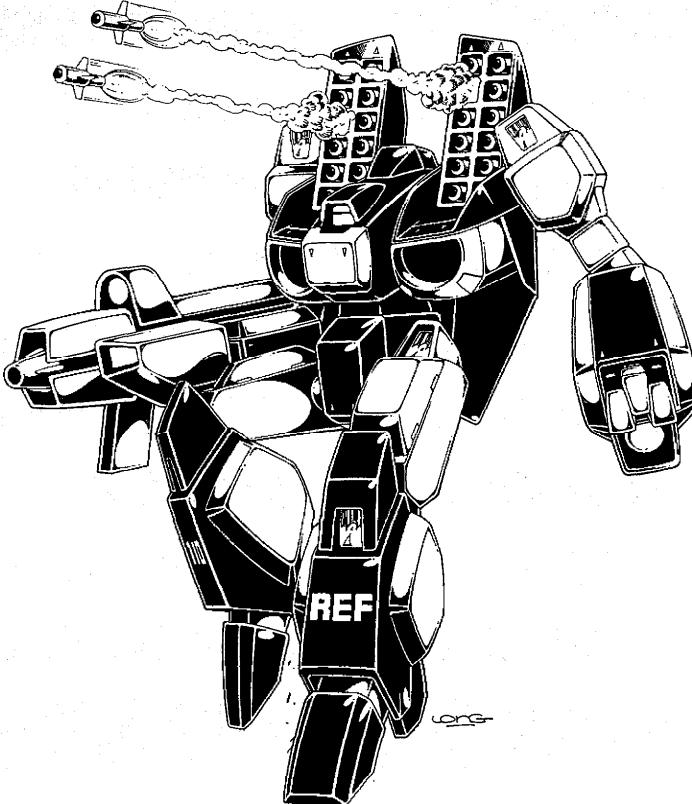
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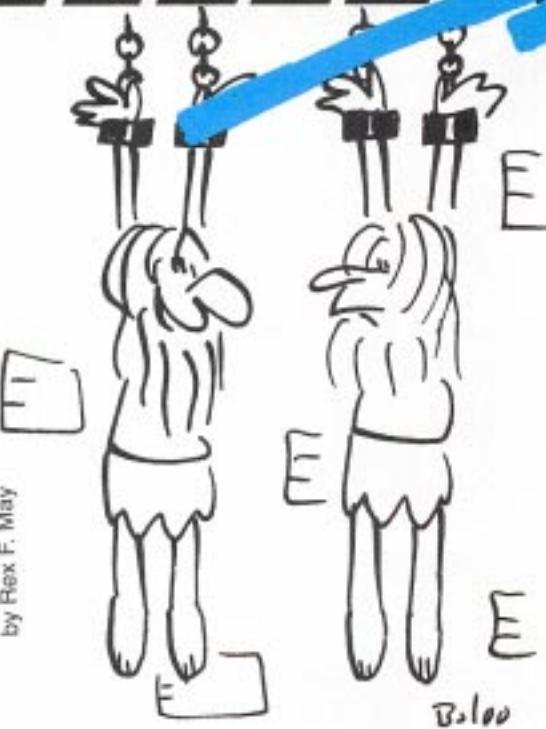
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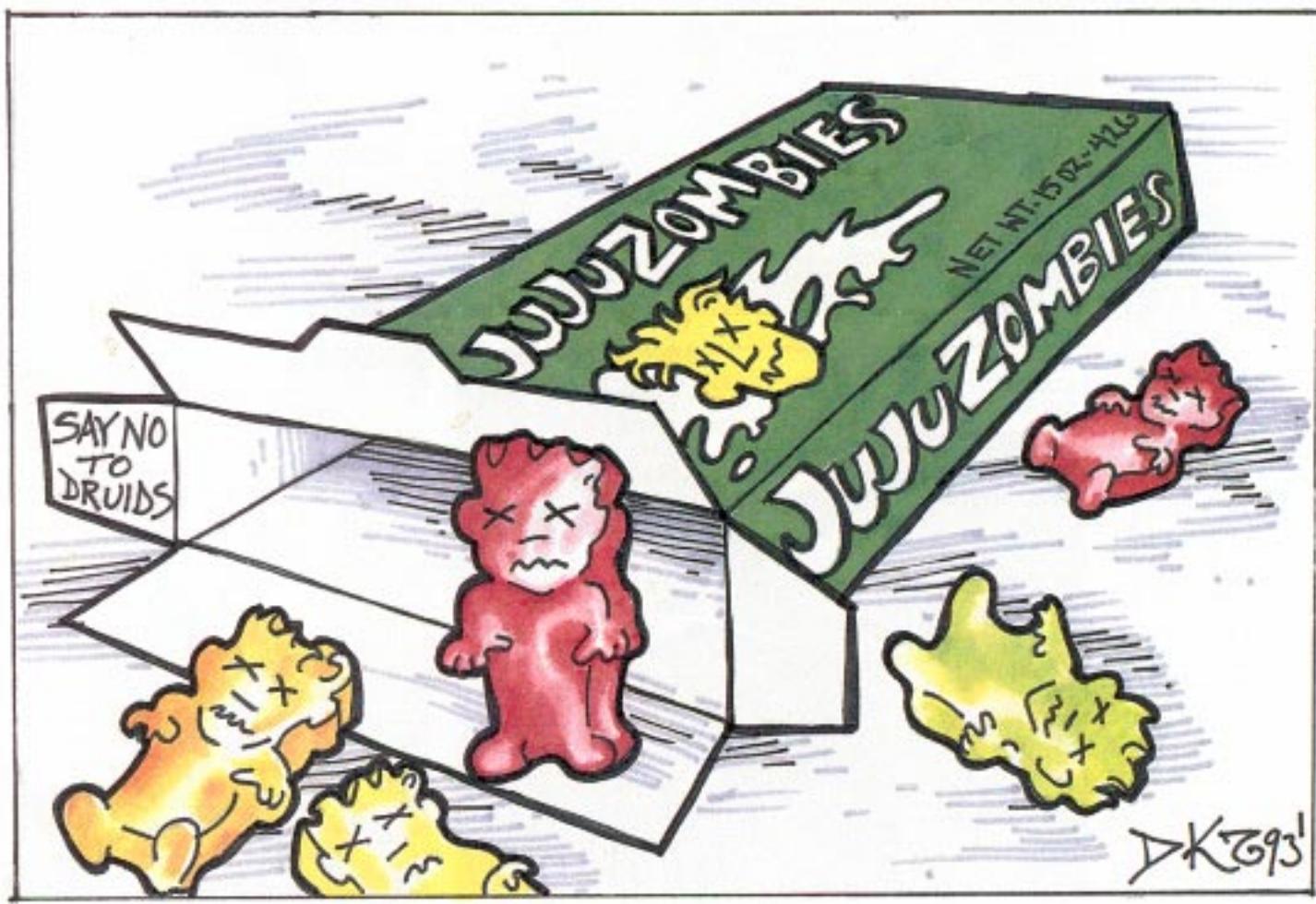


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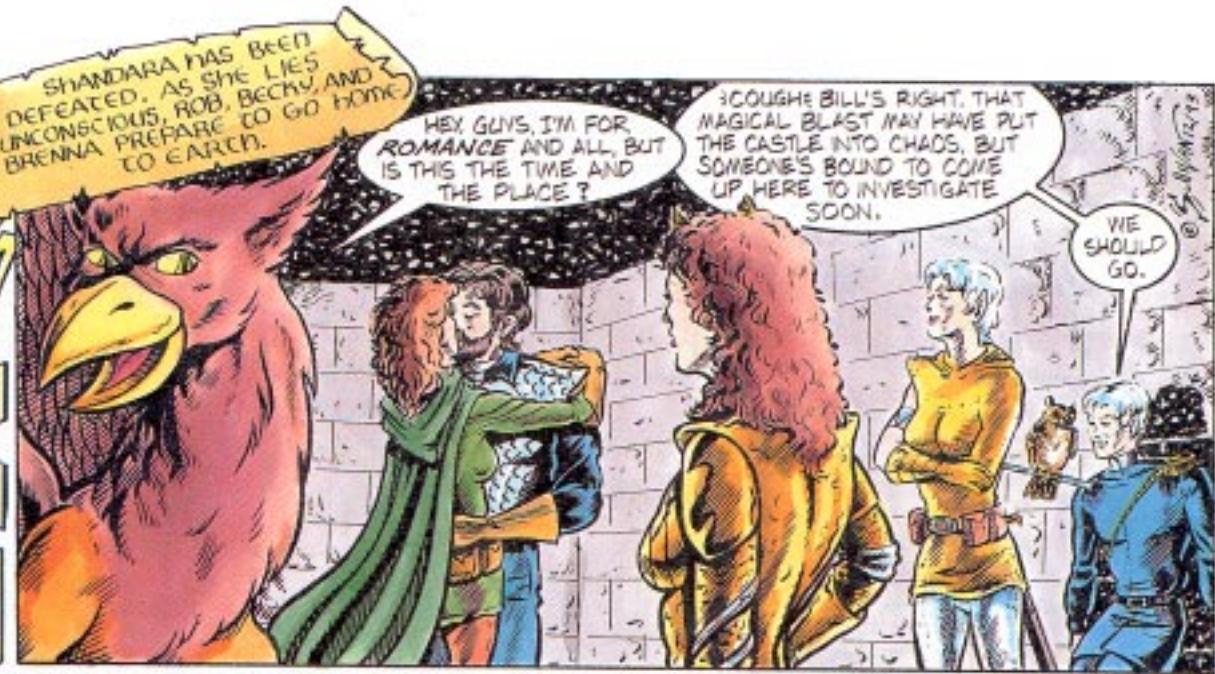


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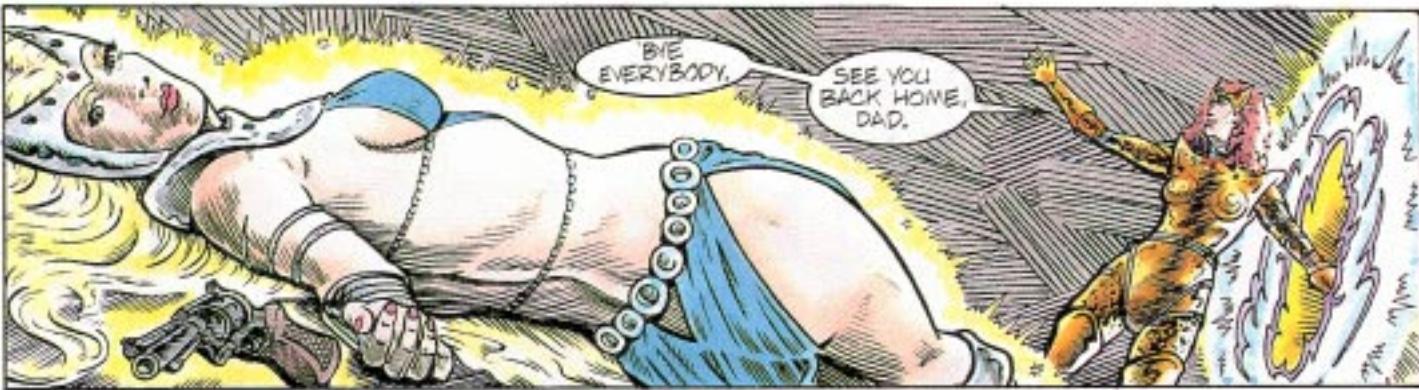
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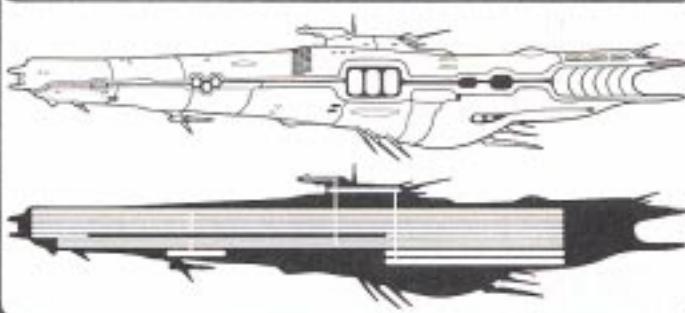
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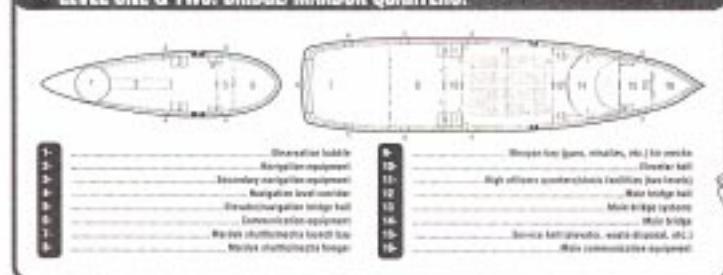
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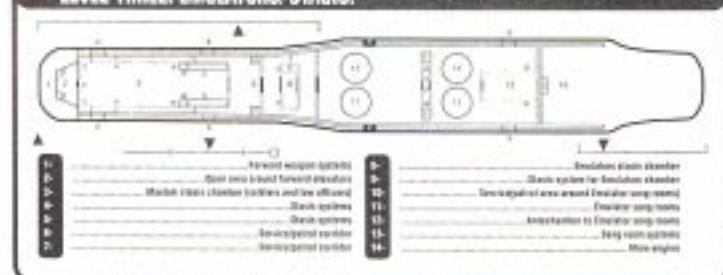
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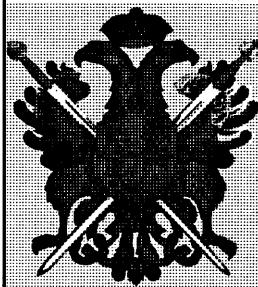
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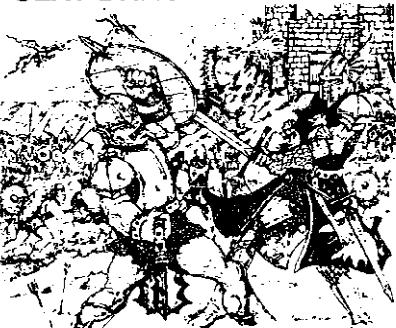
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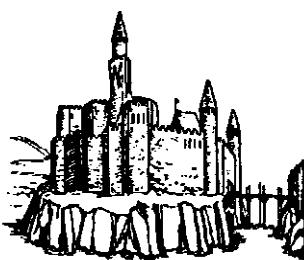
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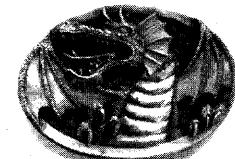
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Gobsmasher (Epicast)

Questions and answers

I want to start off with a brief apology to everyone connected with the magazine. I'm sorry that I missed the February issue. We moved our store in November and December. Close on the heels of this move came inventory, and I'm still not totally unpacked. The items in this month's reviews reflect the first forays into the review boxes since the move. Bear with me as I get back on track.

I'm going to answer a few questions that I am asked most often. Let's start with the most common question:

What is 25-mm scale or any scale?

This question has been answered in previous columns but bears repeating. Definitions of scale depend upon whom

you talk to. The hobby market measures figures from base to eyes and assumes humans are 6' tall. For comparisons, HO or 1/87-scale is 17-19 mm depending on the manufacturer. The popular 1/72nd-scale is 21-23 mm. (Plastic figures from Europe in plastic tend to be 23 mm.) The larger scale now featured by many com-

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average

panies for war gaming is actually the old 30-mm scale, as some of my very old knight figures attest to. Companies are split with many new figures in the larger scale and army units now being produced in the more affordable 15-mm scale. Remember to check your figures when you purchase them. If you have old 25-mm figures, some new figures will tower over them by at least a head. You may need to carry a small metric ruler, as the differences are hard to spot with the eye alone.

Can you help me learn how to paint and what books can I read?

The only painting books available on a regular basis are the Painting Guides from Games Workshop. A number of other books have been written, but are out of print. RAFM and Ral Partha both have painting guides with their box sets. We have had a number of guest authors in this column over the years and a number of good ideas, the last one being in DRAGON® issue #191 about painting monster figures.

You must teach yourself how to paint. A lot of us can pass on tips, but it takes a lot of practice to get a figure to look the way you want it to. Sometimes you will need to paint an area or a figure several times. There is nothing wrong with this, although this is a good advertisement for water-based paints. You have to find a style of painting you're comfortable with through practice. Always strive for better results but ignore those who criticize nonconstructively. You will get better with time and practice.

My hobby shop doesn't have [a certain figure]. Can you get it for me?

I'm surprised at how often I receive this call even after all I've said. Check with your hobby shop first. If they don't stock an item, ask them to order it. If they won't order it, then write to the company at the address listed in the column. In most cases, they either will sell it to you directly or, refer you to a shop near you that carries their figures.

Which scale is better?

This is a hard question to answer. The 25-mm scale usually has more detail simply because it is easier to sculpt. The 28-mm scale has some advantages in being easier to paint. The 15-mm scale is beginning to show detail that rivals that of 25-mm figures. It has the advantage of being cheaper, but much harder to paint. If you play the AD&D® game, 25-mm figures still have the largest scope of game-specific pieces. Most other games pieces are 28-mm scale. There is no best scale. You must choose one when you decide how to use the pieces.

Why are the pieces you review not new releases? Why can't you review them the same month they come out?

I would love to review everything the same month it comes out, but there are a number of logistics problems involved. We'll trace a product for one month and you'll see what I mean.

My deadline for a magazine is mid-month, 60 days before the month listed in the issue. I am writing this article in the middle of January for March and am already late. Company "P" sends me their December releases in January, missing my deadline for the March issue. (In defense of the companies, they frequently do not have figures to send until they release them to the public. I specify that I want to see production figures and report on what you will see in the stores. This would mean mailing prototype figures and a "follow-up" figure after the figure's release. Most companies do not have the staff or do not wish to send "double" product.)

At this point the figures go into Aprils issue. The review column goes to the magazine. If it has a heavy advertising month or a feature runs long and extra room is needed, the feature is "jumped" farther back in the magazine. Often, such a feature is jumped into the space my column normally occupies. Since this column is composed of small "chunks" of text, a few reviews are cut to make room for the jumped feature. I usually don't get a choice on what gets "bumped" (to the next issue's column), as it is a last-minute editorial move. The review is now in the May issue, a full five months since its release, and a month beyond even what I planned. If the product is a rules set, the delay can be longer as I always playtest the rules before writing the review.

I also keep all the figures I haven't reviewed. They are kept in my office to place into later columns, or to use in other places. I cannot sell or give away these figures, as they are "proof" for my reviews. One of the reasons I moved the store was that I could not move in my office anymore. Unfortunately, some of the figures have been stolen over the years, but I replace those figures as the theft is discovered. These figures are then used on slow release months, or to emphasize a DRAGON issue's theme where there



Damaged Skelbots (Palladium)



Psi Stalkers & Scouts (Palladium)

may not have been any new releases to support. This means there may be older product in some columns.

Reviews

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Games Workshop, Inc.

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ENGLAND

0132 High Elves

0130 The Empire

0131 Orcs & Goblins

These three books are all designed as sourcebooks for the WARHAMMER FANTASY BATTLES* boxed set. The books are all in 8½" x 11" format with soft covers. The fronts are illustrated with paintings

while the inside covers have battle scenes or available miniatures displayed in color. Length of the books varies from 96-120 pages. The books also contain new spells.

The *Empire* book gives a political and geographical map of the Empire's realms. This history includes famous persons and areas. Included in this book is a timeline with special events noted to help people playing the Empire get into the proper state of mind. The book then moves into special weapons not available in the boxed game, their statistics, and strategies for using the weapons. Included is a painting guide for the Empire with excellent art. The next section reviews some groups from the armies list and introduces more possibilities while showing point costs. The last section contains a fully illustrated catalog giving part numbers for subassemblies and troops by types.

The *Orcs & Goblins* book is the thickest book, and is not quite as clearly set up as *The Empire*. This book contains history and geography of both orcs and goblins

separately and working together. The timeline and map are slightly less complex than the Empire's and some of the history is told through stories. This book details animosity levels between orc and goblin and the importance of shamans. The weapons section contains fewer weapons but more tactical illustrations and examples. The painting guide is split by a battle report complete with pictures. The armies list is split between the different types of orcs and goblins, as well as monsters allies. A parts list closes out this book.

The *High Elves* book follows the same format as the *Orcs and Goblins* book. Political and geographic data follow a brief presentation of the elves' history. This is followed by a more in-depth history and the timeline. The timeline in this book is more detailed and the mindset of elves is more easily followed. The painting guide is complete with pictures. A number of new items and spells precede the new army lists. Once again, the book finishes with a catalog of items available.

These books have excellent line drawings and action illustrations as well as their practical game value. The books cost about \$20.00 each and are well worth the price to anyone who wishes to campaign. As an added note, there is also a Dwarf book that I have not received for review. I really enjoyed these books.

Epicast USA

Nicholas A. Tompkins
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Gobsmasher

Epicast USA is working with Games Workshop to produce a line of vehicles for the new WARHAMMER 40K^{*} rules. Previous reviews included an Eldar, an Imperial Termite, and a conversion kit. The new Gobsmasher is manufactured to give the orks an assist.

The model is made of a urethane resin and is scaled for the larger 28-mm scale. The vehicle kit consists of a body, a gun, and four wheels. The body is a solid piece, with secondary weapons and clearly recognizable viewports. Mufflers with heat guards, hatches with straps, fuel tanks, criss-crossed, topped engine access panels, a commander's and passenger hatch vie with the very large rivets as eye-catching features. There are clear marks and lines on the body to indicate the location of the remaining parts. The gun has no major visible flaws, but the mantlet of the gun is rough on the review piece I selected and needs to be filled in. After the body is complete and cleaned, the four wheels are glued into position. An excellent casting of a bolt and nut is bracketed by rivets that hold the large plates on as treads. There is minor clean-up needed after the gun is placed, and my only complaint is the fill on the rivets and roughness of the gun's surface.

The kit also came with brief instructions

that include the importance of washing and priming the model as well as telling the modeler what glue can be used. Be sure to fill any flawed rivets prior to priming and follow-up with a good cleaning as per instructions and the pieces should adhere well.

The detail on the model and the enclosed vehicle statistics make this model worth recommending. The instructions are easy and the vehicle is generic and simple enough to be used in a number of game systems. The piece is worth the twenty-six dollar price tag. This model was painted by Nick Tompkins.

Palladium Books, Inc.

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#8019 Damaged Skelbots #2 * 1/2

This four-miniature set for Palladium's RIFTS^{*} role-playing game (RPG) represents several damaged Skelbots in a variety of positions. The set is 100% pewter and is to be used with the rest of their 25-mm figures. The three standing pieces have roughly oval-shaped bases with textured top surfaces of cracked rock. Two skelbots are identical, with weapons pointing towards the ground and a number of pock marks showing front and rear, and the right side of the head is burned away. Figure #3 has his gun raised into the air, a couple of pock marks, and its head laying on the base next to the upright figure. The last miniature is the remains of two skelbots who have fallen in pieces forming a jumbled pile. Individual pieces are visible, but the definition of and the separation of the pieces is poor, unless this unit was hit by a plasm shot and the non-detailed area is slag.

All the pieces have "threads" from breathing holes in the mold. The figures have no extra flash so clean-up is easy. My major complaint about these figures is that the definition of the features remains fair at best, and poor in a few obvious places. The figures lack any real depth and look almost like old molded "flats". The illustrations of the skelbots shows slightly more bulk. This is not a highly recommended set, at \$7.35 each, unless you want a damaged unit to start an adventure.

#8020 Psi Stalkers & Scouts ****

This is a four-figure set also made of pewter and are for 25-mm scale. All the pieces have oval bases with varying degrees of texture and detail on their tops. Figure #1 is a Coalition Psi Stalker. He stands 22-mm tall and is armed with a knife and neuro-mace gripped tightly in his hand. High-topped boots end at mid-calf and body armor protects his chest. His arms, from shoulder to wrist, are bare as is the dome of his head. He is glowering. This is the perfect figure to run the dogpacks in this line. Muscle detail is good, but if you rely solely on the cast features, except for the mustache, there is a blank

look to his face. The second Psi Stalker is armed with mega-damage armor from toes to shoulders, except for the back of the legs. The armor is supported by straps. He is armed with a sword in his right hand, a gun in his left hand. Two cases rest on his belt in the left rear. The armor is layered and jointed. Like the other Psi Stalker, this one is molded to look angry without a lot of detail. Mold lines are evident on this miniature and it will take some work to clean up the armor without destroying any of the detail. Even the base is slightly awkward.

The last two figures represent male and female scouts. The male is attired almost exactly as pictured on page 80 of the RIFTS RPG. The sword is slightly to the right and rests more on the right thigh. As he looks through his glasses, he holds his rifle at the ready. The feel is slightly more relaxed. The female scout has an automatic weapon held in front of her as she advances. She is wearing a multi-piece suit of armor secured by straps. A knife rests on her right hip. Long hair drops to her lower back and is modeled as if wavy and slightly wind-blown. She doesn't look happy, either.

These figures had light pin flash. Facial detail was not clear, nor were the weapons very detailed. Otherwise, this set could be useful in a number of different RPGs. It's worth the \$7.95 price tag with work.

Grenadier Models, Inc.

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#3007 Ratseum Pack ****

This lo-figure set is scaled to the 28 mm and is produced in Luminite. Most figures in the set are dressed in different outfits and all have oval-shaped non-textured bases. All the figures look like bipedal rats complete with fur, long snouts, teeth, a hairless tail, and a raised spiral ridge.

Rat #1 is armed with a long sword or a shortened glaive held in both hands. A crossbow is on his back and a quiver hangs from a belt. His armor consists of a skull belt, a half helmet, and overlapping plates on the left shoulder. The helmet comes complete with nose helm and fringe. Even with a slightly hunched position, the figure is still over 23-mm tall. There is no flash on this figure, but the weapon is extremely fragile.

Figure #2 has the same kind of helmet but is much more heavily armored. Back, shoulder, and groin protection consists of overlapping plates secured by rivets to a breast plate. A large shield is on the left arm, while the right holds a large sword. A belt supports a number of small pouches, a dagger, and a water container. Hair detail is good, but the curled tail

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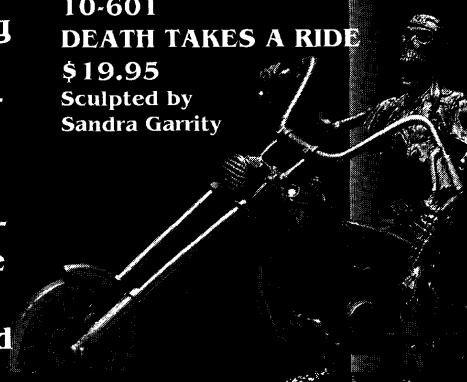


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Ratscum Pack (Grenadier)



Ratscum Snipers (Grenadier)

could be better. There is no flash.

Rat #3 has no helmet and no armor. A round wooden shield is on the left arm, while the right holds a large sword in a gauntleted hand. He is wearing a belt and a wide necklace decorated with disks. There is no flash, but there is also no detail on the inside part of the shield arm.

Rat #4 is holding a halberd in a position of attention. His right hand is in a gauntlet and his left shoulder is covered by plate secured with straps. These straps cross the chest and support several small bangles. The blade shows slight nicks that enhance the figure. There is no flash.

Rat #5 is armed with a well-detailed spear held in both hands. A number of differently shaped plates are tied together with twine to protect the chest, while a large plate held by straps cover both shoulders. Claw and hand detail is excellent.

Rat #6 is charging into combat. He is wearing a belt and a necklace with small plates that connect to the belt. His right hand holds a sword while the left hoists a short sword. A snarl curls his gums. There

some flash in the areas between arm and body and around the legs, which is not difficult to clean and remove, but you must take care not to remove fur detail.

The rest of the rats fall into the assault or officer category. Rat #7 is helmetless but armed to the teeth. His right hand holds a sword while the left supports a circular shield. His chest is covered by a Juzeraint shirt secured at the neck by a strap and a belt. Two daggers dangle on his right side and he is showing his teeth. There are some small breather-hole threads that must be removed.

Rat #8 is the leader of this pack. His head is covered by several layers of plate riveted together with openings for the eyes and the nose. He points his troops onward with his left hand while the right holds a flint-lock pistol. The firing mechanism is clear and the gun body is wood and joined to the body with metal straps. A sword is sheathed on his left hip. His chest is covered by plate secured by a neck strap and belt, while his groin is protected by overlapping plates. His belt

supports a dagger, a powder jar, and a bullet pouch. While the neck protection is clear, the tail and body has some detail-obscuring metal where the mold either over-or under-filled along with some flash

Rat #9 is almost identical to #7 except that the posture and the sword are different. The inside of the shield is not as distinct as it should be, but there is no flash and little in the way of mold lines.

The last figure is bigger than the rest. Armed with a halberd and a crossbow, the halberd occupies both hands. The rat's head is covered by riveted plates and a camail covers him to mid-chest. His left arm is protected by jointed plate while the chest is covered by rawhide-joined armor scraps and disks. His waist is circled by a belt that supports a quiver of crossbow bolts. The figure is at 25-mm tall. There is no flash or mold lines.

Even with the noted flaws, I like this set and plan to pick up a second group. You could easily use this group as a wererat terror for a town in a AD&D campaign, or one box for the FANTASY WARRIORS* game, or two boxes for the WARHAMMER FANTASY* game. Detail is very fine. The set retails for \$18.99, and includes data sheets and a story line for the race.

#3131 Ratscum Snipers

****½

These figures are scaled to 28-mm scale and are made to support the Ratscum pack. The figures differ only in position and posture. Each figure is made of Luminite and has an oval base. Their heads are covered by helmets. Necks and shoulders have camail. The figures are carrying flint lock long muskets including a cleaning rod. A wide shoulder strap supports a powder horn, bullet pouch, and bag. Small circular disks dangle from the front of the chain. One is firing and one is at rest. Fur detail is good, but chain is slightly shallow. Some flash is noted, but is easily removed from the legs. Claw detail is good. The portions of the figures not covered by armor are fur covered.

If you play in a fantasy world with gunpowder, these are a good addition to the Ratscum group. I'm waiting for better rules, but I'll probably end up getting more later. Four dollars for two figures is not bad these days.

#3132 Ratscum Leaders

****½

The Ratscum Leader pack consists of two 28-mm scale figures made of Luminite. The command group includes a high-ranking officer or king and a standard bearer. Both have rat features and are squatting on their oval bases. The standard bearer is wearing a helmet, camail, and disks. His left hand clutches a sword, point down into the ground, while his right hand holds a ragged "T"-shaped standard. The tattered and frayed flag is held on the pole by thick straps and rings. A second trophy of hair or a rough flag is wrapped around the bent support. His attitude is one of defiance. There is some



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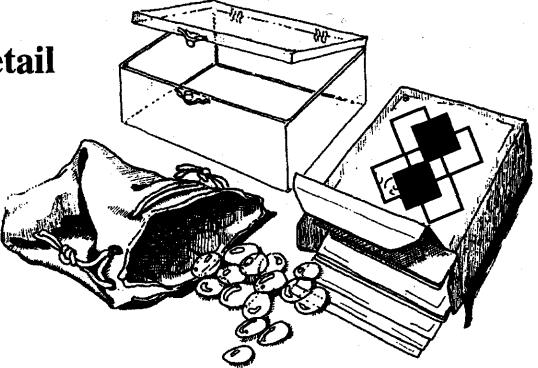
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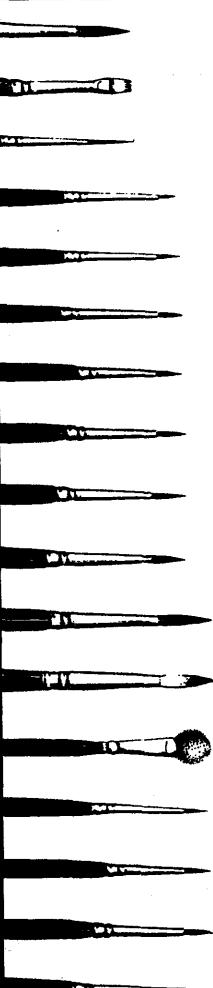
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DRAGON 117



Ratscum Leaders (Grenadier)

flash at the feet and on the arms, but it is easily removed.

The leader is wearing a plain, slightly dented chest protector that extends past the groin and is belted on. The belt ends meet in mid-back and are buckled. He clasps a sword in his right hand and a shield on his left arm. An unknown skull hangs from his neck on a link chain. Camail covers his neck, and a strange plume that almost looks like a loaf of bread crowns his helmet. There is no flash and only the tail looks deficient.

This set is highly recommended for those who buy the Ratscum set. Four dollars a pack is not too much for leadership. I recommend the whole Ratscum set

I welcome any input into subjects or themes. If you have any questions, please call me at: (708) 336-0790 MWThFr 2-10P.M. CSI: or SaSu 10A.M.-P.M. or write to the new address:

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Letters

Continued from page 6

Gaming labels

Dear Dragon,

While browsing through issue #200, I came across the article, "The Color of Magic" by Dan Joyce. The article was subtitled "Specialized spells for D&D® game spell-casters," but since I'm a DM for an AD&D 2nd Edition game campaign, I skipped over that article.

While preparing for a game session several days later, I found that I had some extra time on my hands. I picked up issue #200 again, but discovered I'd read everything else in the issue, so I decided to read Dan Joyce's article. Only halfway through the article, my eyes widened in sheer joy—such imagination, such a work of wonder, such a godsend! I couldn't wait to stump my players with new spell variations. They had fun guessing the effects of such new specialty mages as the breakfast elementalist and the dreaded apple mage.

All this means is to look past the label. Good work, Dan.

Jameson D. Cragg
Olathe KS

Thanks for confirming the attitude that DRAGON Magazine has been promoting for some time, Jameson. The label on a gaming article or product isn't what determines the item's usefulness, but rather it's the quality of the ideas presented in the item and what those ideas can add to your campaign that's important.

Editorial

Continued from page 4

PLAYING* game by Erick Wujcik. This RPG combines a rich setting drawn from Roger Zelazny's *Amber* novel series with a game system that requires no dice rolls—at all. Obviously, this is not a simple RPG as far as mechanics are concerned. The diceless system weighs heavily on the shoulders of the GM, but in good hands, is capable of producing outstanding role-playing campaigns. Fortunately, the rulebook is full of examples, samples of play, and advice for AMBER GMs. (Much of Wujcik's advice also applies to role-playing campaigns in general.) PCs are the relatives or descendants of the characters in Zelazny's novels, powerful immortals who walk through dimensions the way we cross streets. Many of the PCs' foes are likely to be other Amberites, or members of the Courts of Chaos; enemies not to be taken lightly in either case. Every fan of the *Amber* novels and every serious game collector needs a copy of this RPG on her shelf. For more on this game, see "Role-playing Reviews" in issue #182. If you want to check this game out, ask your local retailer or write to: Phage Press, P.O. Box 519, Detroit MI 48231-0519. A bonus bit of news: The *Shadow Knight* game supplement that details the Merlin Series of *Amber* novels is finally out—honest, I've seen it.

I hope one of the games above triggers some interest in you. Even if you don't want to learn another rules system, the games above all have elements that can be integrated with other RPGs. An infusion of new ideas never hurts. I own more games than I'm likely ever to play, but I turn to them often when seeking inspiration for the RPGs that I do play or run. I love games.

Dale A.
Donovan



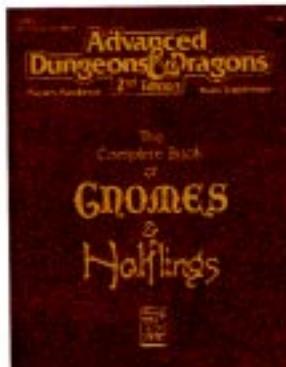
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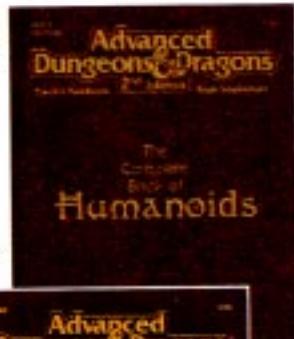
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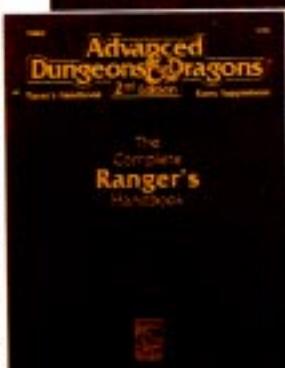
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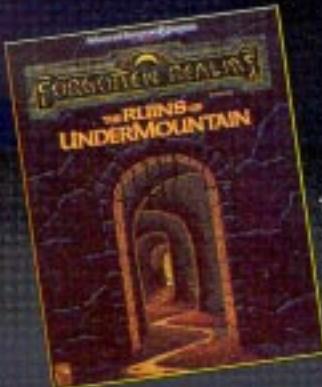
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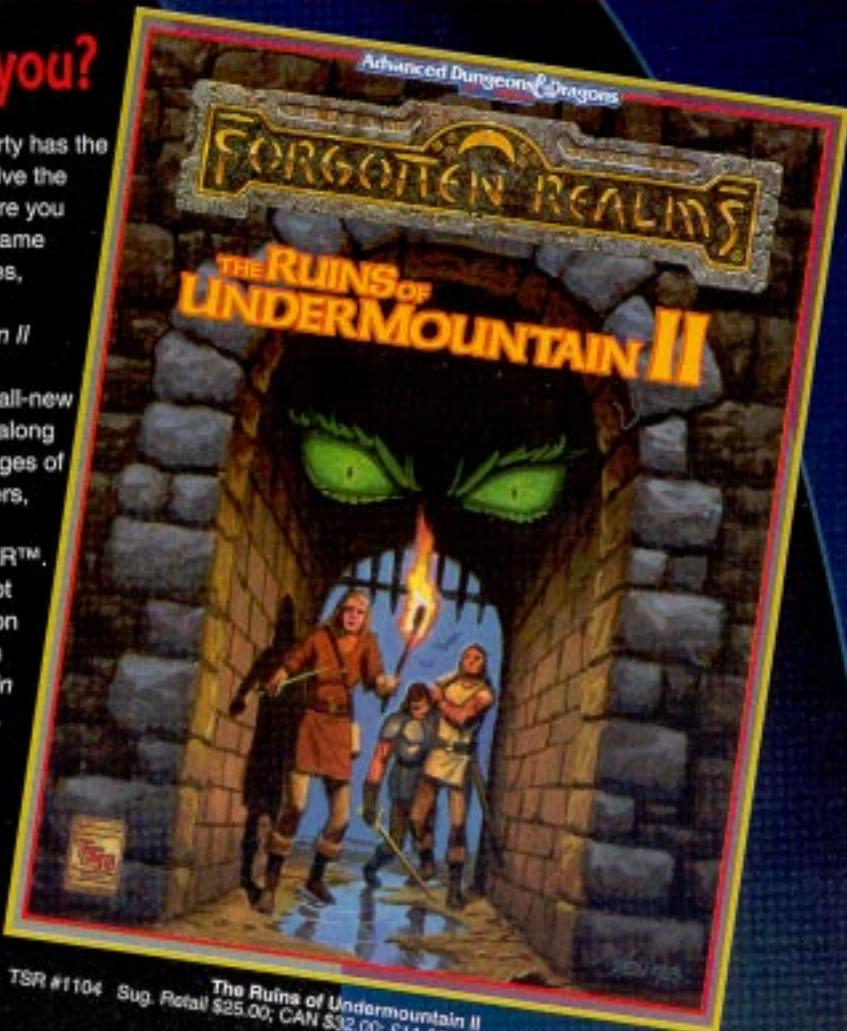
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